Robert Aickman • K. V. Bailev • Cherith Baldry • J.G. Ballard lain M. Banks • Carol Berg • Elizabeth Billinger • Paul Billinger • Colin Bird • Lynne Bispham • Claire Brialey Molly Brown • Tanya Brown • Tim Burton • Andrew M. Butler Octavia E. Butler • John Carpenter • Jonathan Carroll Stuart Carter • John Cassaday • Marc Chabon • B. A. Chepaitis. • C.J. Cherryh • the BEST of 2001 • Arthur C. Clarke John Clute • Chris Columbus • Storm Constantine • Wes Craven • John Crowlev • Kara Dalkev • Garv S. Dalkin • Mark Danielowski • Avram Davidson • Laura Depuv • Greg Egan **Warren Ellis • Iain Emsley • Karen Joy Fowler • Alan Fraser** Stephen Fry • Neil Gaiman • Mary Gentle • Amitav Ghosh Molly Gloss • Mark Greener • Colin Greenland • Jon Courtenay Grimwood • Peter F. Hamilton • M. John Harrison Keith Hartman • Lesley Hatch • Tracey Hickman • Chris Hill Penny Hill • Russell Hoban • Robin Hobb • Robert Holdstock Nalo Hopkinson • Ted Hughes • Peter Jackson • Steve Jeffery • Gwyneth Jones • Lloyd Kaufman • Guy Gavriel Kay Katherine Kerr • J. Gregory Keyes • Paul Kidby • Paul Kincaid atrice Kindl • Dave Langford • Miller Lau • Mitch Le Blanc Ursula Le Guin • Ang Lee • Vikki Lee • Jonathan Lethem • Ken MacLeod • John Marco • George R. R. Martin • Paul McAulev Geraldine McCaughrean • Ian McDonald • Patricia A. McKillip • John Meanev • Farah Mendlesohn • China Miéville • Michael Moorcock • Alan Moore • Pat Murphy Kim Newman • John Newsinger • Jeff Noon • Colin Odell Oliver Postgate • Tim Powers • Terry Pratchett • Philip Pullman • Philip Reeves • Alastair Reynolds • Philip Ridley Adam Roberts • Keith Roberts • James Robinson • Justina Robson • Robert Rodriguez • Jon Ronson • Rudy Rucker Jessica Rydill • Andy Sawyer • Andrew Seaman • Sharon Shinn • Anthony Skene • John Sladek • Maureen Kincaid Speller • Stephen Spielberg • Michael Swanwick • Bryan Talbot • Kathy Taylor • Sheri S. Tepper • Sue Thomason • Eric **Van Lustbader • Jon Wallace • Jill Paton Walsh • Freda Warrington • Margaret Weis • Gary Wilkinson • Liz Williams** Connie Willis • Chris Wooding • Jane Yolen • David Zindell

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The View from the Creative Writing Class

So, that was 2001, and I'm amazed by how many people are tempting fate by saying – like they have on previous occasions – that this year will be better. (Pause to turn round three times widdershins and spit, to avoid jinxing it.) Meanwhile the lead time of *Vector* from copy deadline to release obscured an intriguing shift. In the interview with Michael Cobley I wrote that Tolkien was "rather suffering from a backlash at the moment from inside and outside the genre (whilst obviously copies of the books are everywhere ready for the films)". To some extent that's still true – the snootier critics have said that *The Lord of the Rings* was *just* escapism, or doesn't have anything to say about the real world. But I've been amazed by the way in which the film has been embraced by the sf and fantasy community. But there's still that old canard, it's not real life, is it?

Meanwhile I've been teaching creative writing, which was the result I had to pay for trying to make myself indispensable when I was only working part time. I've not actually written anything creatively – beyond the odd finely tuned minute or conference paper proposal – for more years than I care to recall, but I was relieved to see that the brain can still invent things and think on its (my?) feet. For twelve weeks I taught or left them to write sf and fantasy, and the result is a pile of stories that somehow I have to grade.

One of the more popular sessions was rewriting old stories,

and I turned to Tolkien for inspiration, improvising a story for them. There's been a dragon terrifying the countryside, carrying off sheep, cows, dwarves, indiscriminately, and finally enough is enough. The newly crowned king of the dwarves (who some have claimed is not legitimate) declares war on the people of Laketown, for harbouring a dragon in the caves above the town. Wave after wave of dwarves go in with axes and canon and those devices used in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* to fling cows (trabuché?) and which they keep on recreating in so-called history documentaries. There are cynics who would argue that the dwarves were only after the gold – when in fact all they want to do is to restore a decent government (read: pro-dwarf) to Laketown. Flushed with success, the dwarves look for other towns to attack, and everyone quietly forgets that the dragon hasn't been seen for a few months.

One thing I forgot to do is to direct them to Stephen Baxter's *Omegatropic*, published last year by the BSFA, which includes some of Steve's musings on how to write. The book has been nominated for the BSFA Award for Non-Fiction, a new trophy in our roster of awards, and I can thoroughly recommend it. Remember: vote early, vote often.

Omegatropic is available from BSFA, 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, Northants, NN11 3BE, £20 for hardback, £8 for paperback, postage free to members. For more details see www.bsfa.co.uk.

by Andrew M. Butler, spring 2002

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Letters to Vector

Matrix supremo Gary Wilkinson's article an Alan Moore has generated a couple of letters:

From Colin Greenland, via email:

'Close to Midnight' (V220) was a fascinating article, full of sound observations and apposite quotations. A worthwhile reminder of a great book and a perfect introduction for anyone who hasn't read it. There's more, much more, about the career of Alan Moore and especially the eternally lamented *Big Numbers* in the wonderful *Alec: How to be an artist*, written, drawn and published by one of Moore's principal collaborators, Eddie Campbell (not an Australian, by the way, only married to one).

I have to say, though, that in his fascination with Watchmen Gary Wilkinson does seem to be in danger of underestimating the Northampton Nightingale's latest outpourings. Tom Strong, Greyshirt, Jack B. Quick et al. may not be to everyone's taste; and we may disagree about Top Ten and The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, which I'd say are, in their different ways, simply glorious. Still, not even to mention Promethea is a serious oversight, especially in a piece subtitled 'The Magic of Alan Moore'. If you're interested in Moore's genius in general and his ideas on magic in particular, Promethea is the place you need to look.

While she is a proper, conventional superheroine, a sort of latter-day Wonder Woman who flies around doing superheroic deeds, fighting crime and rescuing people from monsters, Promethea is also and all-importantly a personification of the human imagination, in all its 'holy splendour'. That's the source of her powers. Along with her various other avatars she's a denizen, a divinity, of the Immateria, the realm of the imagination: in the universe according to Alan Moore, a plane of existence every bit as real as the mundane physical world; and one quite close, perhaps, to the 'ideaverse' that Gary describes, 'where the raw

materials of all creativity are located. A major story arc of the series so far consists of Promethea giving Sophie Bangs, her latest human incarnation, a guided tour of her cosmic inheritance.

Some readers apparently do find the book a bit too rich, too much a vehicle for its author's ideas about magic and creativity, though there's no shortage of stories in it, all as dramatically and vividly plotted and subplotted as you'd expect from Alan Moore. The baseline reality is a highly technologically-advanced parallel world, for one thing, where New York is congratulating itself on the election of its first multiple-personalitied mayor. Then again, if what you really prize in the postmodern serial funny-book is technical virtuosity, the pages of *Promethea* bulge with enough formal innovation and technical elaboration to make it clear that all the recursive counterpoint of *Watchmen* was just Moore warming up.

All that and he plays left wing for Burnley F.C. too. There must be something in this magic lark. \square

Cheryl Morgan responds to the comments Gary made on the award-winning status of Watchmen, something I've heard argued about for the last deacde-and-a-half:

From Cheryl Morgan, WSFS Secretary, ConJosé, via email:

In his excellent article on Alan Moore Gary Wilkinson comments: "Watchmen [was] the first graphic novel to win a Hugo (in the 'Other Forms' category, although its subsequent omission from lists of Hugos calls the award's status into question)."

The Watchmen award is listed on the World Science Fiction Society's web site (http://www.worldcon.org/hy.html) which is the most authoritative source there is. It is also listed on AwardWeb (http://www.dpsinfo.com/awardweb/), the most comprehensive listing of SF awards, and in the Hugo lists on my own web site (http://www.emcit.com/hugo_otherfic.shtml). So far so good.

It is true, however, that *Watchmen*'s award was omitted from the list in the program book for this year's Worldcon, The Millennium Philcon. This is probably a typographical error, or a result of copying the list from a previous year's program book that contained a typographical error. At the MilPhil Business Meeting WSFS established a committee (of which I am a member) to investigate irregularities in the Hugo lists. I am confident that *Watchmen* will be restored to the program book list at ConJose.

I wonder if Gary had read the following entry on the Hugos in the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction: "A category added by the Committee in 1988 and voted on, so it was not a Special Committee Award (see below). It was won by Alan MOORE and Dave GIBBONS for a GRAPHIC NOVEL, WATCHMEN. However, this particular award has mysteriously disappeared from subsequent official lists of past Hugo Winners, so its status is not clear." I certainly recall head scratching as to precisely what award Watchmen won.

And now the man himself:

From Gary Wilkinson, via email:

I was amused to see in the *Guardian*, just prior to the appearance of my article in *Vector*, that another has joined the mad dance of the gull-catchers.

Books of the Year – 2001 Compiled by Steve Jeffery American crime writer Patricia Cornwell (most well-known for her Kay Scarpetta novels) has 'ripped-up' a painting by the Victorian artist Walter Sickert searching for clues in an attempt to nail him as her suspect for Jack the Ripper. She has also spent £2m buying up 31 more of Sickert paintings, some of his letters and even his writing desk. She has also paid for a battery of forensic tests on the material. 'Monstrously stupid' was the comment of one Sickert expert. You can read the full story on the Guardian's website. I'm sure Alan Moore is proud of her. \(\sqrt{\sq

According to Private Eye the Sickert theory is a century old, and Cornwell can't have exported the paintings out of the country without some export committee giving permission. Besides, she has a book to plug.

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. Letters in Vector should either be about the contents and policies of Vector, or about sf and fantasy in general. Letters about the BSFA should be sent to Matrix – see p. 2 for their contact address.

"Everybody has won, and all must have prizes." – The Dodo at the end of the Caucus Race (Alice's Adventures in Wonderland)

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

The top of last year's poll was dominated by two big books which tied for top place, Mary Gentle's Ash: A Secret History and China Miéville's Perdido Street Station. This year the results are far more evenly spread, and for quite a long time, as the results came in, the top place shifted between any of half a dozen or more titles.

In the end, three books tied with five votes each: last year's joint winner Perdido Street Station, together with Iain M. Banks's latest Culture novel, Look to Windward and Neil Gaiman's American Gods. Very close behind are John Clute's challenging first sf novel Appleseed (Clute has always maintained his first novel, The Disinheriting Party is not sf), Gwyneth Jones's Bold as Love, Guy Gavriel Kay's Lord of Emperors (for the purpose of the poll I've treated this as representative of The Sarantine Mosaic as a whole, since several respondents voted for both parts) and Connie Willis's Passage. The results show a healthy cross mixture of sf and fantasy, adult and children's books (both Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy and Chris Wooding's The Haunting of Alaizabel Cray are, I suspect, aimed at the upper age range of that classification, and towards the teenage/Young Adult readership), novels and short story collections, particularly in the appearance of Molly Brown's long-awaited first story collection, Bad Timing, from UK independent publisher Big Engine.

K. V. Bailey

First, three novels, respectively sf, fantasy and mainstream.

China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (Macmillan, 2000; Pan pb, 2001). The megalopolis, even in crass decline, is ordered, predictable. It is subjected to incursions of the anomalous and the contingent. The flight of nightmare-spreading predatory slake-

moths over the sleeping city is paradigmatic. A perfect fantasy-tinctured sfnal fable for our times,

Storm Constantine's *The Way of Light* (Gollancz, 2001). Chosen because it so admirably performs the role of the trilogical third volume, subtly rehearsing and symphony-wise interweaving themes introduced at the outset. Inter-human and human-elemental tensions are resolved through closure, yet "the way of light" remains open.

J.G. Ballard's *Super-Cannes* (HarperCollins Flamingo, 2000). A psycho-sociological shocker, enjoyable (and disturbing) for the cross-relationships, and eventually discernible identities/congruencies, between the Super-Cannes scientific community above and the sordid playground below; and for the postmodernist threadings-through of significant *Wonderland/Looking-Glass* imagery.

Then two non-fiction works.

In *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (HarperCollins, 1998), Richard Holmes completes the biography begun in *Early Visions*. As by Coleridge's poetry, I am fascinated by his life, described here as a voyage "with its black storms and glittering sunlit spells forever chasing each other over the horizon."

A Theory of Everything (Gateway, 2001) is the philosopher Ken Wilber's resume and direction towards contemporary affairs of his analytic / holistic mappings of human prehensions, inwardlyoutwardly, subjectively-objectively, oriented. The seminal 'map' (AQAL) compartmentalises, while integrating, quadrants, knowledge/experience into four crosscorresponding evolutionary levels being stepped ladder-wise within all four quadrants. It's a kind of modern Great Chain of Being: a most stimulating read.

Cherith Baldry

China Miéville, *Perdido Street Station*. This is an awe-inspiring book, and a worthy winner of the Clarke Award. I was impressed by the density of the world he has created and the imaginative force behind the problems his characters face and the decisions they make.

Gwyneth Jones, *Bold as Love* (Gollancz, 2001). Another amazing book. The near future she depicts is easily believable,

and she has some telling things to say about the way political idealism has to compromise to achieve what is possible, but it's the characters that really make it work for me, and the joy and optimism that they show in spite of all they have to suffer. I wanted to know more about them, so it's good to know there's more to come.

Jonathan Carroll, *The Wooden Sea* (Gollancz/Tor, 2001). This is strange; strange is good. Though it's flawed because, although the main character can be kept in ignorance of the reasons behind what happens to him, the readers should not be. In spite of that, I loved the quirkiness and the wisdom of what Carroll has to say about growing up, growing old, and relating to the world.

lain M. Banks, *Look to Windward* (Orbit, 2000). I'd like to visit the Culture, though I'm not sure I'd want to live there, so each new Banks book is an event for me. This had one of those endings I'd love to be able to do myself, where all the different elements fall into place with a beautiful inevitability.

Jane Yolen, Sister Emily's Lightship (Tor). Though most of the stories in this collection are not new, I wanted to include it because it was such a joy to read someone with her command of style.

Paul Billinger

When not reading Clarke Award submissions I've turned increasingly towards the crime genre:

Jake Arnott's *He Kills Coppers* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2001), brilliantly intertwines the lives of the leads – Cop, Journalist and Thief – from the brutal murder of three policeman during the summer of '66 to the final consequences in Thatcher's Britain. The eloquence of the writing evokes the squalor and seediness of the times making it as much pointed social commentary as crime novel

In Christopher Brookmyre's stunning return to form, *A Big Boy Did It and Ran Away* (little, Brown, 2001), the grown-up Raymond Ash sees the face of an old friend at the airport – someone who has been dead for three years – and finds that his misspent youth may save him after all when be becomes involved in an international terrorist conspiracy. Structurally very strong and with particular resonance following September 11th.

At first glance *City of Ice*, by John Farrow (HarperCollins, 1999), is a typical police procedural with an unconventional policeman investigating two apparently unconnected crimes, a child murder and a mob bombing. What makes this an outstanding example is the evocation of the place – Montreal during a particularly harsh winter – the lead character Emile Cinq-Mars and the intricacy of the plotting.

Jonathan Lethem, in *Motherless Brooklyn* (Doubleday, 1999), similarly takes a well used format – small-time crook seeks revenge for the murder of his mob boss – and turns it into a stunning character study by making his lead a victim of Tourette's syndrome. Lethem succeeds brilliantly at this difficult challenge.

Returning to sf and the long overdue collection of Molly Brown's wonderfully written short stories, *Bad Timing and Other Stories*. Funny, sad, moving, scary – you just have to read them all.

Elizabeth Billinger

Molly Brown's collection *Bad Timing and Other Stories* is a delicious mix of sweetness and whimsy, violence and menace all perpetrated with a wicked sense of humour. And of course, Ms Brown's timing is perfect.

In The Gumshoe, The Witch and the Virtual Corpse (Decatur, GA: Meisha Merlin, 1999), Keith Hartman sets a typical, hard-boiled private eye in a world where religion is a powerful force, where a televangelist is one of the most influential men around and where the son of a Baptist family may be grounded for dating a witch. The complex structure of the novel, with myriad view-point characters, all narrating in the first person, does nothing to slow down a funny, high-energy romp.

Brown Girl in the Ring (Warner Aspect, 1998) is a book that you feel you've lived through rather than read. Nalo Hopkinson

conceives a future that includes organ transplants and zombies, urban disintegration and ancient rituals. Her characters are real and irresistible, the places she takes them both fascinating and terrifying.

The Glass Palace (HarperCollins, 2000) by Amitav Ghosh is a big book that encompasses the entire twentieth century for three generations across three countries – Burma, Malaya and India. Ghosh skilfully keeps the focus on a few key characters whilst offering a wealth of fascinating history (and some tantalising food).

The Fear Principle (Ace, 1998) is the first tale of Jaguar Addams by B. A. Chepaitis. Jaguar is a difficult character, not always readily distinguishable from the bad guys she tries to thwart, and not easy to like, which is precisely what makes her likable. The setting is high-tech and futuristic but the novel is really a splendidly old-fashioned and well-realised of thriller.

Colin Bird

Mary Gentle, Ash: A Secret History
Alastair Reynolds, Revelation Space (Gollancz, 2000)
Iain M. Banks, Look to Windward
Rudy Rucker, Realware (Eos, 2000)
Keith Roberts, Pavane (1968)

Lynne Bispham

The final part of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass* (David Fickling, 2000 / Point, 2001) proved to be a towering feat of the imagination, an accessible if demanding read for its target juvenile readership, and like all the best children's books, a compelling read for any age group. It has to be my choice as "best" book of 2001, mainly because it is so different to any other fantasy I've read this year, and because it wears its considerable learning very lightly.

Admittedly the "message" of *The Telling* (Gollancz, 2001) tends to overwhelm its plot, but this thought-provoking sf novel set in Ursula Le Guin's Hainish universe is written in such exquisite prose and creates such a strong sense of place, that, despite its flaws, it is my second choice.

Third choice is *A Game Of Thrones* (Voyager, 1998) first volume in George R R Martin's A Song Of Ice And Fire series, in which numerous well-realised characters slaughter their way to the Iron Throne, murdering their relatives with an enthusiasm that would rival the Borgias'. Wonderful, colourful escapism, but also extremely well-written and convincing.

Fourth choice, *The Riddle Master Of Hed* by Patricia A McKillip (Gollancz, 2001). This is probably cheating, because I did actually first read this fantasy some twenty years ago when it was published in three separate volumes as The Chronicles Of Morgan, Prince Of Hed, but when I read this single volume, I realised that I had forgotten just how excellent it is.

My final choice, *The Fire Dragon* (Voyager, 2001), is the third volume of The Dragon Mage quartet, and the eleventh novel in Katherine Kerr's on-going Deverry series. The book continues the high standard of fantasy writing of the preceding ten novels, which is some achievement.

Claire Brialey

I expected to need to make allowances for developments in the genre in the eight years since Jeff Noon's first novel *Vurt* (Littleborough: Ringpull, 1993) won the Clarke Award, but, although this future is a long way from the one I hope to see, it totally fired my imagination to read it written about this well.

Coming rather more up to date, Pat Murphy's Adventures in Time and Space with Max Merriwell (Tor, 2001) is the third and last in her sequence dealing with sf author Merriwell and his pseudonyms, Mary Maxwell (romantic fiction) and Weldon Merrimax (thrillers). It encompasses all three genres, includes three different characters called Pat Murphy, and is tremendous fun.

Oliver Postgate's autobiography Seeing Things (Sidgwick &

Jackson, 2000) tells the story of his remarkable life with the simplicity, humour, poignant charm and wholly engaging narrative which characterises his children's television work with Peter Firman. And it has new photos of Bagpuss.

The Keys of Egypt by Lesley & Roy Adkins (HarperCollins, 2000) is another life story, which also relates the race to rediscover a language: Jean-Francois Champollion's work on Egyptian hieroglyphs which culminated in his decoding of the Rosetta Stone.

I've had to exclude at least seven good of novels and three excellent works of non-fiction; this list could easily have looked very different. But my favourite of novel of the year would have made it into any selection. Alastair Reynolds's *Chasm City* (Gollancz, 2001) is part space opera and part psychological thriller, with a compelling and complex plot, a tenacious society emerging like a festering phoenix from the rotting ruins of a great civilisation, and a three-fold narrative running through a single character's mind.

Tanya Brown

Far and away my favourite book of the year was Gwyneth Jones's *Bold as Love*, a tale of the near future in which the government is taken over by a bunch of indie rockstars. This isn't just a feelgood romp, but a novel about different kinds of love and the darker sides of human nature, featuring a triumvirate of the most likeable characters I've encountered in sf for some time, and strange magic rising at the heart of a subtly-transformed future England. *Bold as Love* is an immensely cheering book, despite its grimmer side, and I can't wait for the sequel.

The plot of *Passage* – which concerns a neurologist's quest to understand near-death experiences – seems an unlikely vehicle for Connie Willis's usual romantic comedy. It's altogether darker and more tragic than usual, and yet there's something oddly comforting about Willis's no-nonsense approach to the whole American death industry.

Neil Gaiman's American Gods recounts the story of the old gods, who came over with the other immigrants, and what they make of the American Dream. As expected from Gaiman, there are hilarious one-liners, plenty of word-games and riddles, and vivid imagery. Even the novel's climax is a suitably American resolution.

C.J. Cherryh's *Fortress of Dragons* is the 'triumphant conclusion' that publishers always promise at the end of a series, but seldom deliver. Cherryh's distinctively dense, allusive prose paints a grim and obscure world in heraldically bright colours.

The Ghost Sister by Liz Williams, is at once evocative and promising – a first novel set in a world of wide open spaces, with a very different take on an age-old myth.

Stuart Carter

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

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

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

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

shame.

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

Gary Dalkin

Jon Ronson's *Them – Adventures With Extremists* (Picador, 2001) is a fast, light read which details some very murky territory, the disquieted sceptic surprising himself concluding our most deeply paranoid conspiracy theories may be true, or not. So the Bilderberg Group really exists, but the scary thing is, our embassy in Portugal is scared too, and the great and the good, including world business leaders and former US Presidents really do make mock human sacrifices to a 40 foot symbol of a pagan owl god deep in the Californian woods every summer. Do you want people like these running the planet?

Prime candidate for a trip to the woods is the subject of Andrew Yule's Steven Spielberg: Father of The Man (1997). Yule is riveting on the business practices of Hollywood, and presents the evidence to back-up some seriously shocking claims. If what Yule alleges is true... oh, just read it. Arthur C. Clarke wrote a version of A.I. when it was still a Kubrick project, which brings me to his The Collected Stories. What more needs to be said except every sf fan needs a copy?

Modris Eksteins's *Rites of Spring* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999) is an imaginative exploration of the changes in European society during the first half of the twentieth Century. Using Stravinsky's dance of death as a prelude to the Great War he outlines how we came to live in the world described by Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (Knopf Canada, Jan 2000 / Flamingo 2000), a book so popular it is probably no longer cool to recommend it. Still, Klein's exposure of the inequity behind the drive to globalisation raises the hackles, powerfully demonstrating how we all lose under MacDonaldisation.

lain Emsley

Sleight of hand is the oldest trick in the book and Neil Gaiman performs it with aplomb in *American Gods* (Headline). After his release from prison, Shadow is employed by the enigmatic Mr Wednesday, who claims to be many things. On their journey through America, they come across a motley crew of refugees and former gods whilst solving a murder. The novel is a mishmash of styles, deftly intertwined to produce an outstanding story that looks at America from a non-native perspective. Definitely one to re-read at leisure.

Robert Holdstock's *Celtika* (Earthlight) recreated Merlin's journeys before Arthur. From Northern Europe, where he resurrects the Argo, we follow him to Greece where he reunites Jason with his sons, who had been moved in time by Medea. The novel is wondrous first novel in the Merlin Codex and promises to deliver as powerfully as Mythago Wood.

The Lightstone (Harper Collins) is the first book that I have read by David Zindell and it was a delight to read. In this multilayered High Fantasy, we follow the attempt to recover the Lightstone. Whereas in most fantasies, this would end the quest, Zindell uses this to introduce wilder possibilities in future books.

Last year saw two really strong British fantasy debuts. Talisker (Earthlight) by Miller Lau delivers strong characters and plot which captivate as well as deliver neat hooks for the continuing series. Children of the Shaman (Orbit) by Jessica Rydill is a captivating book which reminded me of pre-Tolkien fantasy with a contemporary twist.

Alan Fraser

lain M. Banks, Look To Windward (Orbit): A sequel of sorts to Consider Phlebas (its title is taken from the same section of T. S.

Eliot's *The Waste Land*). Dedicated to "the Gulf War veterans", this book works now even better as an analogy to Western foreign policy than Banks ever intended! Once again Banks also gives us an engrossing look at Culture life, as well as setting up an exciting race against time to discover Quilan's intent and stop him.

Mary Gentle, Ash: A Secret History (Gollancz): What more praise can I heap upon this massive tome with the twinned tales of a feisty female mercenary captain in fifteenth century Europe and her present day biographer that hasn't been heaped already? My only comment is that it's classed as fantasy, and in my opinion any book that includes both alternate worlds intersecting with our own, and mediaeval tactical computers that communicate telepathically with specially-bred clones is sf. A long but very rewarding read, stacked full of dangerous and dirty Middle Ages atmosphere, and an especially satisfying conclusion!

Robin Hobb, *Ship Of Destiny*: Book 3 of The Liveship Traders (Voyager): The end of her second series set in the same world as the Assassin trilogy, this time with a much more satisfying conclusion than the first. *Ship Of Destiny* completes the story started in *Ship Of Magic* and continued in *The Mad Ship*.

Guy Gavriel Kay, Lord Of Emperors. Book 2 of The Sarantine Mosaic (Simon & Schuster): The second and concluding part of this series set in the same alternate world as The Lions Of Al-Rassan. It continues the tale of Crispin of Batiara, Imperial Mosaicist, and introduces a new lead character, Rustem, a physician from the country of Bassania who also finds himself journeying to Sarantium to take part in the momentous events about to explode. A clever and absorbing tale in a fascinating world well-told and described.

John Marco, Saints Of The Sword: Book 3 of Tyrants And Kings (Gollancz): I'm not a great fan of magic in fantasy novels because it's too easy to bring in to cover lazy plotting, but John Marco uses it logically and minimally in the Tyrants And Kings series, his epic fantasy about the warring continent of Nar and its neighbour Lucel-Lor. I found much to like in this third and concluding volume to The Jackal Of Nar and The Grand Design.

Mark Greener

I found choosing just five books to recommend to *Vector*'s readers intensely frustrating. I found it frustrating that I couldn't manage to squeeze some marvellous books inside the ghetto's walls. So, unfortunately, I can't recommend that you read McEwan's *Atonement*, Amis's *The War Against Cliché* or Ackroyd's *London: The Biography*, three of the best books I've read this – or any other – year. And I found it frustrating that I'm allowed only five nominations. So, you'll never know that Moore's *From Hell* was my favourite graphic novel. Shame.

Still, here are my five nominations. Firstly, non-fiction: Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975, but still in print) – an eloquent, provocative look at the nature of genre and the paradoxical nature of fantastic fiction. The book offers much food for thought concerning sf and fantasy's relationship with the broader literary landscape.

Secondly, Ted Hughes *Beowulf* (Faber, 1999), a beautifully written, accessible translation that should appeal to anyone who loves fantasy – irrespective of whether they regularly read poetry.

Thirdly, I replaced my well-worn copy of Michael Moorcock's *Behold the Man* with the SF Masterworks reissue. It remains as brilliant, thought provoking and shocking today, and after several readings, as when I first read it more than 20 years ago. James Blish once said that sf could boast "few authentic masterpieces". For me, *Behold the Man* ranks alongside *Nineteen Eighty Four, Brave New World* and *Frankenstein* as one of those authentic masterpieces.

My vote for best short story collection goes to M John Harrison's *Travel Arrangements* (Gollancz 2000). An impressive collection of haunting stories that linger in the mind for hours, days, weeks. (And probably longer – I only finished it a few weeks ago.)

Finally, Doctor Who's my safety valve; an undemanding escape after hours huddled over the computer. Of the dozen or so tie-in novels I've read this year, Newman's novella *Time and Relative* (Telos 2001) is the best – probably because it takes a different approach to most Who novels. Newman tells the story from view of Susan Foreman, the original Doctor's granddaughter, who has always been one of the most enigmatic characters in the Doctor Who mythos. Now if you'll excuse me while I slip out of my anorak ...

Lesley Hatch

Robin Hobb's *Ship of Destiny* is my first choice, and it forms volume three of The Liveship Traders series, in which the various protagonists find themselves facing all kinds of problems, the resolutions to which are skilfully and ingeniously handled by the author, who kept this reader totally enthralled throughout.

Next up are Michael Moorcock and Storm Constantine with *Silverheart*, which is a real blockbuster of a novel, and an excellent collaboration; there is, simply, no way to tell who created which aspect of the story. With strong characters, an ingenious story-line and an immaculate background, it was thoroughly enjoyable.

My next choice is Freda Warrington's *The Obsidian Throne*, which is the concluding volume of her Jewelfire Trilogy. This novel more than lived up to my expectations. I had no idea how Freda was going to pull all the disparate threads together, but she did, giving me a compelling read.

Sharon Shinn's Wrapt In Crystal is a detective story with a difference, set on an alien planet where a series of murders take place and a very special investigator is called in. The background against which the investigation takes place transforms this police procedural into true science fiction.

My last choice, after much thought, is *Making History* by Stephen Fry, which starts off as a fairly straightforward story, but takes an unexpected turn when the protagonist alters history by preventing the birth of Adolf Hitler (with the aid of a rudimentary time machine). Fry's novel is a compulsive and very funny read.

Chris Hill

Not an easy choice this year. There was much that was good, but little that was really outstanding. Three of my choices were pretty solidly in the list from the beginning, the other two could have been any of a dozen or more, the final choice depending on my mood when I finalised the list.

Guy Gavriel Kay, *The Sarantine Mosaic*. Cheating here slightly by including two books under one choice, but there was never any doubt that these were going to be in my top five this year. Beautifully written and compelling, with a likeable and believable cast

Connie Willis, *Passage*. A serious examination of the possible meanings of Near-Death Experiences. Spoiled slightly by the 'screwball-comedy' style opening, but rewards persistence.

Mark Danielowski, *House of Leaves*. The weirdest book I read this year. The 'haunted house' part of the book is genuinely creepy and the metaphysical games played around it are intriguing.

Neil Gaiman, American Gods. Perhaps classifies as an old-fashioned 'good read' but none the worse for that. Starts from an intriguing question of what happens to the native gods of immigrants.

Terry Pratchett, *The Last Hero*. Pratchett's funniest story for ages, complemented by Paul Kidby's wonderfully detailed illustrations.

Penny Hill

I read The Sarantine Mosaic in January 2001 and knew then it would be one of my top five books of the year. It comprises *Sailing to Sarantium* and *Lord of Emperors* by Guy Gavriel Kay and the plot covers an episode in the history of Byzantium in a parallel world where gods and magic are real. The mosaic theme is central to the book – both the physical mosaics that are created

and destroyed and the metaphysical mosaic made up of people's lives.

I re-read Tim Powers's *The Anubis Gates* (1983) and was struck again by how brilliant the interweaving of different types of time travel is. I would categorise this as science fiction although there is an argument for describing it as fantasy.

Knowledge of Angels (Black Swan, 1994) by Jill Paton Walsh probably counts as magic realism. A spell-binding book that discusses theological issues passionately, while making you care about the characters and their opposing viewpoints.

Emma by Jane Austen is my second favourite Jane Austen novel and is better than most other books I have read. I don't know how many times I have re-read it now. This time the main characters all started to appear rather young to me - even Mrs Elton whose patronising manner makes her seem middle-aged.

American Gods by Neil Gaiman just blew me away. It is a big sustained story that works on many different levels making the strange seem familiar and the every-day suddenly strange.

Paul Kincaid

It has been a year of Collected Stories. We've had them from J.G. Ballard and Vernor Vinge and even, lord help us, from Tim Powers (surely too young and too unprolific a short story writer for such an exercise), but the best of the lot has to be *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke* (Gollancz/Tor, 2001), because it illustrates so well why he was one of the most significant and influential writers science fiction has so far produced.

My second selection is *Amaryllis Night And Day* by Russell Hoban (Bloomsbury, 2001), the best thing he has done since at least *Pilgermann*, and lovely story of interweaving dreams.

Connie Willis is a writer who keeps winning awards, often for works that don't really deserve it. But with *Passage* (Voyager, 2001) she is back on top form, indeed if you ignore the tendency to make inappropriate jokes all the time it is even stronger and darker than Doomsday Book.

There are UK editions of all these books, but alas you are unlikely to see a UK edition of *Sister Noon* by Karen Joy Fowler (Putnams, 2001), though this wonderfully atmospheric novel harks back to the mood and even the era of the last of her books that was published here, Sarah Canary. Like that book it is a vivid evocation of the period (it is set in and around an orphanage in San Francisco in the 1890s), with a subtle hint of mystery and the fantastic around it.

Finally a 1999 novel I've only just caught up with, but which blew me away when I read it: *Motherless Brooklyn* by Jonathan Lethem (Vintage). It's a crime novel featuring a protagonist with Tourette's Syndrome, and the Tourette's becomes a vivid symbol both for the crime and for the city of New York.

Steve Jeffery

There were probably one or two books in every month this year that I've enjoyed enough to recommend them enthusiastically to people (July, from which two of my choices come, plus two more that didn't quite make my top five -Kim Wilkins's haunting dark fantasy *The Resurrectionists* (Orion) and M. J. Engh's *Arslan* (Orb) - was a particularly good month).

Chris Wooding's *The Haunting of Alaizabel Cray* (Scholastic) came via an enthusiastic recommendation from *Vector* general editor Tony Cullen, and I became shamelessly evangelical about this to anyone who stayed in one place for more than three minutes. The nearest I can describe this is as a cross between China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* and the Victorian gaslight romantic thrillers of Philip Pullman's Sally Lockhart books.

Gwyneth Jones's *Bold as Love* (Gollancz) is as much a love story between the author and rock and roll as it is between (in different combinations) its three main protagonists Ax, Sage and Fiorinda as a near future England descends into chaos. A book that makes you really care about the characters and

relationships, both troubled and joyful, and possibly the one book this year that made me laugh and cry at the same time.

The Fox Woman by Kij Johnson (Tor) is a re-telling of the same Japanese folk tale that Neil Gaiman used as the basis for his collaboration with artist Yoshitaka Amano in *The Dream Hunters. The Fox Woman* is a beautifully told and heartbreaking love story that slips constantly between dream and reality.

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay by Marc Chabon (4th Estate) won the Pullitzer Prize and one that I think will be appreciated by sf and fantasy fans who have an interest (even a passing one, like me) in comics and the history of comics. There were echoes, I thought, of works like Art Spiegelman's Maus (itself a work which virtually redefines what comics/graphic novels are capable of) in Joe Kavalier's (a young Jewish refugee from the Holocaust) creation of the anti-Nazi storylines to The Escapist.

Justina Robson's second novel *Mappa Mundi* (Macmillan) fully confirms the promise of her debut *Silver Screen* (1999) and (I have just learned) earns her a second shortlisting for the Clarke Award. Ambitious and impressive stuff, written with the assurance and big sf ideas you would expect from the likes of McAuley, Bear or Egan.

Dave Langford

John Clute, Appleseed: a hugely enjoyable feast of language (ranging from azulejaria through nanoforges to "Okey-dokey") served up on a relatively straightforward space-operatic platter. I fell over at the announcement of the name of one of those Significant Children who tend to get born into the genre: "Arturus Quondam Captain Future!"

Greg Egan, Schild's Ladder (Gollancz): a cosmic disaster is erasing known space in a sphere forever expanding at half lightspeed, and you know you're in an Egan novel when (owing to rich possibilities of life in the "novo-vacuum" within) there's serious debate about the morality of trying to stop it. Boggling stuff.

Ian McDonald, Ares Express (Earthlight): a genial, unashamed romp (I have the author's word for this) with a grippingly dotty narrative, a million allusions to other Martian sf sagas and The Book of the New Sun, and a whiff of sly self-referential knowingness which – as in The Princess Bride – actually works.

Ken MacLeod, *Dark Light* (Gollancz): Book Two of Engines of Light, following on from his Hugo nominee *Cosmonaut Keep* and similarly crammed with big ideas, savvy political insight, and engaging wit.

John Sladek, *The Complete Roderick* (Gollancz): his finest novel, differently chopped up by British and US publishers, appeared as a single volume for the first time in 2001. Brilliant tragicomic satire of robots, humans and just what the difference between them might be.

Honourable mention: the latest posthumous collection of Avram Davidson's stories, *The Other Nineteenth Century* (Tor, 2001), somewhat various but with wonderful high points.

Vikki Lee

Genpei by Kara Dalkey (Tor) was one of my memorable reads this year. A fantasy re-telling of the fate of two families in twelfth century Japan – highly recommended if you like a mixture of historical fact and accuracy blended with good characterisation and storytelling.

Well of Darkness by Margaret Weis and Tracey Hickman (HarperCollins). It is a sad fact that because of their previous involvement with roleplaying-linked stories, Weis and Hickman rarely receive credit for their art. Well of Darkness is a gripping dark fantasy with as many twists and turns as the very best of fantasy, and is original enough to stand out from the run-of-themill.

The Fresco by Sheri S. Tepper (Gollancz). I seem to

recommend Tepper every year, despite the variation in quality of her ideas. The writing, as always, is Tepper at her best, but this story probably isn't. It is however a different slant on 'aliens make contact on earth' and the laughs come thick and fast as Tepper keeps her tongue very firmly in her cheek.

The Ring of Five Dragons by Eric Van Lustbader (Tor). I've always had a little difficulty getting into Lustbader's fantasy, and 'Ring' is no different on that score. It's a great start to a trilogy and I really hope he can keep it up for at least two more books. Read this one for yourself to find out more about it.

Transformation by Carol Berg (Orbit). This is a first novel, and I always find new authors and first novels intriguing. This is no exception, and the strength of Berg's writing is the simplicity of the plot. Very few protagonists and great characterisation ensure a vivid and engrossing read. Having recently read the second book in the series, which I didn't enjoy as much, I was reminded just how different and enjoyable Transformation is.

Farah Mendlesohn

This hasn't been one of the more inspiring years for science fiction. There are good books out there but very few that I would thrust, burbling excitedly, into people's hands with the demand that they read this, now. However, I adored John Clute's Appleseed: I have a penchant for space opera anyway, and combined with the awesome use of language I was blown away, and if the language of sf appeals, China Miéville's Scar, due next spring, is a must. I also really liked Paul McAuley's Secret of Life which worked at all levels, as science fiction, as mystery and as complex psychological novel.

I took part in two panels this year on children's sf so I read about forty new books in this category this year. Much of what I read was dross, but *Owl in Love* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993; Puffin 1994) by Patrice Kindl, a rather strange story of a fourteen year old were-owl, and *The Stones are Hatching* (HarperCollins, 2000), by Geraldine McCaughrean a sort of Tam Lin folk tale set in 1919, were both magical. Children's science fiction, however, remains a rare beast, so I was delighted when I was lent a proof copy of Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* (Scholastic, 2001); I can't remember the last time a children's sf book had such originality, sheer verve and sense of wonder.

Of the history books I've read for work, few seem to have left the slightest trace on my cortex. Two stand out for the world builders among us: *Perfection Salad* by Laura Shapiro (New york: Modern Library, 1984), a really hysterical analysis of the New England cooking school at the end of the nineteenth century (taste came bottom of a defining list of quality, jello rather higher), and *Arming America* (Knopf, 2000) by Michael A. Bellesiles, a four hundred page argument that colonial America was not very heavily armed at all, most people preferred swords, and that gun culture emerged as a consequence of the Civil War. The NRA is not happy. The author is now in the highly unusual situation of having to defend his thesis in front of an academic "court". Usually academic opponents just write another book.

John Newsinger

One thing that struck me when sorting out my personal favourites from this last year's sf reading is the preponderance of British authors. Admittedly, we are living through a golden age of British sf, but I cannot help feeling that this preponderance is unbalanced. Has the quality of American sf declined, is a lot of good stuff just not making it across the Atlantic, am I just missing it? Anyway my choice in no particular order: Ken MacLeod's Cosmonaut Keep, essential reading; MacLeod is arguably the most important British sf writer of the moment and this volume is the magnificent start to his Engines of Light series that promises to be one of the key works of the new century's first decade. Paul McAuley's The Secret of Life. This is an outstanding novel by a writer who gets better with every book; a marvellous blending of science, politics, sex and attitude. Justina Robson's Silver Screen, has been out for some time, but I've only just read it. Tremendous

stuff. Impressed enough to secure her new volume, Mappa Mundi as a Christmas present. Jon Courtney Grimwood's red Robe: as always a thriller with edge, considerable edge. And Philip Pullman's The Amber Spyglass, the final novel in a classic trilogy that puts the Harry Potter phenomenon in some sort of perspective. And, of course, Terry Pratchett remains wildly overrated.

Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

Chris Wooding, *The Haunting of Alaizabel Cray* (Scholastic Press). Like much of Scholastic Press's output, it seems ostensibly marketed towards a teenage audience, but this is to deny the adult nature of the book. A ripping yarn with shedloads of good ideas, more than a touch of intrigue and a perfectly realised alternative London. At turns scary, exciting and fascinating.

Molly Brown, Bad Timing and Other Stories (Big Engine). In a world where books are becoming increasingly long, forcing them into the "life's too short to read them" category, Molly's delicious set of short stories is a welcome treat. Ranging from whimsical to shocking to very, very funny this set of tales has something for everybody.

Lloyd Kaufman, All I Need to Know About Filmmaking I Learned from the Toxic Avenger (Berkley Boulevard, 1998). A book for reprobates everywhere, Lloyd Kaufman's combination of autobiography and devil-may-care exploitation film techniques makes this an ideal alternative to the usual Hollywood film handbook. Learn how to market the most appallingly crass films as politically subversive statements and still laugh.

Philip Ridley, *In the Eyes of Mr Fury* (Penguin). A disturbing novel that manages to capture the spirit of Ray Bradbury. Wholly British in tone, this is an effortless read that is at once nostalgic and worrying.

Barry Gifford, *The Sinaloa Story* (Rebel Inc.). Gifford once again proves that he is the master of economy. The combination of low life degradation and plot twists makes this a speedy most satisfying read.

Andrew Seaman

The Collected Strange Stories of Robert Aickman (Tartarus Press/Durtro Press 2000). The most expensive, but currently the most treasured, book that I bought in 2001. All of Aickman's short fiction in two lovingly-produced volumes – haunting, often maddeningly oblique, stories of unease that send a shudder down your spine, sometimes for reasons that you can't adequately explain. Every home should have one.

Anything by Andrew Crumey. A cheat here. To be topical I could mention Crumey's latest novel *Mr Mee* (Picador, 2001), but his previous novels for Daedelus, including *Music, in a Foreign Language* and *Pfitz* are equally wonderful. Crumey, a theoretical physicist by training, writes in a European tradition of authors like Calvino and Eco, rather than in the hidebound and parochial mode of much contemporary English fiction. His erudite and playful fictions conceal Russian doll-like labyrinths of narrative misdirection, but are never stuffy or pretentious. One of my discoveries of the year.

Declare by Tim Powers (Morrow, 2001) is a real return to form after the disappointing Earthquake Weather (1997). This typically gonzo offering is an occult spy thriller, spanning the period from before the Second World War to the collapse of the Soviet Union, that reads like a collaboration between John le Carré and Charles Williams, positing eerily plausible supernatural explanations for the key events of the last sixty years. Like other U.S. authors Powers mangles some details of British life, but these are minor faults in a hugely entertaining and, yes, thrilling novel

Appleseed by John Clute (Orbit, 2001). Oft-announced and long-anticipated, Clute's first sf novel, rather surprisingly a space opera, provided a pyrotechnic blast of language and neat sfnal ideas. Difficult, certainly, but once you settle into the rhythm

of the information-dense prose there was much here to reward the patient reader and leave them eager for more.

The Soul of the Night: An Astronomical Pilgrimage by Chet Raymo (Ruminator Books, 1992). A series of essays by science writer Raymo that deftly link the earthbound and the cosmic. Each piece is beautifully written and he has an unerring eye for just the right metaphor or analogy to illuminate his meditations on discoveries in modern-day cosmology. Even for an old astronomy buff like me there's much here to appreciate and learn from.

Andy Sawyer

As usual, this really ought to be called "best books of the first half of 2001", because I've not yet got around to a number of the potentially most interesting books published in the second half of the year, but in no particular order:

Jon Courtenay Grimwood's *Pashazade* (Earthlight) has an interesting alternate-history North African setting where the Ottoman Empire survived the first world war, and promoted Laurence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet several places up my "must re-read" list.

Talking of re-reading, I probably need to read John Clute's Appleseed (Orbit) at least once more, but Clute's mixture of obliqueness and linguistic virtuosity makes this a fascinating take on sf for the twenty-first century. Certainly among the most important books of the year, but I'm slightly baffled by the fact that it hasn't sparked nearly as much argument as I thought it would.

Dave Langford's *The Leaky Estabishment* (Big Engine) is a reread but I was happy to see its reappearance this year and note that it was as funny as ever.

Soul Mountain by Nobel prize-winner Gao Xingjian (Flamingo, 2000) had a number of people trying to drag it into the field because of its references to Chinese folk-tale and fantasy and its unusual narrative structure. I couldn't see this myself, but the way he develops the glimpses of cultures of which the march of time, the pressure of ideology, or the sheer need for survival have left nothing but a few bricks, a half-recalled ritual, or some untranslatable inscriptions is certainly reminiscent of some strands of sf.

Anthony Skene, Monsieur Zenith the Albino (Savoy, 2001): "Zenith's crimson-irised eyes were reflective. He stood there long of leg and broad of shoulder. immaculately dressed, groomed to perfection, cold as an icicle; and dangerous; transcendentally dangerous." This resurrected obscurity from the golden age of thrillers, when they were churned out at high speed by writers only slightly less extraordinary than their characters, is so dazzlingly good that it's hard to evade suspicions that this is a spoof, perhaps by that other creator of an alienated Albino who supplies a foreword to this volume (and who cunningly links Skene's sophisticated, embittered villainhero to his own Multiverse.) Anthony Skene's writing is as sharply honed as the senses of his hero, while the dramatis personae of this novel are like nothing else but those baroque dissidents we meet in Jacobean tragedy. I read this book in a constant state of jaw-dropping. To think that I once thought that tossers like Raffles and the Saint had style. Dear me.

Maureen Kincaid Speller

For the first time ever, in 2001 I kept a record of all the books I read, somewhere over 100, many of them not sf or fantasy related. However, going through my genre reading, there are some clear winners.

China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*, winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award, will, I'm sure, figure on many people's lists. At a time when my tastes have become rather plainer, I nevertheless revelled in the richness of the language, the ambiguity of the characters and the extraordinary city of New Crobuzon.

Molly Gloss's Wild Life (Simon & Schuster 2000, Mariner

Books 2001), which won the Tiptree Award, is an entirely different story intertwining a nineteenth century woman's extraordinary encounter with a sasquatch in the American backwoods with a powerful discussion of women's role in society. Lyrical and humorous but always powerful, this was a book I could not get out of my mind.

Staying in America, Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* did not disappoint me at all. It's clever, as you might expect from Gaiman, who plays with different understandings of gods and their role in modern American society, as well as addressing some of their most powerful myths (though not, as everyone points out, rivers). I loved it to pieces; it was a fine book.

I admit that I didn't expect to enjoy Gwyneth Jones's *Bold as Love*, much as I like her work. Teenage rock-chicks are not, to be honest, my usual choice of subject matter but Jones firmly stomped on my prejudices and I found myself caught up in the fascinating interactions between the three protagonists and their fairytale attempt to put the world to rights. As with all Jones's books, it bears rereading and will bring further dividends, I think.

I usually like to include one book that's a step outside the genre: for 2001 that's *Le Grand Meaulnes* by Alain-Fournier, in the excellent new translation from Tartarus Press (1999; also available in Penguin). I've loved this book for years, a romantic and tragic tale of love lost and found, and lost again. Rereading it, I think more and more that the lost domain has a flavour of the fantastical about it. Either way, I think everyone should read it. It's wonderful.

Sue Thomason

John Crowley, *Dæmonomania* (Bantam Books, 2001). Third of a projected four-book series about the nature of reality, the power of story, and who gets off with whom in a certain small American town in the Faraway Hills. I just love reading something that's written so plainly and clearly, by someone who's wiser, more knowledgeable, and more perceptive than I'll ever be. A real consciousness-raiser!

Ursula Le Guin, *The Other Wind* (Harcourt Inc., 2001). Fifth volume of the Earthsea trilogy, settling a number of important questions about magic, death, dragons, and prejudice. Deep, sensitive, clear, coherent, satisfying writing.

Pat Barker, Regeneration (Penguin Books, 1991). A brilliant novel based on the therapeutic relationship between clinical psychologist W.H.R. Rivers and poet Siegfried Sassoon at Craiglockhart Army (psychiatric) Hospital in 1917. Follows the format of a Greek tragedy (with all the really nasty action happening "off" and narrated by messenger), and details a classic Kirk/Spock encounter between Rivers the thinker and mindhealer and Sassoon the romantic and man of action. It's also an unsparing examination of the First World War, and in my opinion a better novel than its two sequels (which both won major awards).

Joe Simpson, *Touching The Void* (Vintage, 1997). True, firsthand account of a mountaineer's extended near-death experience in the Peruvian Andes, detailing his physical, emotional and spiritual experiences after his climbing partner cut the rope and left him (as they both thought) to die. An incredible story of survival in the face of overwhelming odds, including a couple of disturbingly shamanic episodes. I don't read many truly unputdownable books – this one was.

Jared Diamond, Guns, Germs And Steel (W W Norton, 1997). Why did Terra's diverse cultures and civilizations develop as they did, and not otherwise? This book offers a well-researched, logical and convincing answer. Should be compulsory reading for all designers of civilizations and the ecosystems that support them

Kathy Taylor

My five best books must include the C.J. Cherryh I've just finished, Defender. Set as part of the Foreigner series it's a fabulous example of her ability to write anthropological sf. As well as a fascinating exercise in alien language an psychology in which she explores what it means to be human it's a unputdownable pageturner. This must rank as my favourite novel of the year.

In the fantasy field I'd nominate *The Amber Spyglass* by Philip Pullman. It has its faults, and in some ways it fails to produce the climax the previous books seemed to be leading to but never the less it is a superb original fantasy.

Also in the fantasy field are *Sailing to Sarantium* and *Lord of Emperors* by Guy Gavriel Kay. I'm going to cheat a little and call these one nomination as they are clearly just two halves of the same book, split in half for length reasons.

Fantasy again, *Newton's Cannon* by J. Gregory Keyes (Del Rey, 1999). This excellent alternative history deals with the personal and political consequences of alchemy becoming a real science whose laws are discovered by a young Benjamin Franklin and by Sir Isacc Newton amongst others.

Out of the genre I'd like to nominate *Charlotte Gray* by Sebastian Faulks (Hutchinson, 1998). Set during the second world war the novel tells the story of an ordinary middle class Scott who becomes a spy in France during the occupation. For most of the book it's a well-written novel but the last chapter moves it into the great works of modern literature.

Jon Wallace

In a year that saw me record even fewer of the books that I read than I did in 2000, I am actually hard pushed to recall five books that I enjoyed enough to recommend. I find myself buying less sf, and relying on the library is hard work... But I did buy some books.

lain M. Banks can always be relied upon to stretch the brain and *Look to Windward* certainly does that. China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* got me through the summer at work quite nicely, even if this dense novel did take me so long to read that I had to skip back and check out who was who...

On the non-sf front, I finally got around to reading some Elmore Leonard in the shape of *Get Shorty* (Delacorte / Viking, 1990). Are you sure that's not sf? It's alien to me... And if Elmore Leonard writes sf (hard, of course) then Carol O'Connor writes fantasy. I've never come across a police detective as strange as Kathy Mallory anywhere, and *The Flight of the Stone Angel* (Hutchinson, 1997) wraps a lot up nicely (DON'T start there, if you feel you want to check them out. You'll get lost).

And at the risk of becoming predictable, I enjoyed my yearly Terry Pratchett, and that's *The Truth* (2000).

Oh and I didn't read 2001...

Gary Wilkinson

Strangely, during the iconic year of 2001, I didn't seem to read as much sf as I normally would. And most were re-reads – of which the outstanding example was Iain Banks's *The Bridge* (1986). Still the man's best work. I noticed (or perhaps re-noticed) so much more this time around as a man in a coma dreams of a man of a bridge who dreams of a Glaswegian-dialect barbarian and the past life of the man in the coma...

The release of the *Heart of Empire* CD ROM by Bryan Talbot and James Robinson reminded me how good the original comic series was – a beautifully drawn cross-genre romp. And at least in 2001 I read a 'novel' with pictures on a computer via a silver disk. How sf is that! Holidays on the moon next...

A couple of choice fantasies. I was genuinely surprised by how much I enjoyed *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) by J. K. Rowling. Much funnier than I expected and basically unputdownable. *The Iron Dragon's Daughter* (1993) by Michael Swanwick was a scintillating kaleidoscope of a novel, with many stories within stories; it almost falls into incoherence but comes

together at the end. Sexy, very much for grown-ups, and you cannot beat dragons with heat-seeking missiles...

James Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia* (Mysterious Press, 1987 / Century 1988) was the stand-out from a number of crime novels I read this year. An investigation into a horrific murder in Los Angeles during the 1940s is only the start of an ultra-noir, plot-twisting drama – as black as they come.

The Results

Titles which gained more than one vote are given below:

5 votes

Neil Gaiman, American Gods (Headline)
Iain M. Banks, Look to Windward (Orbit)
China Miéville, Perdido Street Station (Macmillan)

4 votes

John Clute, Appleseed (Orbit)
Gwyneth Jones, Bold as Love (Gollancz)
Guy Gavriel Kay, Lord of Emperors (Earthlight)
Connie Willis, Passage (Voyager)

3 votes

Molly Brown, *Bad Timing and Other Stories* (Big Engine) Guy Gavriel Kay, *Sailing to Sarantium* (Voyager) Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* (David Fickling/Scholastic)

2 votes

Mary Gentle, Ash: A Secret History (Gollancz) Jonathan Lethem, Motherless Brooklyn (Vintage) Alastair Reynolds, Revelation Space (Gollancz) Robin Hobb, Ship Of Destiny (Voyager)

Arthur C. Clarke, *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke* (Gollancz)

Chris Wooding, The Haunting of Alaizabel Cray (Scholastic)

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BSFA Award Novel Shortlist for 2000 - Awarded 2001

Mary Gentle, Ash: A Secret History
Jon Courtenay Grimwood, redRobe
John Meaney, Paradox
China Miéville, Perdido Street Station
Alastair Reynolds, Revelation Space

(Winner: Mary Gentle, Ash: A Secret History)

Arthur C. Clarke Award Shortlist for 2000 - Awarded 2001

Octavia E.Butler, Parable of the Talents Mary Gentle, Ash: A Secret History Ken MacLeod, Cosmonaut Keep China Miéville, Perdido Street Station Alastair Reynolds, Revelation Space Adam Roberts, Salt

(Winner: China Miéville, Perdido Street Station)

Arthur C. Clarke Award Shortlist for 2001 - To be awarded 2002

Jon Courtenay Grimwood, *Pashazade* (Earthlight)
Peter F. Hamilton, *Fallen Dragon* (Macmillan)
Gwyneth Jones, *Bold As Love* (Gollancz)
Paul McAuley, *The Secret Of Life* (Voyager)
Justina Robson, *Mappa Mundi* (Macmillan)
Connie Willis, *Passage* (Voyager)

The Science Fiction Films of 2001 By Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc While the number of exclusively sf films are a bit low this year, those that are borderline (crossing over into the fantasy or horror genres) are on the increase. But then again how often do "true" sf films come along? And what is an sf film anyway? If sf is the extrapolation of the contemporary to perceive a logically plausible future then really *Final Fantasy* or *A.I.* are the closest you are going to get (spiritual questions excepted) this year. If you view sf as a method for commenting on the present by altering actuality or perceived near-futures then *Josie and the Pussycats* is your film. Then of course, came a couple films that were on hype overload – both based on popular novels. Perhaps most surprisingly the one film that most definitely is not sf is the one that virtually everyone agrees is a "must-see" – *The Dish.* In the end it seems that whether a film can be marketed or justified as sf is irrelevant to whether it is perceived as such.

A.I.

Imagine a table laid with the finest savoury food you've ever tasted; little canapés, stuffed olives, tasty cheesy nibbles, fresh bread. The aroma. The feel of your saliva glands bursting with antici...pation. Then imagine the horror as the renowned chef who has created these delicious morsels unloads a dumper-truck of sweetener over the whole lot and bids you bon apetit. This is what watching A.I. is like. A further plunge to the "not good" side of the Spielberg swing-o-meter that hasn't seen a good film in twelve years (which admittedly is still ahead of Ridley Scott's seventeen years and counting – this year's risible Hannibal reaching a nadir). If you must watch it then switch off or walk out when it feels like the end, you'll thank us for it and probably like it.

Atlantis: The Lost Continent

Well, the story ain't exactly bursting with originality - young bumbling geek and his group of companions, some of whom have, gasp, ulterior motives, discover the legendary lost city of Atlantis. Cue adventures, excitement, misunderstandings and betrayal before all is nicely resolved and everyone lives happily ever after. Except the bad guys. What makes this film worth watching though, apart from the merciful lack of bad musical numbers, is the delightful animation. Japanese anime has become increasingly influential on Western films - characters' eyes are becoming bigger, their noses are more snub-cute but more importantly the action has become far more dynamic. In many respects it's a return to Disney's glory days of the 1930s and 1940s. The ending is almost abstract as the source of Atlantis's power prevents the volcano's lava destroying the city, it's a sequence that tries to live up to the masterful work of Miyazaki and if it never comes close (Disney may have the cash and the staff but they can't compete with the delicacy, ambiguity and occasional ferocity of Miyazaki) it is nonetheless a welcome step in the right direction.

Battle Royale

Sf Japanese style, released to cries of despair in its native land. Why the fuss? Well the near-future plot revolves around the staging of a government-sponsored game show where contestants have to kill or be killed on a specially modified island. Armed with a random selection of weapons from sub-machine guns to the awesome tea-tray, the combatants have three days to kill each other. There can only be one survivor, a rule enforced by the exploding collar - a stylish fashion statement that everyone must wear. The whole sordid affair is commented upon with helium-induced glee by a bubbly, bouncing front woman and the progress in the film can be seen at regular intervals thanks to a handy "people left alive" tally. So far, so good, but Battle Royale's trump card is that the contestants are all roped into the game by their long suffering schoolteacher (played by the inimitable 'Beat' Takeshi), resulting in two hours of 14 and 15 year olds mutilating each other in the name of entertainment. Sick, socially appropriate and wickedly funny.

Brotherhood of the Wolf

In a great year for popularist French films *Brotherhood of the Wolf* is a crowd-pleasing combination of heritage gore, monster movie and multi-racial martial arts. A sweeping pot-pourri of a film, it occasionally falls foul of its everything-into-the-pot ethos, but gains top marks for exhilarating camerawork and design. 9 out of 10 Hollywood blockbusters (when stating a preference) declared that they wish they'd been this instead.

Cats and Doas

The potential for a great film stuffed with James Bond gadgets, international canine politics, allergy cures, mad scientists and big quadruped punch-ups may be there, but *Cats and Dogs* is a dog of a film. A reactionary piece of propaganda that asserts that all dogs are patriotic defenders of the US flag; the political overtones are distasteful and seem to be saying that wealth equals morality, that the only women who are not wholly evil are not worthy to have a home of their own and that any non-US nation is inherently suspect. Some of the CGI definitely bears the hallmarks of rushed-out-for-the-holidays-itis. Still Mr Tinkles's character means that it is not entirely a lost cause, it's just that the overall film is such a missed opportunity. And besides, cats rule.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

How long has it taken to get a decent bit of stylised wire-work into Hollywood? Too long, and ironically now you can't get away from it (although if you're after gentle laid back film try *The Man* Who Wasn't There, mentioned here because we couldn't think of anywhere else appropriate to put it). While The Matrix may have introduced it to a wider audience it took Crouching Tiger to put it into context. What Ang Lee has managed to do is redefine Hong Kong-style cinema as art, no mean feat for a Wu Xia film as most reviewers limit themselves to Wong Kar Wai (whose only Wu Xia film Ashes of Time was kept from these shores until Crouching Tiger made it "acceptable") or John Woo, dismissing others as merely metteurs-en-scene of cinematic junkfood. So while many may have been surprised by the cross dressing (it's a staple of the genre), the surreal nature of the fighting (it's a staple of the genre) and the pathos (it's a staple of the genre), it doesn't detract from a sumptuous and, in Hollywood terms, groundbreaking film. Suddenly Iron Monkey is issued in the US and reaps comfortable returns at the box office, and a Mandarin language film grabs some statues. Scoff all you want but this is good news.

The Dish

Possibly the flimsiest excuses for putting this in a round up of sf films but frankly it has got a rocket in it, so it sort of counts (sadly we couldn't twist things far enough to include the remarkable Tears of the Black Tiger, Amélie or Moulin Rouge). The workers at an Australian satellite station are given the task of broadcasting man's first steps on the moon live to the globe, a task not made any easier by its location in a sheep paddock and a series of unfortunate mishaps. As much about a small rural community as it is about the space race The Dish sees all the actors on top form with some mercifully restrained direction. Gentle, delightful and not in the slightest bit cloying, The Dish is a wonderful feel-good comedy that cannot be recommended highly enough. Even cynics can enjoy.

Dungeons and Dragons

Admit it, you missed this one as well didn't you? Well in the name of "art" and Vector we didn't. Quite simply the funniest film of the year we howled through every atrocious moment, almost requiring medical attention at some of Jeremy Irons' gluttonyrich scenery feasting. Not convinced? Try this: Tom Baker as a geriatric elf, Richard O'Brien as the campest king of thieves, needlessly moulded female armour, pointy ears, horrible dialogue, dreadful acting and very silly names. In a year of

lacklustre blockbusters and tired screenplays it takes something really special to plumb the depths – D&Ds the one. Pack a D20 and a six-pack.

Evolution

It's *Ghostbusters* for the Noughties! Only jaw-droppingly poor. Interesting CGI and some intriguing ideas cannot begin to compensate for third-rate arse gags and sorry acting. Dripping with teeth-grinding scenes of unimaginable crassness, the poster is by far the best bit.

Final Fantasy

Square Soft's ambitious and hugely costly all CGI feature was generally condemned by critics as slight and avoided by the public at large. Anything good to say about it was levelled at the heroine's hair. A shame really, as *Final Fantasy*'s deceptively simple story can be viewed on many levels, the attention to design and pacing is superb whilst the score quite simply one of the most portentously serious in a long time. Breathtaking visuals, alien aliens (how often can you say that?), action, adventure, a decent female lead role for once and a mainstream film that tackles questions of identity, ecology and spirituality. Buy it on DVD and curse that you couldn't be bothered to see it on the big screen. Which we did of course. Twice.

John Carpenter's Ghosts of Mars

So JC returns at last from his brief sojourn into the Vampire genre to direct an sf/horror hybrid. However mish-mash is probably a more appropriate term. A group of cops set out to transport a dangerous prisoner from a holding gaol across Mars to a secure facility. But on arrival they discover that most of the camp population have somehow become possessed and are now fearsome fiends, with painful looking body piercings and strange rituals. Told in flashback, the film holds little in the way of suspense as you know the final outcome pretty much from the beginning. Despite a thoroughly respectable ensemble cast and good use of mise-en-scène, it just doesn't quite work. Enjoyable hokum, but one expects more from Carpenter.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

One of the hypes of the year. Well, this looks great and features another droll turn from the stunning Alan Rickman. That's the good part. Unfortunately Chris Columbus (it should've been Gilliam directing), while sensibly opting for a British cast, sadly appears so in awe of Ms Rowling's book that he doesn't pare enough of it to make the characterisation work. This results in a film that never fails to interest but is distanced from actually making the audience care for the characters as anything other than (delightfully realised) walking illustrations. Sometimes judicious editing and restructuring are essential to make a film work as a film...

Josie and the Pussycats

Blink-and-you-missed-it *Archie* comic post-modern update with great tunes, heaps of consumerist irony and spot-on performances all around. Josie's frothy pop-punksters are spin-doctored into stardom by Alan Cumming and his bubbly-bitch boss following an unfortunate "accident" resulting in the disappearance of (s)hit boy band *du jour*. But sinister plans are afoot involving hi-tech underground capitalist marketing, brainwashing America's youth and world domination (insert maniacal laugh here). Infectious lightweight fun, cruelly discarded on initial release – this year's missed hit.

Jurassic Park III

JPIII is streets ahead of its wretched predecessor in terms of... well everything really, but is still pretty dodgy. Wisely the film ditches basic storytelling principles (beginning-middle-end) in favour of a "get on with the dinosaurs" middle-only approach resulting in much more action. Preposterous in the extreme with

a bizarre solution to restoring estranged families (throw your only son on a dinosaur inhabited island for a couple of months before kidnapping a palaeontologist and enlisting the services of B-picture mercenaries to get him back again) but at least there are jumps, thrills and spills to be enjoyed in-between your mouthfuls of popcorn. Dire characterisation, occasionally ludicrous set-pieces and a non-ending do their best to dampen whatever lacklustre enthusiasm you can muster, but it passes the time. Remember, *The Lost World* (1925 and re-issued on video/DVD this year) and *King Kong* (1933) are still the best dinosaur films ever made.

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider

Beginning with outrageous fetishistic sexualisation through voyeuristic editing, the Lara v. Robot opening gets most of the fan-boy wet dreams nicely out of the way before settling down into familiar "Indiana Jones" style territory. Angelina Jolie makes a surprisingly good Lara Croft (although less said about Jon Anaconda Voight's oh-so-ironic part as her father the better) and being a Simon West film at least the action is exhilarating. Of course it is disposable tosh with some dreadful dialogue and delivery, a plot from a B-movie producer's wastepaper bin and more product placements than The Shopping Channel, but nice use is made of Angkor Watt and the ending is strangely reminiscent of *The Final Programme*, just don't ask why...

The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Rings

Peter "ne'er a bad film" Jackson has done it – a splendid three-hour adaptation of Tolkien. Ditching the usual (Tom "always first to go" Bombadil and the Barrow-wights among many) Jackson's film makes far more narrative sense in the uprising of Saruman in Isengard than the book ever did. Huge battles, Boschian Mordor, really horrid orcs, aloof elves, a tantalising glimpse of Gollum, mercifully underplayed invisibility transformations and big, big sets mix with picture perfect cinematography and Howard Shore's not-too-cute soundtrack. The editing's great, Gandalf is perfect riding the fine line between party-thrower extraordinaire and terrifying vessel of destructive power and you even forget that the hobbits are in reality the same size as the rest of the cast, due to the subtlety of the effects work. A packed cinema full of kids marvelled at it, and the adults were entranced too, so you can't say fairer than that.

The Mummy Returns

OK so *The Mummy* wasn't going to be winning any awards for literary merit or plausibility but it was a helluva lot of fun. The sequel goes for the "re-make with knobs on" approach but sadly the film cannot live up to its predecessor. Yes, the battles are impressive, there are jumps, flashbacks, sword-fighting, airships and all manner of icky curses. Unfortunately some of it seems a touch stale and the horror aspects of the original have been ousted by spectacle. Worst of all is the appalling Scorpion king – he's rubbish when just a bloke and laughably rubbish when half man/half scorpion, rendered in some truly abominable CGI. Still fun, still watchable, still dumb, but a let down nonetheless.

Planet of the Apes

A-ha. Tim Burton's "re-imagining" of *The Planet of the Apes*. Presumably he "re-imagined" it as an average, disposable piece of lightweight tosh without a single memorable human character, replete with uncharacteristically insipid cinematography, no human experimentation and a selection of endings pinched from Boulle's novel, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* and Kevin Smith (allegedly – but even if you had written that ending would you have admitted it?). Disappointing and Burton's least Burtonesque film since *Batman*.

Shrek

Truly a film for all ages the marvellous *Shrek* has had more than its fair share of eminently justifiable praise – if you've seen it

nothing we're going to say is going to come as any surprise and if you haven't then where the hell were you in 2001?

Spy Kids

Robert Rodriguez in U-rated shocker! Fast and furious fun from start to finish this is the cool kids' flick of the year with super-spy parents being held hostage and only their kids to save them. Cue mad gadgets, jet-packs and nuclear powered submarines. Where else can you see Antonio Banderas at the mercy of a pantomime cackling megalomaniac Alan Cumming (it's that man again) complete with an army of guards who are, literally, all thumbs? More action and ideas in ten minutes than most Hollywood blockbusters cram into two hours; bonkers concepts, mad sets and frenetic camerawork. As deep as a small puddle but sheer entertainment nonetheless.

This Year's Horror

The delayed release of the Wes Craven produced Dracula 2000 (imaginatively re-titled in the UK as, wait for it,... Dracula 2001) couldn't disguise the tedium of the finished film. Packed with some interesting ideas, particularly relating to Judas Iscariot, any affinity for the project is dampened by needless editing, that annoying tendency to show gross things but just a little bit so it doesn't offend, and an entirely unconvincing Dracula. Well, he's fine swishing the cloak about and stomping around in leather trousers, just don't let him open his mouth. A plethora of unsubtle Virgin (the shop not the preferred type of vampire victim) product placements drive the final stake well and truly home. Far better (relatively) was Forsaken, an AIDS allegory fusion of John Carpenter's Vampires (1997) and Near Dark (1987). Not original by any stretch but eminently watchable, occasionally shocking and only let down by a weak finale. Jeepers Creepers was a run-ofthe-mill teen horror with jumps aplenty. It managed to tread the now over-familiar post-postmodernist route (how many times do we need to be told how to watch a horror film?) but dared to be different at the end, amidst an otherwise predictable plot. As for Bless The Child and Lost Souls... don't ask, and please don't get us worked up to mention the truly abominable Scary Movie 2. However one to watch out for is The Others, the sort of horror film that's been missing from the big screen for too long. No gore, no fx overload, just a thoroughly creepy haunted house story. Who cares if you're savvy enough to know what's going on? With splendid performances all round, this is a rare treat - a horror film that genuinely scares and shocks. Also well worth a peek is the low-budget Canadian lycanthrope film Ginger Snaps, mixing art, gore and Buffy as one of a pair of suicide obsessed sisters finds herself growing a tail and having an insatiable urge for human blood. Top stuff. Follow-up fans will be pleased to have seen the excellent sequel to spooky Japanese shocker The Ring (title? guess...) received a limited release - we implore you to catch up with this series right now and join us in awaiting the release of Ring O, hopefully next year. Those of a nervous disposition are invited to seek their kicks elsewhere. Add Audition to the equation and Japan look like retaining their crown as makers of interesting and audacious horror.

And the winners are:

Best (and fluffiest) sf Film: Josie and the Pussycats

Scariest Horror: *The Others*

Fantasy Winner: *The Lord of the Rings* (inevitably)

Best sf-by-the-back-door: The Dish

Film That Didn't Match Its Hype: Planet of the Apes

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Editorial interjection: Even setting aside the idea that all musicals are fantasies, Moulin Rouge has a fantasyland Paris and is the most Gilliamesque film since The Fisher King. Meanwhile the Coen Brothers' The Man Who Wasn't There has its sf moment – or is it fantasy? Both hightly recommended

A posthumous collaboration between one of the most cerebral makers of sf film and one of the most commercial sf film-makers, involving at least three British sf writers in the process? Act of homage or the worst idea since... Nigel Planer decided to do Mr MacHenry's voice in a Scottish accent? Spielberg's adaptation of Kubrick's long-delayed project was always going to divide people – so here's an alternative view to our review of the year..

A.I.
A reappraisal of the sf film of the year by Gary S. Dalkin

Stanley Kubrick films are always greeted with controversy, and even though he has been dead for over two years his latest movie, A.l., has proved no different. Of course A.l. is a collaborative project between the deceased Kubrick and the very much alive Steven Spielberg. For anyone who still doesn't know, it is the story of a robot ("Mecha") boy, David, programmed to love, but abandoned in the woods after a couple of family misunderstandings. He then sets out on a quest for the Blue Fairy from Pinocchio, who he believes will make him human.

Kubrick famously worked on A.I. through the 1990s, variously frustrating such writers as Brian Aldiss, Ian Watson and Arthur C. Clarke. Aldiss provided the initial short story on which the film was based, "Supertoys Last All Summer Long". Perhaps Kubrick was thinking that as a short story by one British sf writer, Clarke's "The Sentinel" (plus elements of other stories including "Breaking Strain"), eventually resulted in science fiction masterpiece 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), starting with a story by another celebrated British sf veteran might have a similar outcome. Thus Aldiss worked on the screenplay, famously quoting Kubrick's dictum that all one needs to make a film is "half a dozen nonsubmersible units" before becoming frustrated by the director's desire to turn the tale into an sf version of Pinocchio. Watson similarly worked on the project and left, after which Kubrick

turned to Clarke.

"Stanley went through a number of writers and eventually he sent me a fax for which many writers would have murdered their entire families, saying 'Only you can write the script, name your figure.' Well that was a challenge I couldn't resist and I did write an outline – really I did it because I owed him so much; I never got a penny for it, I never asked for anything. But I did a lot of work and developed a script that I thought was pretty good and my agent thought was the best thing I've ever done, but unfortunately Stanley hated it. But now Stanley's brother-in-law, Jan Harlan was here filming me recently for a retrospective on Stanley, and Jan is with Steven now and he's got a copy of my script, and I very much hope they can find it useful."

There are certainly elements in the finished film which are reminiscent of Clarke, most notably the mystical, ice-locked coda, which evokes the 1949 story, "History Lesson". However, it's worth recording that Spielberg and Kubrick talked long and often by phone through the 1980s and 1990s, and Kubrick eventually asked Spielberg to take-over A.I., while Spielberg already had a connection with Clarke, his company Dreamworks SKG basing Deep Impact (1997) in part on Clarke's novel The Hammer of God. John Baxter's biography Stanley Kubrick suggests Kubrick was

jealous of the box-office success of Spielberg and Lucas's sf and fantasy movies, and considering how they publicly credited 2001: A Space Odyssey as laying the foundation for both Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977) and Star Wars (1977), he felt he deserved a populist hit on an equal scale. It appears A.I. was his attempt at that success, if so given the dark, serious, philosophical, action-free nature of the finished film, it was an odd attempt.

Where though did the *Pinocchio* factor come from? Many have pointed a finger at Spielberg, considered the more child-like, sentimental of the pair, yet it is clear Kubrick planned to work this theme into the film from an early stage. Spielberg had John Williams weave an orchestral version of the song "When You Wish Upon A Star" from the 1940 Disney film of *Pinocchio* into the closing music of the *Special Edition of Close Encounters of The Third Kind* (1980), itself virtually Spielberg's own more emotional reworking of *2001: A Space Odyssey.* So perhaps it was all Kubrick's little joke, taking something back from Spielberg's blockbuster.

It has been noted that Spielberg has directed A.I. in cool, detached style reminiscent of Kubrick, though it contains a theme of childhood lost typical of Spielberg. There have always been lost children in Spielberg movies, from the abducted little boy in Close Encounters of the Third Kind (to say nothing of the boy eaten by the shark in Jaws (1975)) to the loving lost alien in E.T. (1982) to the English boy abroad in Empire of the Sun (1987), Peter Pan (and The Lost Boys) in Hook (1992) and the little girl in red walking through the holocaust in Schindler's List (1994). There are the endangered children in the Jurassic Park (1993 and 1997) films, and the boy in Indiana Jones and The Temple of Doom (1984), all needing protection and adults to care for them. The title A.I. deliberately echoes that of E.T. and the lost robot boy wanting to find his mother clearly parallels the lost alien child wanting to go home.

A.l. is a film in three acts. Once over the disappointment of Spielberg yet again shooting what should be a big film in the narrow screen ratio of 1.85-1, a form totally unsuitable for the epic vistas of visionary sf, the opening act is rather good. We meet the family which will adopt "Mecha" boy David, a marvellous performance by Haley Joe Osment, see David adjust to the family, come to love his human mother, then suffer the trauma of being abandoned in the woods, Hansel and Gretel style. Much of this is very effective and even a robot teddy bear sidekick proves to be a strong character, far removed from the sickly cuteness such a notion implies. One subtle touch, given what happens later, is that David's first appearance is initially shown so extremely out of focus he resembles the alien visitors as they appear from the spaceship at the climax of Close Encounters.

The second act runs for eighty to ninety minutes and is much less successful, largely because plot elements are in sufficiently developed and explained, or are simply absurd. Once in the woods David almost immediately comes across a dumping ground for old robots, where other robots are scavenging for parts. This is most convenient as David has the chance to hook up with Gigolo Joe, a sex robot played well by Jude Law. Other than that presumably he is programmed to do so, we never learn why Joe hurries from having sex for money with one woman after another. We could assume someone owns him, that he is working for either a human "pimp" or corporation. Yet he appears to act independently, so perhaps he needs the money, but for what? It leaves an intriguing character under-written and under-developed. Even his departure from the film is under-stated, though effectively and blackly comic.

It is further convenient in that our mechanical buddies, teddy and other robots are immediately hunted for a Flesh Fair – the hunters use a balloon for no other reason than it gives Spielberg an excuse to visually reference *Close Encounters* again, though on this occasion without purpose. A Flesh Fair is carnival where humans opposed robots go to enjoy the spectacle of "Mecha" being destroyed in inventively macabre ways in a circus arena.

Any argument about whether the presence of robots in human society is a good or bad thing is squashed as Spielberg stacks the deck by making the anti-lobby a pack of howling rednecks. Given that this is supposed to be 140 years in the future, its strange that popular music consists of thrash metal, a form already dated a decade ago. Still, world building isn't A.I.'s strong suite; there is a photo on a shelf in one scene featuring William Hurt's character -David's designer - with an absolutely contemporary looking car. The apartment David's adoptive family inhabit could easily exist anywhere in the western world right now. Later our heroes visit the futuristic version of an internet booth, which is a franchise of "Doctor Know", a patronising, talking database no one would accept for five seconds. The database is fronted by a hyperactive 3-D animation seemingly styled on equal parts the Wizard of Oz, a cartoon Einstein and the Windows Office Assistant. It is as if computer communications have been entirely taken over by a nightmare union of Microsoft and Disney.

All this becomes increasingly tiresome, relieved only by some imaginatively designed shots of Rouge City (New York), which would be impressive if shot wider. The second act climaxes as David finds a range of robot boys identical to himself. We learn David's designer lost his own son, so has a psychologically unconvincing plan to flood the world with replicas of his dead boy, thus providing constant reminders to himself of his grief. No father who loved his dead son would exploit his image in such a way. This sequence leads to David finding a Coney Island replica of the Blue Fairy deep under the flooded remains of New York. It has been speculated Kubrick would have ended the film here, on a note of utter cynical nihilism, the robot boy praying to a plaster statue for eternity. At least the flooded Manhattan we are shown, with the waters haven risen perhaps 100-200 feet, makes far more geographical sense than the mountain-flooding deluge of Waterworld (1995). What is not explained, and makes no sense, is how and why people are still working in the partially flooded towers of Manhattan. We can only presume it is because it looks cool. Though not as cool as when, at the opening of the third act, they are ice-bound. Of course this is where the film really cries out to be shot wide, and ironically Spielberg has not shot in 2.35-1 since the derided but visually breathtaking and thematically similar Hook. The twin towers of the World Trade Center are present and correct. It is to be hoped political correctness, or a desire not to confuse the audience, does not result in their digital deletion for the video and DVD editions. Given Spielberg's Nineteen Eight-Four-like revisions (guns have become walkietalkies) to E.T. for its twentieth anniversary reissue next year one can not be hopeful.

For the final act an appropriately millennial 2000 years have passed, and given that David is soon to be "resurrected" (as was E.T.) more than passing significance can be read into this passage of time; the film is now as far from us in time into the future as we are from The Crucifixion. David is revived, not as many critics have written, by aliens, but by advanced "Mecha". They do unfortunately look somewhat like a version of the aliens from Close Encounters. Just as David searched for his mother, his creators and for the chance to be human, 2000 years from now Mecha archaeologists search for information about their long dead creators.

It has been written in various reviews that this final act spoils the film by opting for typical Spielberg warm sentimentality. This is nonsense. It is a brave, radical decision in mainstream filmmaking to suddenly shift the story two millennia to a time when humanity has died out completely and the world is frozen. There is no sentimentality, only emotion and this final half hour makes the previous disappointing ninety minutes worth sitting through. What unfolds is quiet, genuine science fiction drama without recourse to action, violence or destruction, the film ending in the most calm, valedictory way possible. Spielberg asks the audience to use their imagination, to follow the story in a direction we are used to from many of the best sf novels – a change of perspective onto a higher, alien, transformative scale –

but which is almost entirely unfamiliar to multiplex cinema. This is closer to *Childhood's End* or *Blood Music* than *Close Encounters* or *E.T.*.

I have heard that some performances have been greeted with cat-calls and cynical jeering. In the eight hundred seat cinema in which I saw the film the audience sat transfixed, spellbound through the otherworldly final fifteen minutes. A.l. is a deeply flawed film made valuable by a powerful last act, greatly aided by the most original, quietly majestic and modernist score John Williams has written in many years. Other than owing an inspiration to the minimalism of Philip Glass, Williams's score sounds like nothing either he nor any other film composer has written before. The fusion of classically elegant soundtrack and drama is the finest cinematic achievement this year thus far, certainly resulting in the best science fiction film in several years, probably since the equally flawed but enthralling Dark City (1997). More successful as a fable that as pure sf, A.l. is a film to be seen and argued over, which in the current climate of mindless special effects dominated action fodder makes it easy to over-rate. But then of the large crop of sf and fantasy films unleashed this summer gone none of the others were worth more than passing comment. A.l. must therefore be considered something of a triumph, and it is a sad reflection that this at least half-way intelligent film proved to be among Spielberg's least commercially viable releases. Spielberg though is to be congratulated for getting this distaff follow-up to 2001: A Space Odyssey into the cinemas in 2001. Had Kubrick lived A.l. probably would not have appeared for another decade.

¹ Arthur C. Clarke in an interview with Gary Dalkin, April 2000 http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/tg/feature/-/41275/ref=ed_art_135796_txt_1/202-5524207-7357401

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Travel Writing:

An Intervoiew with Liz Williams by Tanya Brown

Tanya Brown: Liz Williams is the author of several short stories, which have appeared in *Interzone* and elsewhere – online and in print. Her first novel, *The Ghost Sister*, was recently published by Bantam in the US, and has been shortlisted for the Philip K Dick Award. What made you start writing? What were you doing before?

Liz Williams: I was a philosopher for about ten years. I went into academic philosophy, but basically there just aren't that many jobs for philosophers around. I did a whole range of other things, including reading tarot cards and selling flowers in restaurants: the usual boring list of things that writers do when they haven't actually written anything yet, and have to pay the bills. When I was in my mid-twenties I got a proper job, working for a big educational concern in England that recruited students from the central Asian countries - places like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan. That culminated in us going out to live in Kazakhstan for the summer of 1996. The subsequent four years were spent going back and forth between central Asia and this country, recruiting students and trying to persuade people to come to universities in Britain: it was basically educational marketing. Then the Soviet economy collapsed and took most of the central Asian economies with it. I got made redundant, and started writing more or less full time. I got a small part-time job to pay the bills, but now the part-time job has given me up, so I'm a fulltime writer.

TB: What made you decide to become a writer?

LW: I always wanted to write science fiction and fantasy. My mother was a writer: she wrote a series of Gothic horror novels and Gothic romance novels in the 1970s. The impression that I got was that it was perfectly normal for women to sit and write, at the end of the day or at odd hours in the day. When I was eleven, she brought back a copy of Jack Vance's *Planet of Adventure* series from the local library, and that was it, I was lost! I fell completely in love with Jack Vance and everything he wrote, and when I get round to it I'm going to write him a proper fan letter. Partly because of that, and partly because of my wanting to travel – I wanted to travel to places on *this* world, but this world's getting smaller all the time – I wanted to create my own world, so I could travel on the cheap.

TB: You've certainly managed the travel on this world: how have your travels affected what you write?

LW: It's affected it a lot, in the sense of luring me to particular places because I think they're like the planets I've invented. I was very keen to go to central Asia because it's like the image of the world in *The Ghost Sister*, the world Monde d'Isle, that I had from

about fourteen or so. I wanted to go to the Gobi Desert (which I haven't actually been to yet): I wanted to go to the steppes. The region of Kazakhstan in which we were living is a mountainous area, and once you get out of town it's very wild and deserted - that's the sort of place I want to go to. I never set out to be in central Asian marketing, but by a rather bizarre set of coincidences, that's where I got.

Place is very important to me. I grew up having been imbued with this sense of landscape. I think that the land is important, and that places have an intrinsic importance in terms of the effect that they have upon the mythology and legends of a society. That's something that I can't really stop coming out in the writing.

TB: Several of your short stories have a strong sense of place. The Blood Thieves', for example, is set in Iceland: did you actually get to go there?

LW: No. Writing is a bit manipulative, because when I write about something I can take the choice to write about somewhere completely imaginary, or about somewhere I've been – which is fairly straightforward. Or I can write about somewhere that I hope to go to some day, and then turn up on the one *Interzone* Icelandic subscriber's doorstep with a copy of the magazine. "You don't know me, but I've written a story set in Iceland! Want to go out for a drink?" My forthcoming novel, *Empire of Bones*, gave me a reason to go to India, which we did. It's partly that the travel comes first, and partly that it's an excuse.

TB: One of the more interesting settings of a short story is 'Adventures in the Ghost Trade', which was shortlisted for the BSFA Award in 2000. It's a future Singapore, or rather a future franchise of Singapore.

LW: Yes, it's a franchise of Singapore. It's actually Hong Kong, which I do know.

TB: It has a Blade Runner, film noir feel to it.

LW: That's Hong Kong: it just has that anyway. It doesn't really have to try: it's a futuristic, peculiar place. The reason it was described in the story as a Singaporean franchise was because there actually was a plan by the Singaporean government, a couple of years ago, to franchise out the city plan of Singapore to under-developed areas so they could build Singapore in the middle of Africa, for example. This isn't something that I came up with, it's something that they came up with! They ought to be writing science fiction, because the people in charge of Singapore are clearly the horrifying way that the future is going to go. I've never figured out what the franchise consists of. I don't know if it's the whole 'ecosystem', the police force and the rules about not spitting in lifts and the general city plan. I never got as

far as figuring it out, because by that time I was up and running, writing my story.

TB: Singapore Three has a spatial correlation with Hell. It reminds me of that old axiom, 'As above, so below'.

LW: Hell has the same street plan, more or less, and similar buildings. Again, this is not something that I can take credit for: the Chinese version of Hell is unbelievably bureaucratic. You have to fill out forms to get into it. You have to go through an immigration procedure when you die. If you don't have the right forms, you don't get there. You don't get into heaven, either. There is a Ministry of Epidemics, in Chinese mythology. There is a Ministry of Diseases, and a Ministry of War. I think there's a Ministry of Lust, but I haven't quite got to grips with that one yet! It's all bureaucratically based, and the structure is like the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century structure of Chinese bureaucracy. Burning money so that it goes to your relatives, burning little replicas of cars or little replicas of microwaves so that they manifest in Hell, is something that the Chinese do a lot of – because, you know, you don't want them to be without these things. You can marry your dead relatives off. When I was in Hong Kong, I knew somebody whose dead daughter was getting married to the dead son of a neighbour. The families were saying, "OK, we can't actually have them here, but we know they're getting married because we've set it up."

TB: Modern, or future, science coming into contact with ancient myth is another theme you revisit in several different stories. Science and myth don't inevitably clash but they highlight aspects of each other. Are they opposites, or are they complementary?

LW: Ultimately, they're parts of the same thing. Mythology is based on an empirical understanding of the world around you. You screw up, and the volcano erupts. You have a poor idea of causal relationship, so you think you've done it. It happens again – and repeatability is the hallmark of a scientific experiment – so you think this time you've definitely done it. That's in a very primitive state where you don't have technology. You're working with what you see, and the beliefs that you have are drawn out of natural events, and usually a mistaken causal relationship between yourself and those events. It starts to get murkier later on, when you get people like Newton (who saw himself as an alchemist), and Doctor John Dee. I've just been researching Dr. Dee for a third novel: he claimed to have invented flying machines and to have discovered a method of communicating across vast distances by means of fire, which he wouldn't talk about.

In Elizabethan times, the mythological world and the religious world and the scientific world really start to go head-to-head, whereas previously they jogged along on parallel lines, sometimes mixing, sometimes colliding, sometimes working in harmony. I think it's in the Elizabethan period and the Renaissance period that the scientific and the occult worlds really start to mesh, and I think the mesh is where people like me start writing science fantasy. That's what I write: I think it's a label that you don't see very much now, but I do write science fantasy, not science fiction or fantasy.

TB: You don't build your plots around hard science.

LW: I can't bluff the background: my background is in philosophy, and I don't need to bluff that.

TB: Was 'The Unthinkables' the first epistemological thriller that *Interzone* had published?

LW: Almost certainly it wasn't. These ideas are so central to science fiction. People want to know about how people know things, and where people get their knowledge. Alien societies are built on people having different knowledge and a different way of treating knowledge, and a different way of conceptualising it.

TB: That story deals with a caste-based alien society, where the undercaste - like India's Untouchables, but these are the Unthinkables - subvert the dominant caste by coming up with a thought paradox.

LW: it's a world where you can actually, literally, infect people with a meme, not just by the ideas that you give them but also by hormones and viruses. It's the world in *Empire of Bones*, and it's

interesting you mention the Untouchables because that novel is based on the British in India, and the heroine is, an Untouchable.

TB: You've said elsewhere that the world of *The Ghost Sister* has been with you for a very long time. How did it feel to finally write it down? How much has it all changed?

LW: It was like suddenly being a teenager. These characters have been with me since I was about thirteen or fourteen. It was a bit like being a thirteen-year-old again and saying, "Hey! Come and investigate my bedroom! Turn out the drawers!" It was very embarrassing. It's like inviting people into your head: but it's not the fairly rational, compos mentis person that you are now, but the fourteen-year-old, angst-ridden self that we all were. It's very strange having your private teenage hero on the page for people to read and relate to.

The characters haven't changed; they're pretty much as they were. The world certainly hasn't changed a lot, and neither has the geography of the world. And I am going to enthuse with adolescent passion, because the map in the front of the book is the map that I was drawing in my bedroom when I was fourteen. There's hope for teenage geeks everywhere! The plot has changed a lot. I'm very much one for bolting the plot on afterwards, which is an embarrassing confession really, and it probably shows.

TB: If you have the scenario and you have the characters, then maybe the longer you live with them the better you know them. You know that what they do isn't so important, because you know who they are.

LW: You know what they *would* do. In any circumstance, I know what they'd do, and it's usually not the right thing.

TB: According to the cover, "The fate of a planet lies with an outcast woman and a mysterious visitor" – but *The Ghost Sister* is not quite the novel you might expect from that description. The action takes place on a lost colony world, Monde d'Isle: the 'natives', who are descended from the original colonists, are visited by an all-female anthropological mission from Irie St Syre, that colony's source. How much have the Mondhaith changed in the meantime? Are they still human?

LW: They are basically human beings, but they're a long way down the genetic line. They turn their kids out when the kids are very small, to fend for themselves (like the ancient Spartans did, but for much longer than one night) until they're about thirteen. During their childhood they're not actually conscious: they're like little animals. That should tell you where I'm coming from in terms of the maternal instinct! When they hit puberty, consciousness comes upon them and they return, rather like migrating birds, to the place where they were born. They start developing interesting thoughts and civilised customs. They do revert from time to time, and the reversion is to their base nature rather than their civilised nature.

TB: One of the characters says about another, "He's not an animal. At least, not all the time." In a sense, it's a werewolf story.

LW: It's certainly, basically, a werewolf story. They don't turn into animals, but they are animals within. They are what we are, effectively, but it's a sharper distinction. We aren't animals, except when we are. They're much more extreme because that's what science fiction highlights. It brings out certain behavioural aspects and sharpens things so that you can see the light and the shadow.

TB: The anthropologists are absolutely horrified by the Mondhaith treatment of children: "Oh, these poor children! Look, they've been turned out of their homes – what terrible neglect and abuse!" The Mondhaith, meanwhile, are saying, "Yes, we turned them out, but they'll be back eventually." They don't understand the problem. I was reminded of Philip Pullman's comment about children being ignorant little savages.

LW: I do think he has a point! When I was on my way to the station today, a small child made a creditable and serious attempt to shove his sister in front of a bus. That kind of thing gets glossed over as 'oh, they're only playing'. Are they hell! They're more than ignoble little savages, obviously, but that is an element of their

behaviour. Childhood is a violent and disturbing time. It gets sentimentalised in this culture, and over-brutalised in other cultures.

TB: In the language of Monde d'Isle, the word for 'child' translates as 'human-to-be'... You mentioned the maternal instinct, it's not really a feature of their society. This is not a book that upholds stereotypical gender roles.

LW: No. One of the ways that you get rid of stereotypical gender roles, for women, is to take the kids away from them. Then there's no reason to stay home, do the cleaning, and look after the children. I don't mean that this is an excuse for getting out of something else, but that has often been the role in which women are put because they have no choice. In our world they have a choice, because they can choose whether or not to have children. We have adequate contraception in most countries, though not all. On Monde d'Isle they have a choice because the kids are sent out into the wilderness. In a sense they have less of a choice than we do, because they can't choose to bring up their children even if they want to, and some of them do want to.

TB: It's difficult to find maternal characters in any of your writing.

LW: I can't write from the perspective of a mother because I'm not a mother. That's something that I think is the great divide, and I know that people who are parents say that when you have children your entire worldview changes. In effect your consciousness changes. Suddenly your children are the focus. Because I haven't had that, I don't think I can write about it convincingly, so I don't write about it at all.

TB: One of several strong women in the novel is a grandmother who's a quantum anthropologist. Grandmothers seem to crop up in your fiction quite frequently: it reminds me of all those Chinese stories about children and grandparents, where the grandparents are wise and the wisdom seems to have skipped a generation.

LW: Grandmothers are very important. I had both my grandmothers alive at the time when I was growing up: one grandmother lived with us. Grandmothers are important in many cultures, because they're the repositories of what people know: it's the same with grandfathers. The older people in societies tend to get respect, because they know more than the young. They have knowledge of history – I don't think they get enough credit for that – and they have knowledge of change, which a child does not have.

TB: Having an older woman as a major character sidesteps the trap of it becoming just another love story, a planetary romance. Instead, Shu Gho – the grandmother anthropologist – becomes a friend of the primary male character. That must have affected the way the relationships developed in the book.

LW: Yes, it did. I have a lot of friends who are a lot older than myself. I also have a lot of friends who are younger than myself. I don't see that portrayed in a lot of fiction, that you can value somebody for how much experience they've had, and for how much experience you've had in relation to them. The 'grandmother' thing, I think, came originally out of that quote from Ursula le Guin about how it's never Mrs. Brown, the little old lady, who goes off to the alien planet. The strapping young hero does, the mad scientist and his daughter do, but the little old grandmother doesn't. Why can't she go to another planet?

TB: Your 'little old grandmother', Shu, is also a quantum anthropologist. What's a quantum anthropologist?

LW: Quantum mechanics posits that you change what you see. Anthropology is all about observation, looking at cultures and studying them. When you participate in a culture as an anthropologist, you necessarily bring your own preconditions to it. Your relationship to the people that you see is structured by the fact that you're an outside observer. So how far does it have an effect at the social level? How far do you change what you observe, just by observing it? These people, the visitors, don't really interact with the society: they just look at it. What effect does looking have? There's a story coming out in Asimov's called

'Quantum Anthropology', which is set on Monde d'Isle, and it's about two very stroppy young women and an anthropologist, and what they do to him inadvertently, and what he does to them by being an observer.

TB: The women of the Mission follow the Gaian path, a sort of green feminism.

LW: It's bog-standard Gaian goddess-worship. I'm a pagan. I get very hacked off with the kind of "we're here to save the world" mentality. We're screwing up the ecosphere, and anything unfortunate enough to share it with us. But the planet itself goes on. Planets don't care. They irradiate themselves; they blow themselves up at regular intervals. If humans managed to set off every atomic device on this planet, it would be pretty much a blip compared to what the planet has done to itself in its history. The idea that the goddess of the planet is some sort of human figure is comforting for us, but completely wrong with relationship to the world itself.

TB: One of the themes of the novel is the contrast between the terraforming mentality with which the original colonists set out – let's make this world into a nice, safe, weather-controlled place for us to live – and the geoforming– let's make ourselves fit this world. The first viewpoint can be typified by the phrase "the world in harmony with us": the second, by a Mondhaith tale of the first ancestor, who "thought it best to put humans in harmony with the world".

LW: I used to do a lot of amateur archaeology. After one particularly stressful meeting with English Heritage or the National Trust, the site director said, "it's now my job to keep the public away from sharp things". The British Druid Order won't be celebrating at Stonehenge this year because last year somebody fell over: it's dark and it's muddy in the middle of winter. And English Heritage are now terrified of being sued. This is the Gaian mentality: keep 'em away from sharp things. But life is about risk, and about finding your own way to do things. And that often involves danger. And sharp objects.

Terry Pratchett writes somewhere that sin starts when you start treating other people as things. And the Gaians do treat other people as things. They're inconvenient. Their mentality is inconvenient. It doesn't follow the patterns that they've come to believe are the One True Way. And so they've got to change, haven't they?

TB: The Irians arrive and immediately begin to make judgements about what they perceive as a less advanced culture – even though it's more flexible than the society they're used to. That contrast is like two worlds colliding, metaphorically as well as literally – it's like a clash between science fiction and fantasy. Which do you prefer writing?

LW: I have ideas for stories, and I'm not too bothered about what plots they fit into. It can be a problem knowing where to send the stories. Some places are very flexible: Interzone is very forgiving, and Asimov's has actually proved quite forgiving too. I have stories that I don't know where to send, because they're too cross-genre. I send them to slipstream anthologies, but they're not right for that either. Then again, if they want them rewritten, I'll rewrite them.

TB: That must be difficult with something like *The Ghost Sister*, where the scenario and the characters have been with you for so long. There are limits to what you would change, surely.

LW: I don't think I would have made it into a fantasy because I don't think it would have worked. But given enough time, and enough money, I probably could have done it.

TB: In *The Ghost Sister*, you use four different first-person voices. Most of your short stories are first person narratives too. What's so appealing about writing in the first person?

LW: It just comes out that way. It's a cheap narrative trick, as well; it's easier to get people engaged. I notice the first-person ones – and psychologists everywhere will have a field day – tend to be blokes. I tend to write a first-person narrative more easily as a man than I do as a woman. I'm not prepared to spend thousands

of pounds on therapy finding out why. Eleres [the male protagonist] was very easy: Eleres is pretty close to me.

TB: What prompted you to write it from different viewpoints?

LW: I'd written it all as Eleres, and then I decided that I needed to get different perspectives on him. Originally, the anthropologists weren't there at all. They came later, and those bits were written a lot faster than the rest of the book, so I don't know how successful those other voices were.

TB: What's coming up?

LW: What's coming up in April is *Empire of Bones*, which is set in India. The basis is the British in India, but they're alien civil servants, not British civil servants. After that, there are two more novels for Bantam, one of which has just been delivered. That's called *The Poison Master*, and it's about Elizabethans in space with drugs. This is the one in which John Dee appears.

TB: Alchemy in space?

LW: Alchemy and drugs (and Elizabethans), in fact, because alchemy and drugs are related quite heavily, certainly in many societies.

After that there's a novel set in Kazakhstan, about a seven hundred year old hero who doesn't know why he's lived so long, and a failed cosmonaut. That hasn't been written yet, and I don't know when it's coming out.

TB: And what about your travel writing?

LW: I plan to do more of that now that I'm unemployed. I need a way of generating more money, and I like doing it!

TB: You contributed a chapter to the *Rough Guide to Women's Travel*, didn't you?

LW: Yes, the chapter on Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. I know both areas so I want to do more on that. Another project I've been working on is a series of interviews with women in the former Soviet republics. There are interviews with women in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and a bunch of Afghan refugees in Tajikistan – somebody did those last interviews for me, in Russian, so I need to sit down and translate them.

TB: How about more short stories? There was a cluster of stories published in *Interzone*. Do you write in batches?

LW: I sent them to *Interzone* as a batch, which you shouldn't really do. I did apologise for it. I've been sending them single pieces since. I have a Kazakhstani / Uzbekistani one about genetic modification coming up in *Interzone* in January or February: two coming up in *Asimov's*. two coming up in *Realms of Fantasy*. and I think there's one in *The Third Alternative*.

[Audience]: In *The Ghost Sister*, the society depends very heavily on their biology, and the biology very much informs the society. Which came first – the biology or the society?

LW: The biology. I knew the characters had a problem, and when you have a problem the social constraints are going to come out of that. I don't think all our problems are biological, but a lot of them are. This is a bunch of people whose main problem happens to be biological, so their society reflects that.

[Audience]: You said you were influenced early on by Jack Vance. Who else has been an influence, and who do you wish you could write like?

LW: The Poison Master started off being very Vancian, so when that comes out you will notice a few familiar elements. Le Guin I love, Tanith Lee I love: and people like Arthur Machen who was writing at the turn of the century - who weren't, obviously, science fiction writers, but gothic writers. I was very into that whole gothic strand, though I don't try to emulate it. I love Ray Bradbury. There's a trend emerging here of people whose prose is better than their plots. Although their plots are pretty good, I think their real strengths are in their writing. I liked Isaac Asimov when I was growing up; I read all the Clarke and Asimov books. The prose didn't grab me but I thought the plots, the stories, were great. Vance's prose grabbed me because it's so idiosyncratic. I wasn't too keen on some of the 1970s feminist authors. I was too young and intolerant of what was actually going on to take people like Suzy McKee Charnas on board. I'm reading Lois McMaster Bujold at the moment, which is a lot of fun. She's not a great stylist, and I wish she'd do something with her bloody planets: they're terribly bog standard. But I like her plots, and I love her characters.

TB: How about current British writers?

LW: I think a lot of the small press authors are very good, the people who write for *The Third Alternative* and *Visionary Tongue*. I love *Perdido Street Station:* I thought that was a cracking book. Another person who I rate is Graham Joyce – again, because he's a good storyteller, a good stylist, and I like his take on things. He's very cross-genre. There are people outside the mainstream press who I rate enormously highly, and people on the mainstream shelves who I just don't bother with. There's an awful lot of pedestrian stuff out there. I couldn't be bothered to read it if I was ill.

[Audience]: We're sat here in the middle of this great burgeoning of British SF, fantasy and science fiction – but you're only getting published in the United States. Is this by accident or design?

LW: My agent is in the States. I went to her, cap in hand, through an announcement in *Locus*. she's Shawna McCarthy, and she'd moved from her literary agency and was setting up on her own. I sent her the stuff, she took me on, and because she's primarily an American agent she sells to American publishing houses. We can't sell *The Ghost Sister* over here, and we're still trying, though it may be now coming out with Big Engine. It was too slow in pace for most of the British publishers: that's what they said.

[Audience]: What about Russian science fiction?

LW: I love Chinghiz Atmaitov, who is very much a 'sense of place' man, with a bit of science fiction bolted on: he's Kyrgyz, and not very well known over here, but I have seen some of his science fiction in English translation. And Mikhail Zinoniev, who was a philosophy professor at Moscow University until he defected, and he wrote a series of very bitter novels, with some fantasy elements, ("The Glorious Future," "The Yawning Heights") about what it was like to live in Moscow during the 1960s and 1970s. I like his stuff a lot but it's harrowing. Harrowing in a very funny way, though. I'd like to read more science fiction from Russia. They are very into it. You say you're a science fiction writer and they say "Oh yes, I've read Dostoyevsky too". You think, "hang on a minute!" – they don't make any distinction between literary stuff and science fiction. Instant respect for science fiction writers!

James Barclay - Nightchild 🛄

Gollancz, London, 2001, 432pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07215-6 Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Nightchild is the third in James Barclay's Chronicles of the Raven and is set some years after events in previous book, Noonshade. The Raven are in semi-retirement, and only Hirad Coldheart is still struggling with the after-effects of the final defeat of the Wesmen army. Linked to the dragon Sha-Kaan, he is hiding in the hills protecting the three dragons trapped in Balaia when the curtain wall to their own dimension closed. The dragons are deteriorating quickly in their current unsuitable environment and to add to Hirad's problems, bounty-hunters and would-be dragonslayers, having quickly forgotten the dragons' role in saving Balaia, are getting ever more numerous and cunning in their attempts at the ultimate prize – a dragon's head.

Meanwhile, back in the Dordovan College of magic, five year old Lyanna, daughter of Denser and Elienne, is supposedly being taught by the Dordovans to control her magic. Unfortunately, they have an agenda of their own as the 'Power of the Land' has manifested itself in Lyanna – making her potentially the most powerful magic-wielder of the age – which in turn could mean the end of the Colleges of Magic. Elienne, fearful for her daughter, flees with her and goes into hiding. It is up to the Raven to get to them before the Dordovans and the other colleges do. Trouble is, nobody knows where they have gone.

The frightened Lyanna, having had her magic wakened prematurely by the Dordovans, is struggling to learn to control it and this has disastrous effects on the whole of Balaia. Denser, as the only one who feels he can help the child, cajoles the Raven into one last heroic effort.

Once again Barclay presents us with a story of countless twists and turns without ever losing track of what needs to be achieved with the tale. Lots of action, chasing around, alliances for good and evil, and a final solution to the plight of the dragons, to whom Balaia owes its very existence. It's all gripping stuff, and the reader once again is taken on a jaunt with characters readers of Barclay have become very fond of.

I don't know whether this is the last Chronicle of the Raven, but I hope not – it is refreshing to have some fun put back into fantasy. Fans of the Raven will not need persuading to read this, but I highly recommend it anyway.

Carol Berg - Revelation 🛄

Orbit, London, 2001, 485pp, £10.99, ISBN 1-84149-076-8 Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Having read and enjoyed Berg's debut novel *Transformation* (V217), I was quite looking forward to this second book in the Rai-Kirah series.

Having returned to Ezzaria following the defeat of the Ria-Kirah demons that sought to control the Derzhi Empire through Aleksander, Seyonne has settled back into the routine of fighting demons on the spiritual plane. He is fighting more than ever before because the war with the Empire has depleted the number of trained Wardens and Aifes. Although married to the Queen of Ezzaria who is also an Aife (controller of the gates between this world and the demon world), Seyonne is paired with a young Aife named Fiona. Never a happy relationship, Seyonne struggles to prove he has not been tainted by his 16 years of captivity with the Derzhi.

The Queen is pregnant, and life seems good for Seyonne, until, that is, the Queen is mysteriously no longer pregnant. If this wasn't bad enough, nobody else seems to notice or accept that the Queen was ever pregnant. Seyonne discovers that his child, a

boy, was born demon-possessed, and will never be acknowledged by the Ezzarians. The child is taken away and handed over to others outside Ezzaria -though what happens to them is not known or cared about by Ezzarians.

It is during this time of great stress that Seyonne makes an apparently grave and unforgivable mistake during a demon battle. He decides not to kill the demon he is fighting, leaving the person he is supposed to be saving possessed. Mistakes can be made of course, but this was a deliberate action by Seyonne, and considered an inexcusable error of judgement. Following a trial, Seyonne is stripped of his Warden's duties and banned from ever performing them again. Feeling wronged, and effectively unable to pursue his calling, he sets off to try and find out the truth about his son. Little does he know that this journey will leave him in the hands of the demons he is sworn to defeat.

As Seyonne starts to unravel the truth, he is more and more convinced that Ezzarian history has been tampered with and their belief-system skewed. Unravelling it all will test Seyonne's faith to the limits, and also that of Prince Aleksander and Seyonne's now ex-Aife, Fiona.

Berg has once again cast Seyonne as the misunderstood hero, but this time has really upped the stakes. There are long sections of this book that move very slowly, and indeed, are quite depressing -after all, there is only so much suffering a reader can take, and Seyonne's, once again, is prolonged and quite brutal. There is an intriguing plot and it does keep you turning the pages, but this is not a fun book, and should not be read in little fits and bursts.

Revelation is a fine sequel, but is much darker than Berg's debut novel. Stick with it, though, and it will reward you.

Ray Bradbury - From the Dust Returned

Earthlight, London, 2001, 204pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-7432-0759-9 Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Although billed as "his new novel" this is very much a collection of vignettes and short pieces, some of which were published as early as 1946. The underlying structure is the history of the Elliott family, who in their House in Illinois and with their dark vampiric talents fuse Central European gothickry with small-town American life. As with much of Bradbury, this is a less a novel than a series of short stories with linking text, a mosaic which builds up – if it is successful – to a greater whole.

Bradbury, as is well-known, is the "stylist" of fantasy and science fiction, and his heavily-mannered, faux-poetic style, which always reminds me of Baudelaire in a log cabin somewhere in the Mid-West, is by no means to everyone's taste. In stories like 'The Wandering Witch' the effect is created less by the style than the story itself, in which Cecy takes over the body of a young girl, Ann, who left to herself would not go to the dance with Tom, but is forced into accepting by Cecy, who "wants to be in love". Underlying this strange tale of teenage romance and sentimentality is a peculiar darkness, for it is, of course a kind of rape which happens. We meet Tom again, later on, in a scene reminiscent of Walter de la Mare. There's longing in 'Homecoming' in which Timothy regrets that his lack of the arcane powers of the Family will condemn him to a life of mundane mortality, and black humour in 'West of October' where four rumbustious and randy cousins find themselves bodiless and have to take up residence in Grandpere.

Behind it all is the 'October Family' itself, balanced between ephemerality and eternity, created from the languages which the creators of the first creators of the first hinges heard in their squeaking, the patterns which the observers of the first smoke saw swirling about them. In traditional folk-tale the Fairies flee to the West. Bradbury's nostalgically- macabre creations do likewise, to live on in the dusty corners of family memories. But the world is changing and even this lair is insecure in the face of modernity.

Is it successful? Well, there seems to be a difference in tone between some of the earlier-composed stories (which in their sometimes-humorous collision of the supernatural and the everyday are the sources for the Addams Family) and the linking vignettes, prose-poems whose subject is the melancholy evanescence of story or dream. There are several stories, here, to be read between the lines of this one. One is the story as Bradbury presents it; the tale of the timeless family, "children of the earth and inheritors of Eternity". The other, as Bradbury is constantly reminding us, is the story of the European immigrants who have come to this new land, leaving (as they thought) behind the Old Stories and the long past for a new future. Perhaps it is only the storytellers and archivists who will pass on the knowledge of what remains in the shadows. Perhaps we have found our own shadows, and ancestral dreamings are no longer relevant. Reading From the Dust Returned, I found a kind of unease about it. Its language is flowery, but the flowers are dark, with strange scents. The folksy elements belie the existence of real folk. It is clearly less of a novel than a series of meditative, weird fantasies with a story-structure linking them together, yet it leads to a clearly-defined, but ambiguous, conclusion. It's not, quite (I suspect) the novel Bradbury would have written fifty years ago, but confirms him as a writer who has ploughed his own furrow of the macabre.

Suzy McKee Charnas - *The Furies*

Tor Orb, New York, 2001 (1994), 383pages, \$14.95 ISBN 0-312-86606-2

Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

Alldera Messenger has returned to the Holdfast she left over fifteen years ago on her search to find the Free Fems of legend. She returns not as the slave she was, but now as a Free Fem, leader of an army set on wrenching the Holdfast away from the men who control it. She returns as Alldera Conqueror.

The Furies is the third novel in Suzy McKee Charnas' Holdfast Chronicles and it picks up the story with the return to the Holdfast of the Free Fems who have spent years living with the Riding Women of the plains, learning to live a free life, ride horses and fight their own battles. Now they're back in the land of their foredams and they're ready to claim that land as their own.

Their first encounter with a man in over a decade is brutal and telling. The man is already dead, crucified, but it doesn't stop the fems from tearing his body apart with their spears and venting their pent-up fury against all men on his body. This is just the beginning. The first live men they find in the mines around Troi are treated in much the same way as the corpse. The future for any kind of relationship between the men and fems of the Holdfast looks very bleak.

There is one man, however, who has a link to Alldera. His name is Ekyar Bek, the Endtendent, the Man who Killed his Father. Many years ago, Alldera was sent on a journey with Bek and his friend D'Layo (told in *Walk to the End of the World*). Bek and Alldera spent a lot of time in each others company and an understanding of some kind occurred between them. When Bek leaves the City to find Alldera there is a point during their first meeting where their relationship could have taken a different turn. However, the presence of Daya Storyteller and Setteo the cutboy means Alldera is reminded of where and when she is, and she immediately orders Bek to join the other men in captivity in the pits.

But Bek is instrumental in Alldera's story and his presence is pivotal. The brutality against the men by the fems is as a result of hundreds of years of brutality by men against fems. *The Furies* demonstrates how the pent-up frustration of the fems almost results in the death of all men – and with them the death of their

hope to bear children. Alldera is a restraining force on her people and Bek is a restraining force (albeit silently) on Alldera.

The Furies, like Walk to the End of the World before it, is a difficult book to read. It is a study on what happens when the fabric of the relationship between men and women comes apart, and a beginning on how to mend that fabric. A great follow up to the two earlier novels (Walk To the End.. and Motherlines) and greatly recommended.

Cecilia Dart-Thornton - The Ill-Made Mute 🛄

Macmillan, London, 2001, 437pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-333-90753-1 (tpb £9.99 ISBN 0-333-90754-X)

Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

A first novel, and first volume of a trilogy, The Bitterbynde. The archaic flavour of that spelling signals that this might be a work inheriting the traditional trimmings of fantasy; indeed, a publicity blurb cites Andre Norton enthusiastically ranking it along with the The Fellowship of the Ring. It has a map of 'The Known Countries of Erith', a glossary of indigenous terms, and a pronunciation guide. Runes and charms are to be found in it. Some of this must sound critically negative — just another derivative look-alike in three hefty volumes. But no: there is something fresh and distinctive here. The distinctiveness rests on three virtues: the author's undoubted talent for story-telling; her industry in researching dusty tomes of (mainly) North British legend and folklore, plus an imaginative ingenuity in utilising the results; and, notably, a flair for evoking places and landscapes. To give one instance, here is the character Sianadh remembering his home country: "The gaunt cliffs along the west coast of Finvarna be the westernmost edge of the Known Lands. There the gulls scream and crowd like snow on the heights. Beyond them, thundering, the terrible ocean stretches out darkly westward and northward to where the Ringstorm rages."

The narrative traverses Erith's seas and Known Lands in following a quest for the healing of Imrhien, its hero/heroine. Imrhien starts as a mute and facially deformed adolescent boy but later transforms to an identically afflicted girl of mysterious origin. As a scullion in one of the high towers which act as docks for the schooner-like, atmosphere-riding windships, she (he at the time) endures a brutal Gormenghastian environment and regime, from which he escapes by stowing away on a windship. After that, through forest, by lake and river, in village and city, befriended or abused, her adventures continue, two factors constantly shaping them - her appearance and her knowledge of what others crave. That knowledge, which she has come by, is the location of treasure. Her appearance is described by one of her persecutors as: "A form a man could worship and a face from out of the worst nightmares." She can speak only by handsign, but, through hopes and disappointments, she pursues her search for a cure along paths that ultimately direct her to the powerful 'carlin', or witch, Maeve One-Eye.

Either a flaw, or imaginative irrelation, is the mixing of the realistic and the fabulous: mining involves a technology like to tin mining, but the miners are inches tall; sail-trimming is nautically exact, but the sails are of aerial windships. Me, I enjoyed these disjunctions and the book generally. It has made the top ten in Australia where the author lives.

Stephen Dedman - Shadows Bite

Tor, New York, 2001, 334pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-312-87783-8 Reviewed by Tanya Brown

Shadows Bite, the sequel to Dedman's 1999 novel The Art of Arrow Cutting, is a novel that tries to fuse dark fantasy and Oriental myth – not altogether successfully. It's an action-packed tale of Hollywood monsters, old-school nosferatu in the sewers and a form of vampirism that is transmitted in an almost homeopathic fashion. Throw in black (and white) magic, an assassin and the daughter of a powerful Yakuza boss, and stir

vigorously until overload is achieved.

Photographer Michelangelo Magistrale – Mage to his friends and relations – is a charismatic young man who happens to be gifted with a broad array of superhero powers, most intriguing of which is an ability to heal himself and others simply by visualising the injury healing. Following the events of *The Art of Arrow Cutting* – in which he encountered his friend and ally, Takumo, and came into his powers – Mage is working at a clinic in Bangkok. He's an idealistic young man whose powers enable him to right some of the wrongs he sees all around him – as well as engaging in simple cosmetic surgery for the poor.

Meanwhile, back in Los Angeles, Takumo finds himself opposing a genuine, old-fashioned black magician. Solomon Tudor habitually wears a black kaftan, and relies on a bookful of demonic pacts to give him a guaranteed century of life. He cossets his son Malachi, now a sullen twenty-something, as insurance in case the demons ever come calling for his blood: that of his firstborn son should prove acceptable in lieu of his own.

Tudor's hat, were he to wear one, would be unequivocally black. He's a two-dimensional villain, as are assassin Krieg and Yakuza boss Tamenaga. Mage and Takumo, though both potentially interesting characters, lack depth. Dedman's prose is unexceptional, with occasional lapses of logic and grammar that should have been edited out before publication. (When a character, ablaze, teleports to the moon, it's the vacuum that extinguishes the flames: the ambient temperature has nothing to do with it). Pacy, action-packed scenes – several of which echo popular vampire films such as *Near Dark* – propel the morally simplistic plot and leave little time for reader or characters to reflect.

Shadows Bite would work better as a graphic novel – to such an extent that I wonder if that's how it was originally conceived. It's easy to imagine Tudor's trip to low Earth orbit as a full-page spread, or 6-foot black female lawyer Kelly's battle with a Goth vampire as a motion-blurred sequence of drawings. Perhaps that's tribute to the visual qualities of Dedman's writing: perhaps it's inherent in the black-and-white ethical spectrum of Shadows Bite.

Stephen Donaldson - *The Man Who Fought Alone*Tor Forge, New York, 2001, 463pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-765-30202-0 **Stephen Donaldson -** *Reed Stephens Novels*Orion, London, 2001, 698pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-75284-960-9
Reviewed By Iain Emsley

Although he is well-known for his Fantasy writing, Stephen Donaldson wrote a series of crime novels under the Reed Stephens pseudonym. Orion has republished them in an omnibus as the fourth novel is published under his own name by Tor.

In the *Reed Stephens Novels*, we are introduced to investigators Mick 'Brew' Axbrewder and Ginny Fistoulari, the main denizens of Stephen Donaldson's crime universe. An alcoholic, Brew lost his licence after killing his brother, and lives half of his life in Puerto del Sol, the Mexican part of town, where he can be found by Ginny Fistoulari, his friend, to help in her investigations. As he begins to work again, Brew is forced to dry out but makes powerful enemies forcing both of them to leave for Carner city.

During Man Who Fought Alone, Brew takes on the security for a martial arts tournament, trying to protect a set of precious artefacts that describe the Wing Chun style. As the job continues he becomes aware of the rivalries between the styles and personalities after the death of security guard there. However he accepts a continuation of the job at a newly built martial arts centre. When the chops are stolen and the leader of Wing Chin school is murdered, Brew is thrown into the seedier side of the martial arts culture.

As we travel through various sub-genres of crime, Donaldson begins to sideline this as a vehicle for a man who is self-

destructive. After Ginny loses her hand, Brew is forced to change his lifestyle and to accept that which he is. Donaldson's personal belief in martial arts and the underlying philosophy defines Brew's path and this opens *The Man Who Fought Alone* into a two strand book where the reader is side-tracked into the crime and away from the reconstructive plot. In the omnibus edition, Brew tries to link himself to the poor part of town, externalising his own problems, but after his enforced exile, he focuses upon himself thus opening the book up as lighter, freer flowing work.

Donaldson's writing becomes less forced as the series progresses and less overwritten. Certainly the first novels are the work of somebody experimenting with a chosen genre, finding his own voice away from the giants of noir crime fiction, such as Walter Moseley or James Ellroy. *The Man who Fought Alone* displays a freedom that is lacking earlier on as he works with a subject close to his own heart.

Certainly lighter in intention and style, the crime novels create an interesting aside to the fantasy novels. However, these might well be for completists rather than new readers to his work.

Candas Jane Dorsey – *A Paradigm Of Earth* Tor, New York, 2001, 366pp, \$26.95 ISBN 0-312-87796-X Reviewed by Sue Thomason

In the near future, the aliens arrive. The beings they send down to Earth look almost human (but without defined sexual characteristics, and blue). Their assignment is to learn from humans, and after delivering a message to this effect, their minds all blank. Effectively they become newborns in adult bodies, to be raised by humans, to be raised as human. It's thought they will be "taken back" after three to five years, presumably so that their knowledge and experience can be used or processed in some way.

Morgan is an honest, perceptive woman living in near-future, neoconservative Canada. She works as an advocate and teacher with profoundly handicapped people. Within a short space of time, both her parents die and she splits up with her long-term lover. She is not happy. As she's been left a big old house and notenough money, she decides to run the house as an intentional community (mostly of artists, as it turns out), using the rent for house maintenance. She applies for a new job; a child care job working with disadvantaged adult clients, teaching certificate required. Turns out the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service are looking for an alien-teacher. Morgan gets hired.

So this isn't a book about what it means to be an alien. It's a book about what it means to be human. It's also a book about (some of) the things that cause a person to be treated as not-quite-human-like-the-rest-of-us, almost an alien in fact; sexual orientation, political affiliation, physical disability... Morgan's house is full of people who don't quite fit the norms of her society. And pretty soon, the alien runs away from the institution where it's been kept and ends up on Morgan's doorstep...

The security service doesn't like this. Morgan doesn't like the security service. But the man in charge of this particular operation is good at his job – very good at his job – partly because he's a man of integrity, who respects the people he's supposed to be protecting, another honest empath. Lots of interesting (and heated) discussion about individual liberty vs. collective responsibility. The alien starts experimenting with a wider range of adult human behaviours... doing something dangerous. Doing something Wrong. Dreaming. Love...

In many ways, it's a wonderful book; deeply thought, deeply felt, beautifully and sensitively written, stuffed with fascinating ideas, intelligent discussions, and wonderful perceptions. I enjoyed reading it very very much. It stimulated and engaged and moved me, it made me think, it enlarged my awareness – I found it a consciousness-raising book, and I love that.

But it's not a perfect book. These are the things that seemed to

me to be flaws. On several occasions, Blue the alien does something "magic". Okay, yeah yeah it's superior inexplicable (and unexplained) alien technology *really*, but in each case I didn't feel the actual "magic" was crucial to the plot, and I'd rather not have had it – for me it jarred.

At one point, Blue offers to "correct the genetic defect" that has caused a woman to become wheelchair-bound. She refuses, and later maintains that this offer of a "miracle cure" would in fact make no difference to her life – her legs are now twisted, weakened, she could never walk "normally"... Nobody points out the big difference that "correcting a genetic defect" might make to a woman of childbearing age, even if it made no difference to her physical state and abilities – the (chance? certainty?) of bearing healthy, unaffected children.

Finally, late in the book the story shoots itself in the foot when despairing Blue, soon to be "recalled" (and maybe killed/deprogrammed, who knows?), says that the aliens' action is bound to end in failure, that Blue's accumulated experience will be incomprehensible to them: "They wanted a Rosetta Stone, but you can't make a Rosetta Stone if you only know one language." Morgan agrees, and they sit and cry for a bit. And I wanted to kick them, because right at the beginning before being mindwiped Blue has enough English to deliver a comprehensible message. Therefore we and the aliens do not have mutually incompatible language/communication/comprehension systems; quite the reverse in fact as the aliens have already successfully communicated to us. Okay emotional structures may be different, many other things may be different, but if Me and You can already communicate, in however fractured and cumbersome a way, there is the possibility of us eventually reaching a useful, workable level of understanding.

But apart from that, it's a wonderful book.

John M Ford - *The Last Hot Time* **Tor Books, New York, 2001, 205pp, \$12.95 ISBN 0-312-87578-9 Reviewed by Avril A Brown**

Tiring of his rural backwater home, Danny Holman is on his way to Chicago. En route, he uses his paramedic skills to save the life of a woman injured in a drive-by shooting. The woman's patron is a big-shot in the elven underworld known as The Levee, and Danny's good deed earns him Mr Patrise's favour. The pay-off for this favour is more than Danny could reasonably have expected or perhaps wanted. Mr Patrise gives him not only a job, but a home and a new identity.

Mr Patrise is caught up in a gang war of the worst sort. Elfland has returned to the mortal realm after centuries, bringing with it all its traditional glamours and powers. However, the supernatural beings that inhabit this world are neither twee fairies nor the noble warriors of traditional fantasy. Instead, these elves have adopted a gangster façade that encompasses big guns, fast cars and wild magic, and the newly-named Doc Hallows uses a mixture of his medical training and magical remedies to patch up the assorted elven combatants. Along the way, he gains not only their respect, but also an insight into his own powers.

This is a book full of strange things, most of which go unidentified and unexplained. It qualifies as urban fantasy, but only just. The Levee is a city, but it's a city out of time. Ford has imagined a cityscape skewed at a 90 degree angle to anything we know, managing to mix the modern-day with Al Capone speakeasies and wild elves with power and scant regard for mankind. The story bowls you along at a fair old pace, and it's fair to say that Ford has a real page-turner here, but unfortunately, the lack of exposition means that something indefinable is missing from the book. The author expects his reader to fill in or guess at a lot of the blanks. This reader enjoyed the experience, others may find it ultimately frustrating.

Terry Goodkind - Debt of Bones

Gollancz, London, 2001, 119p, £12.99 ISBN 0-575-07256-3 Reviewed by lain Emsley

Debt of Bones was originally published in the Legends collection and this newer version fleshes the novella out. In the introduction, Goodkind indicates that he wanted to use this story to further define the original boundaries of the Sword of Truth series. He comments that he was trying to lift the veil on past events and to explore the reaction of the protagonists. This novella certainly offers him the chance to flesh out these events and to lay a challenge to the reader –that the reader will agree with the choices made though the moral problem set and the strong characterisation.

When Abby comes to the city seeking help from Zedd, the Prime Wizard, she brings to fruition the Debt of Bones by which he is bound to her family. Although they are caught in a war against Panis Rahl, she calls upon Zedd to help her save her village. However, he realises that their mission has been undermined by spies and sets up an elaborate trick that forces Abby to make a drastic choice.

The characters are indeed strong and face up to their choices. Goodkind uses set pieces to develop his characters' various conflicts and personality growths, whilst also using minor characters to drop hints around the novella. The eponymous debt of bones provides a telling balancing point for the central relationship as they negotiate the central reciprocal demands it places upon them and how they settle the issues. Out of this simple agreement comes an avalanche of balances that must be struck to maintain he status quo and it is intriguing to watch these develop as the action unfolds.

However, Goodkind fails to deliver a satisfying result because the conclusion has already determined the events, and those who have read *Wizard's First Rule* will know this. He tries to allow his characters to opine, to argue and to become more than ciphers but delivers a fantasy in which the outcome is never in any doubt as there is little real counter argument raised.

Adding little to the world, *Debt of Bones* ultimately does not fully complete its task of allowing the reader to judge whether the action was justified. This novella is very much for those who are already fans rather than newcomers to the series.

Simon Green - Drinking Midnight Wine 🛄

Gollancz, London, 2001, 265 pages, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07246-6 Reviewed by: Stephen Deas

"There is a world beyond the world." So starts *Drinking Midnight Wine*, and after the first few pages I'm ready to be hooked. Nice twists of sarcasm, perky narrative, hints of darker undercurrents and all is looking well. Or not so well for Bradford-on-Avon, quiet English country town and unwitting magical nexus, and particularly not so well for Toby Dexter, even more unwitting and unintentional hero who accidentally follows the mystery woman of his dreams through a door that shouldn't exist and ends up in a parallel world full of magic, gods and demons.

Parallel worlds seem to have been cropping up like weeds these last few years. Where *Drinking Midnight Wine* differs is that it doesn't pick on one mythology to prop itself up, but uses a gungho array of semi-mythic and purely fictional characters and creatures cobbled together largely, one feels, because they seemed like a good idea at the time. In fact, story-craft is regularly sacrificed for a neat idea or a flashy one-liner.

Forget finely crafted alternative realities, forget the plot (evil tries to take over the world, reluctant hero has to stop it, aided by assorted super-beings and largely achieved by walking into the devil's living room and shouting a lot) – this book lives or dies on its wit and originality.

Unfortunately, while both are present, they don't seem to get along too well. Here and there, gems of imagination glitter, tantalising, almost within reach; powers as old and powerful as the Earth itself arrive, the stage is set, everything is ready, and

then they open their mouths and wreck the atmosphere in an instant flash of blazing wit. One wise-cracking, street-smart elder god I can cope with, but with half the town running around like this, it turns into a bizarre hybrid of H.P. Lovecraft and the Brady Bunch. Which was weird enough to keep me interested but at the same time with a frustrating feeling of something much brighter and more vivid lurking behind the haze of dialogue.

Overall impression: someone trying to write like Tom Holt, and doing quite a good job of it. Whether this is a good thing is another matter.

Ray Hammond - Emergence

Pan, London, 2002, 597pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-330-48595-4 Reviewed by Mark Greener

In the near future, high-tech tycoon Thomas Tye is master of a world-spanning network of fibre optics and communication satellites. This, and his numerous other high-tech investments, made Tye Corporation so powerful that its founder is "subject to no laws other than his own".

While working on Tye's un-authorised biography, writer Haley Voss meets Jack Hendriksen, Tye Corporation's head of security. Hendriksen confirms her suspicions that something is rotten in the heart of Tye-land. Hendriksen is already plagued by doubts about Tye's business methods, the way he destroys business and lives. Meanwhile, Tye is readying a series of satellites allowing him "to sell sunshine ... to the highest bidders". But it is increasingly clear that the Tye corporation and, as a result, the world teeters on the brink of economic collapse...

To be honest, I thought *Emergence* was awful. But then, I'm not really the ideal reader to review technothrillers. I just about managed to finish *Jurassic Park* and *Coma*. No doubt, my dislike of them places me in a minority. They seem to be bestsellers, at least judging by the metres of shelf space they occupy. And to be fair, *Emergence* seems neither markedly better nor significantly worse than *JP* or *Coma*. So, if you like these, you might like *Emergence*. But, for me, it failed on every level.

Hammond is a respected science journalist. However, *Emergence* isn't especially well written. There's purple prose from the first page - literally: "By late evening azure becomes amethyst, eventually giving way to an ecclesiastical indigo". It's riddled with clichés: hairs stand up on the backs of necks; people sit like stones; "Haley was incandescent with rage" and so on.

The characterisation is thin, despite layer after layer of detail. Tye, the world's first dollar trillionaire, is offspring of a chronic alcoholic father and suicidal mother. He's the "first entrepreneur to gain genuine superstar status". So, of course, he had "good looks, boyish charm" and a "causal style". Then there's Calypso, an ex-Miss World, born in "grinding poverty" who made good on her "breathlessly blurted" catwalk ambition to become a doctor. However, despite the wealth of detail about each character, I never felt I was getting inside the characters' psychology. They remained wooden.

The story itself is reasonable and the ending is well done — which is why, if you enjoy technothrillers, you might like *Emergence*. However, for me the plot was spun out to inordinate length. By page 120, I was bored. And there were still 477 pages to go. The data dumps further slow the interminable, sluggish story. One, for example, – describing an island Tye owns – runs to more than six close typed pages. Finally, despite it's high-tech trimmings, *Emergence* failed to engender even a sent of a sense of wonder about the science or technology. That's why, for me, *Emergence* isn't really sf and doesn't really even belong in the pages of *Vector*.

The Harvard Lampoon - Bored Of The Rings

Gollancz, London, 2001, 228pp, £6.99, ISBN 0-575-07362-4 Reviewed by Sue Thomason The resurgence of interest in Middle-Earth caused by the new film of Lord Of The Rings (Part 1) makes this a timely reissue. Bored Of The Rings was first published in 1969, and actually written while its authors, Henry N. Beard and Douglas C. Kenney, were still in college. Although it's a close, and in places very witty, parody of Tolkien's work, its humour is marred for me firstly by its insistently American references (e.g. I guess, from context, that Frito the hero bears the trade name of some kind of American junk food, but this is never made explicit), and secondly by its insistently lavatorial nature (if you're the kind of person for whom the name "Dildo Bugger" raises a snigger every time you meet it, which is frequently, then you'll probably find the book terrific fun).

On the other hand, I enjoyed the moment when the intrepid band of travellers are menaced by a lake-dwelling monster at the gate to the Black Pit...

"Aiyee!" shouted Legolam. "A Thesaurus!"
"Maim!" roared the monster. "Mutilate, mangle, crush. See HARM."

There's a map. There are poems. There are songs in Elvish (Elveranto, that is), and there are specific pisstakes of all the bits of LOTR that anyone remembers afterwards. If you are fifteen years old and have just read LOTR for the first time, you'll probably wet yourself laughing over this. If not, then maybe not. Some things are only funny once.

Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson - *Prelude to Dune: House Corrino*

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2001, 590pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-340-75157-7

Reviewed by Andrew A. Adams

This is the final book of the prequel trilogy co-written by Herbert's son, with the assistance of Anderson, who is an experienced writer in other people's universes. Originally titled *The Spice War*, this has been renamed *House Corrino* to give similarity of titles between all three books (the previous two being *House Atreides* and *House Harkonnen*). Being the third of a closely tied trilogy there is little point in reading this book without first reading the other two. The whole trilogy may be read before reading the original Dune series, but that wouldn't be my recommended order.

The book features few surprises in plot development for those who know the situation at the start of *Dune*. Given that they must leave things in a specific state to coincide with that book, these authors do a passable job with the plot-line. Things cohere reasonably well in terms of events, characters, etc. with what we know of the history from the pages of Dune et seq. The portrayal of character is, perhaps, less convincing. The Bene Gesserit in particular are not quite what one would expect. I get the feeling that Herbert Jr. has not really understood the prime motivations of the Bene Gesserit. Although quite mysterious in the early books of the original sequence, and a much-changed organisation by the time of Heretics of Dune, in which they take the leading role, their portrayal in the whole trilogy and in particular in *House Corrino* is quite jarring. This is a pity given the skill with which various other players (both individuals and factions) are portrayed with greater depth than they are given in the originals, while staying true to that broad brush description.

The other thing that strikes one about the entire prelude is the range of viewpoints presented. This is much wider than in Herbert Sr's work and again slightly spoils the mood. The attempts to include snippets of fictional books as chapter headings gets progressively weaker through the trilogy too. Brian is not the philosopher his father was.

Overall, I think these are not the books that Frank Herbert would have written had he lived on, even had he decided to fill in the back story of *Dune*.

Given the existence of his notes for the seventh and final Dune book, I am hoping that the planned conclusion to the saga is truer to his vision. Not a bad trilogy on the whole. Like Christopher Tolkien's reconstructions of his father's notes, however, it's not quite a case of "like father like son". Amusing and enjoyable to read, but without the depth of Herbert Sr., this final instalment lives up to the expectations from the first two.

MacKinlay Kantor – If the South had Won the Civil War
Tor Forge, New York, 2001, 127pp, \$19.95 ISBN 0-312-86553-8
Ed Gorman (ed.) – The Blue and the Gray Undercover
Tor Forge, New York, 2001, 304pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-87487-4
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

In 1959 MacKinlay Kantor was approached by Look magazine to write a piece for the centenary of the start of the Civil War. What would it have been like if the South had won? they asked him. Kantor hesitated, he had already written two classic novels about the Civil War, Long Remember (1934) and Andersonville which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1956, and did not want to return to the subject. But the question intrigued him, and eventually he wrote the story that took up the majority of the November 1960 issue of Look. If the South had Won the Civil War was published as a book shortly afterwards, and immediately recognised as a classic of alternate history. Now, after too many years out of print, it has been republished, complete with Kantor's essay, 'An Historical Inversion', illustrations by Dan Nance, and a rather too-short introduction by Harry Turtledove. Even with all that and set in rather large type, the book only amounts to 127 pages, but those pages are packed with enough detail to satisfy anyone as to why this is such a star in the alternate history firmament.

I suspect that Kantor, a highly respected mainstream novelist with a taste for history, would not have been familiar with much in the way of alternate history, but he may well have known Winston Churchill's curious essay-story 'If Lee had not Won at Gettysburg'. Certainly that is the model that Kantor's piece follows. This is not a story in the conventional sense of following characters and discovering their world. It is, rather, a brief history lesson that begins with Ulysses S. Grant being thrown from his horse and killed not long after embarking on his campaign to capture Vicksburg. (Grant was indeed thrown from his horse, but in New Orleans about a month after the fall of Vicksburg and suffered nothing more than a broken leg.) By right of seniority, Grant's command descended not to Sherman or McPherson who merited it, but to the incompetent political general McClernand, who did not. Grant's daring plan fails. Kantor is practically unique in choosing events in the Western theatre as the starting point for his alternate history, but he backs this up with changes in the East where, at Gettysburg, Lee writes an uncharacteristically forthright order which ensures that Culp's Hill is actually captured by the Confederates at the end of the first day's fighting. Thus Meade is not able to anchor his line, and the Union suffers a devastating defeat.

From this point on, Kantor takes us briskly through the history of divided America, and as in any alternate history much of the fun comes from seeing what changes and what doesn't. Lincoln is still assassinated, the slaves are emancipated under Confederate President Lee (as they were in Turtledove's *The Guns of the South*), the Cuban war occurs much as it did in reality. America does not lose its international standing (as Churchill imagined) nor does either section suffer economic collapse (as Ward Moore suggested in *Bring the Jubilee*), the First World War sees both Americas enter on the same side (unlike Turtledove's *American Front*). In fact, it soon becomes clear that North and South are running on converging tracks, and *If the South had Won the Civil War* concludes with their inevitable reunion.

If Kantor's hesitation before taking on the project is understandable, so is his eventual agreement. The prospect of a divided Union has had a powerful effect on the American imagination, and stories of the war continue to be written at an extraordinary rate. The most recent example is Ed Gorman's anthology of stories about spying during the war, which brings together the usual 'B' list of genre writers, crime writers like Brendan DuBois, Edward Hoch and Loren Estleman, science fiction and fantasy writers like Kristine Katherine Rusch, Ray Vukcevich, Jane Lindskold. None of the stories are in the least fantastic, some aren't in the least interesting, and most are predictable. Estleman's 'South Georgia Crossing' is curiously reminiscent of one of Ambrose Bierce's Civil War stories without the sense of actuality that Bierce gave it. Generally the best stories are those which step outside the familiar incidents of the war, Rusch's 'The Dead Line' which shifts the scene between Andersonville and 1911, Vukcevich's 'The Swan' which somehow incorporates the invention of roller skating, and Marie Jakober's 'Slither' set in a Confederate prison and not at all to do with espionage.

Ursula Le Guin - The Telling 🛄

Gollancz, London, 2001, 264pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-077258-X Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

Authority on the planet Aka is the Corporation, a world-wide political system that has obvious parallels with the old totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. Everyone and everything is subservient to the needs of the state, for, as the slogans inform them, the producer-consumers of Aka march to the stars, science is all, and the reactionary and the seditious must be reported and rooted out. Past history is denied, religion is banned, the only literature permitted is the information and educational material produced by the World Ministry of Information and the Central Ministry of Poetry and Art - any ancient books discovered are destroyed. To this world of uniform-wearing bureaucrats comes the Terran, Sutty Dass. Having been born at a time when Earth was ruled by the Unists, a fanatical theocratic regime, and seen this belief system dismantled, though not before its adherents have killed her partner, Sutty is now a representative of the worlds of the Ekumen whose superior science and technology is prized by the Akans. Unexpectedly, for permission has previously been refused, Sutty is permitted to visit an area away from the main cities where the Ekumenical Envoy hopes she will find the last surviving practitioners of Aka's old culture and religion. Travelling to the mountains, Sutty does indeed find people still following the old, forbidden ways, while she herself is observed by a Monitor, an official of the Corporation, who warns her that such people are brutal and dangerous. What Sutty learns in the mountains affects her profoundly, and it becomes evident that the preservation of Akan's ancient lore, the Telling, and the prevention of its destruction by the Corporation, lies in her hands.

The Telling is a novel of ideas, portraying opposite extremes of culture and belief, and suggesting that between them there is a middle way. Inevitably, it invites comparison with Le Guin's other novels set in the same universe. When it is put beside an acknowledged masterpiece like The Left Hand Of Darkness, in which another representative of the Ekumen is deeply affected by the people of an alien planet, or the outcry against the Vietnam war that informed *The Word For World Is Forest*, it becomes clear that, unlike in these earlier novels, in *The Telling* the message does overwhelm the plot, the central part of the book being a lengthy exposition on the nature of ancient Akan beliefs, while the only psychologically complex characters are Sutty herself and the Monitor. However, the novel is redeemed and reader's attention compelled by the beautifully and lucidly written prose, and its message - rooted in an attempt to reconcile the conflicting ideologies of the twentieth century - is, sadly, particularly relevant to the twenty-first.

Valery Leith - The Way of the Rose

Gollancz, London, 2001, 415pp, £9.99 ISBN 185798 549 4 Reviewed by Kathy Taylor The Way of the Rose is the third of the Everien books, and like its predecessor makes no allowance for any unfamiliarity with the series. For those who have recently read the rest of the trilogy this is an advantage, as the plot is not slowed by the need for explanations or exposition. However for those who have not, this, combined with the multiplicity of characters and viewpoints, means that in places it may be difficult to follow.

The structure of the novel is deliberately fragmented. The multiple viewpoints, place and time settings reflecting Everien's descent into chaos as the Timeserpent rips apart the land. Seven very different major, and several minor, protagonists provide these viewpoints. Tash and Pallo are the most straightforward of these. Tash is a Pharician Warlord whose earlier conquest and self-proclaimed rule of Everien comes apart in the wake of the Timeserpent chaos. Separated from his capital by the fractured time and landscape he seeks to use the remnants of his military to establish a new power base. Pallo is a native Everien, a rebel who had broken into the Fire Houses to prevent Tash from obtaining further Knowledge and thus new weapons. In the wake of the Timeserpent he was thrown into a different part of Everien and into a different time stream. There he uses his unnatural longevity to build up an army with which he hopes to oppose and stop Tash. The straightforward goals and natures of these two provide a dramatic contrast with the journeys of discovery and change in Istar and Tarquin. Istar is a warrior, an Honorary (accepted as male) renowned for her skill and obsession in hunting and killing the Sekk. Her concerns in this book are both greater and more personal. She has the responsibility to try and knit Everian back together, bridging and realigning the different time streams. Tarquin, her adoptive father, is linked irrevocably to his horse Ice, and obsessed with Jaya. It is he who must learn the nature of the Timeserpent and how to deal with it.

The Way of the Rose is an excellent complex novel that is well worth reading. The characters are well-drawn. Their actions arise logically from their backgrounds, needs and goals, and their individuality enhanced by convincingly unique speech patterns. The prose is well-written, for the most part unobtrusive but with some evocative descriptions such as the scenes at the graveyard. The book provides some interesting material for thought on the nature of what it is to be human or at least sentient, and some truly mind boggling stuff on the nature of time and paradoxes. Recommended.

Juliet Marillier - Child of the Prophecy

Tor, New York, 2002, 528pp, \$26.95, ISBN 0-312-84881-1 Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Child of the Prophecy is the third and final volume of the Sevenwaters trilogy, which tells the story of three generations of a family in ancient Ireland. Each book takes one of the women of the clan as its central character, and uses her to show the family's relationship to the world around them, the various forms of magic which either threaten or help them, and the working out of a prophecy.

In this third volume, the central character is Fainne, daughter of Ciaran and Niamh, whose forbidden union was an important part of the second book. She is brought up in isolation from the Sevenwaters family, but the reappearance of her grandmother means that she is forced to meet them and come to know them. Her mind has been poisoned against them and her purpose is to bring about their ruin, but she soon discovers that the account of the past which she has accepted is not the whole story.

The first volume of the trilogy, *Daughter of the Forest*, was strengthened by the retelling of the old story of the girl whose brothers were turned into swans. Without this firm underpinning of legend, I haven't found the other two books as impressive. The story of the prophecy, which ties all three books together, seems quite arbitrary, and isn't strong enough to compel a reader to

move on from one section of the story to the next. I can't help but wonder how much of a publisher's decision it was to create a trilogy, rather than arising out of what the writer felt was inevitably the right way to tell her story.

That said, the characters are engaging, and the second and third books are extremely readable. In this volume, Fainne is an interesting character and I felt involved with her because of the conflict between what she feels she must do, and what her instincts tell her is right.

The ancient Irish culture comes across effectively, though I still have my doubts about the British background which was so obviously skewed in the first volume. There's also a good sense of place, and of the different types of magic Fainne uses and encounters. I particularly like the details of ordinary, everyday life which are often missed out of genre fantasy; Marillier gives a real feeling of how it must have been to live in the communities she shows.

This book brings the trilogy to a satisfying end, although the final twist of how the prophecy will be fulfilled was obvious to me long before. It could be read by itself, because the background and previous events are successfully woven in, but I'd suggest beginning with the first volume if you haven't already done so.

Ken MacLeod - Dark Light 🛄

Orbit, London, 2001, 292pp, £16.99 ISBN 1-84149-069-5 Tor, New York, 2002, 271pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-765-30302-7 Reviewed by Andrew Seaman

Cosmonaut Keep, the first volume in Ken MacLeod's Engines of Light trilogy (reviewed in Vector 218), impressed with its skilful blending of gritty political speculation and traditional space-operatic themes. Second volumes of trilogies, like the dreaded second album syndrome that affects so many rock bands, can prove problematic. Acting as a bridge between the introductory and concluding volumes they must maintain a reader's interest without profligately wasting all of an author's carefully crafted ideas and plot twists. Although Dark Light has its longueurs, MacLeod is far too seasoned a pro to fall into the trap of precipitously revealing his authorial hand. Even if the reader does not turn the pages with quite the same sense of breathless anticipation brought on by Cosmonaut Keep there are sufficient revelations (and straightforward action) to keep the pace from flagging, and hopes high for the final volume in the series.

Matt Cairns and his fellow cosmonauts aboard the restored starship *Bright Star* arrive at the planet Croatan in the Second Sphere of galactic space, another world colonised by humans and aliens kidnapped centuries before by the mysterious gods briefly encountered in *Cosmonaut Keep*. Their arrival, and subsequent actions, triggers a wave of culture shock in the planet's backwater communities, kick-starting a capitalist economy that ironically culminates in a rather old-fashioned revolution. The significance of the political machinations amongst the original cadre of cosmonauts from earth becomes clearer, as do the contradictory intentions of those alien gods (revealed in a memorable brace of encounters in the system's asteroid belt). All of which seems to hint at a cataclysmic 'war in heaven' that promises to form the basis of the final book in the trilogy.

Familiar characters, like Matt and Gregor Cairns, Salasso the saur and Lydia de Tenebre return, but they are joined by a colourful new cast from Croatan, including the 'heathen', Stone, and pilots' mechanic Gail Frethorne. MacLeod has much fun exploring the gender politics of Gail and Stone's mutual attraction and status within their respective communities, and in this, and other passages, he demonstrates how adept he is at delivering those little charges of sensawunda that the best sf administers. It's a measure of his skill that he can achieve in a telling sentence what it would take some lesser writers a whole paragraph to do. *Dark Light* is also again full of a sense of playful

genre self-referentiality, as evinced in chapter titles like 'The Gods Ourselves', 'Ancient Astronauts' and, my favourite, 'Vaster Than Intellects and More Cool'.

So, though it may seem to lack the immediate impact of its predecessor, *Dark Light* works through and develops its predecessor's themes with sufficient skill to make the reader eagerly anticipate the final book of Engines of Light. In the series so far MacLeod has delivered arguably the best work of his career. I'm confident he can now deliver a fitting and satisfying end to the sequence.

Sean McMullen - Eyes of the Calculor

Tor, New York, 2001, 587pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-312-87736-6 Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Eyes of the Calculor is the third book in McMullen's Greatwinter trilogy, which started with Souls in the Great Machine, and continued with The Miocene Arrow [reviewed by Mark Plummer in V213 and Stuart Carter in V218].

The setting is a bizarre far-future Earth, orbited by a huge artificially intelligent construct called Mirrorsun, which constrains technology on the ground to a level somewhere around that of the late industrial revolution, of muskets and steam engines (although fossil-fuelled engines are considered anathema in some regions), interspersed with occasional scavengings of higher technology. Humanity has split into different races: 'pure' humans and the shunned and persecuted avians (stronger, faster, brighter and, apart from their feather-like hair, almost indistinguishable from humans). Humans are constrained in isolated regions by a broadcast telepathic command known as the Call, preventing them crossing the oceans. Avians, however are immune to the Call and cross the seas freely in giant electric powered planes.

In the Rochestrian Commonwealth of Eastern Australica, the ruling elite are the caste of Dragon Librarians, who control the dissemination of knowledge through their great indexing machine, the Calculor, until, at the start of this third volume, Mirrorsun throws out a wide-band electromagnetic pulse which fries all electric devices into slag and the Librarians have to fall back on the hasty construction of a conscript human-powered replacement.

Meanwhile, on the distant continent of Mounthaven (formerly North America), the ruling elite are the Airlords, who duel for position and honour as passionately as do the Librarians, although in compression-engined bi-and triplanes. It is though one such duel that the young and ambitious Airlord Samondel carries her scheme to try and reach Australica by a series of perilous island hops, each at the upper range of even a stripped-down and heavily fuelled super-regal transport.

Despite this being the third book in the trilogy, McMullen takes nearly the first third of the book introducing a large range of seemingly disconnected characters and situations: a renegade monk, Martyne, trained for five years in a deadly martial order (echoes of David Carradine's character in Kung Fu arise irresistibly here); Velesti, a young woman who wakes, oddly changed, from a coma after being raped in an attack which also killed Martyne's sister; the religious demagogue, Jemli, who rises to power in the Western region of Kalgoorlie; a group of eccentric monks at a remote observatory who make the startling discover that Mirrorsun is changing, speeding its orbit. The Mirrorsun pulse also brings down an avian sunwing plane flying across Australica, stranding the survivors in hostile territory. And then Velesti's young brother sends word to Martyne of the rape and murder of his sister, and identifies the culprits as a group of the town's guardsmen.

It's all wonderfully improbable stuff. (I'm left wondering how, if all electrical devices are comprehensively trashed, the Mounthavens' spirit-powered compression engines manage to function without some form of electrical ignition, but then my knowledge of diesel engines is shaky.) There are plots and

conspiracies, a scientific mystery, a revenge tragedy, several love stories (some odder than others), war and uneasy alliances, and a good dose of mayhem. It's not great literature by any means, but it's as imaginative and quaintly picturesque as, for example, Ian McDonald's quirky *Desolation Road* and *Ares Express* mixed with elements as eclectic as *Terminator 2, Kung Fu, The Difference Engine* and *The Red Baron*.

L.E. Modesitt Jr. - The Ghost Of The White Nights
Tor, New York, 2001, 398pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-765-30095-8
Reviewed by Alan Fraser

This is the third novel in the series that started with *Of Tangible Ghosts*, followed by *The Ghost Of The Revelator*. Each book is a blend of three seemingly non-miscible ingredients: ghosts, alternate-history and espionage. Despite this, my remaining impression is that of the food and drink, which Modesitt describes in great detail – an alternate America (here called Columbia) dominated by Dutch culture, where McDonalds and other fast food chains are totally unknown, and fuelled by hot chocolate instead of coffee!

The story is told by Doktor Johan Eschbach, a "retired" secret service agent now teaching ecology at a small university in New Bruges, which we know as New England. The nation of Columbia is quite a different shape than the USA – it includes most of English-speaking Canada but not Alaska, which is still Russian, and not the states that were once Mexican. From Texas to California is part of New France, the "Empire" set up by France in the 19th century having survived. The other North American states are French-speaking Quebec and the independent Mormon state of Deseret, location of the second book in this series. Johan's second wife Llysette, a classical singer whom he met in the first book, is an exile from France, which is now part of a very predatory Austro-Hungarian-German Empire. Only Britain, Sweden and Russia remain independent in Europe.

Reading the first book I constantly looked for the "Jonbar Hinge", the exact point at which an alternate history deviates from ours – I was unable to pin it down. This world where people who have met a violent death remain as ghosts has a continuously different past - killing people, either singly or en masse, is a bad idea, so both murders and violent conquests/revolutions have been deterred through history. Territorial acquisition has certainly taken place, but generally more subtly. In this book Johan is coerced out of retirement yet again - his wife Llysette is offered a very lucrative engagement singing in St. Petersburg for the Tzar, while Johan must secretly meet with the Russian government to strike a vital deal: the Austrians are being belligerent about pollution in the Black Sea, looking for an excuse to annex Southern Russia - Johan will offer Columbian environmental technology and resources to the Russians to help them clear up their rivers; in exchange Columbia wants a pipeline built to carry Siberian and Alaskan oil.

Of course, this clandestine mission goes far astray and becomes very hazardous indeed when Johan discovers the Russians are developing weapons of mass destruction much more devastating than nuclear bombs, using technology very specific to the peculiarities of this world. He comes very close to becoming a "Ghost of the White Nights" – one of those who haunt St. Petersburg in the snow-covered winter nights!

Modesitt can be a very wordy writer, but he restrains himself here to tell a "how I saved the world" tale that is always fascinating and occasionally exciting. The dust jacket says this is the conclusion of the series, but since he says on the final page "the world goes on, lurching from danger to danger", Doktor Johan Eschbach is one hero I can see appearing in print again.

Alan Moore and Stephen Bissette plus Totleben, Woch, Veitch, Randall & Alcala - Swamp Thing: A Murder Of Crows Titan Books, London, 2001, 203pp, £13.99, ISBN 1-84023-318-4 Reviewed by Jon Wallace.

Scientist Alec Holland hides away in a swamp to work on a secret project. Bad guys attack, drench him in the formula and set fire to the lab (or barn...). Alec flees, drenched and burning, into the swamp and falls dead into the water, only to be re-born as Swamp Thing!

Created in the early 1970s, Swamp Thing was fairly standard DC fare. Superhero fights baddies, in the eco-optimism of the times, to save the swamplands from the evil developers. But in the 1980s a team was assembled, led by Alan Moore, to revitalise the comic. Under this leadership, the scope of Swampy changed. He discovered that he was not Alec Holland, reborn as a monster, but an elemental creature made from plant-life, patterned on Alec Holland's consciousness. As an elemental, he interacts with the supernatural, and is shown his true nature...

This sequence of stories opens with a couple of introductory pieces which nicely set the background for those who have never heard of the Swamp Thing, although Swamp Thing himself appears only briefly at the start of the first and the end of the second. Then it's into the meat of the graphic novel.

Many threads are intermingled in the course of the story, as Swamp Thing is lead by the mysterious John Constantine through the 'American Gothic' storyline, taking in the epic DC maxiseries Crisis on Infinite Earths, to the final world-shattering conclusion.

This is hard stuff. I'm old enough to instinctively believe that comics are for kids, I like to think that I've looked at enough of these things to understand that that's not true, but not DC comics. This collection is marketed under DC's Vertigo banner, current issues are marked as "for the mature reader". Not for kids, no.

The graphics are not leading edge (although they were in 1985!), and the paper that they are printed on doesn't do them justice, not really being up to reproducing the deep blacks that are an integral part of the style. But the stories are powerful and heavy with horror and, thankfully, with none of the jokiness that I remember in the comics I read as a lad.

If there is a flaw here, it is that the original source material is in danger of being too complicated, there are perhaps too many threads woven together as the comic strands interact. There is a danger of unwary readers becoming as confused as Swamp Thing himself as he gropes towards the final understanding. But would I read it again? Oh yes.

Pat Murphy – Adventures in Time and Space With Max Merriwell Tor, New York, 2001, 287pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-86643-7 Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Adventures in Time and Space is the third of Murphy's playful games with her three alter-ego pseudonyms, sf writer Max Merriwell (There and Back Again (1999) – reviewed in V209), fantasy author Mary Maxwell (The Wild Angel (2000) – reviewed by Claire Brialey in V214) and horror-thriller writer Weldon Merrimax. Weldon is the dark third of the triumvirate, a sadistic and vicious dark mirror to the avuncular Merriwell.

Electric-blue-haired "Bad Grrl" Pat Murphy and her friend and fellow librarian Susan have won a luxury cruise on the much-refitted (and renamed) Odyssey, one of the attractions of which is an on-board writing course led by Susan's favourite author Max Merriwell. At first things go smoothly, and a romance starts to blossom between Susan and the ship's security officer, Tom Clayton. But strange and unexplained events interrupt what Tom hoped would be a peaceful cruise as the Odyssey crosses into the Bermuda Triangle. A passenger (a Patrick Murphy!) is attacked and stabbed in front of witnesses in a fight in the casino, although no trace of an injured passenger can later be found. Max receives threatening letters purporting to be from Max's own crime-writer pseudonym Weldon Merrimax, and someone answering Weldon's description is spotted (and identified as the gambling assailant) at various places in the ship. Wolves howl on the passenger deck and pee in the swimming pool, and a ship's

party descends into chaos as the passengers are seized by a trance-like dancing mania and conga through the corridors and onto the upper deck. Fiction and reality start to get tangled and confused (the passengers include a group of Californian Clampers, an historic drinking society, who celebrate, in inebriated fashion, the events told in Mary Maxwell's book *The Wild Angel*).

Pat Murphy (the author) intersperses the story with extracts from Pat Murphy's (the passenger) Bad Grrlz' Guide to Physics (which you can find at www.badgrrlzguide.com), while chapters are headed with extracts of other books (still to be written in our reality) by Maxwell, Merriwell and – as the tone becomes darker and events move towards their confrontational climax – Weldon Merrimax. As Pat muses in her Bad Grrlz' Guide, is it Max, or is it Susan, or the collision of both, full of unrealised potentialities, bringing these characters to life, percolating (like quantum particles in the Casmir effect) from a virtual existence on the edge of possibility?

What started, in *There and Back Again*, as an engaging spoof of *The Hobbit*, recast as a sf adventure, has become something deeper and stranger, although no less entertaining, as characters, authors and events criss-cross between the three books, and Murphy examines and plays with (because play is often the best way to learn) the nature of story and reality and how they shape each other.

Kim Newman - Time and Relative

Telos, Tolworth, 2001, 121pp, £25 (deluxe) ISBN 1-903889-03-0 Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

Dr Who has the distinction, gaining I believe an entry in the Guinness Book of Records, for spawning the most spin-off books – from the Target novelisations whilst the program was still broadcasting, through the many Virgin books to the current ongoing run produced by the BBC. Now Telos are having a go, but do we really need any more?

Well, this is slightly different; *Time and Relative* is the first in a series of 'prestige' novellas. For a start it looks fantastic. I was luckily enough to receive the luxury edition which has a 'crackedice' effect hard-backed cover, a foreword and afterword by Justin Richards – the Dr Who range consultant at the BBC – plus a colourful frontispiece by Bryan Talbot. But even the ordinary edition is not too shoddy – its slender grey A5 profile looking really distinctive on the bookshelf, at once retro and modern.

But what about the contents? As indicated this is a slim, but not slight, story: which is actually more akin to the television series than some of the bloated-up novels that have gone before. Kim Newman, an inventive novelist, in his own right, has produced an interesting spin on the *Dr Who* myth. Instead of having to worry about a mountain of continuity, *Time and Relative* goes right back to the beginning, in that it is a prequel to the first television story: 'An Unearthly Child'. And instead of concentrating on the Doctor, this is the story – in fact the diary – of the Unearthly Child herself, Susan Forman, the Doctor's 'granddaughter'.

We start on Wednesday March 27th 1963 in the middle of the 'big freeze'. Newman captures the 'real-world' well, with gonks, Ton-Up Boys, newly opened Wimpy bars and *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* on at the pictures. The first part of the story concerns Forman miserable school life, as she struggles not only with double Geog., PE and bullying but also with not being human, 'on the run' and worrying patches of 'fog' in her memory. But then it start to get even colder and the snow and ice start moving... Foreman and her school-friends struggle to get back to her Grandfather's 'Box' back in Trotter's Lane.

This is where it could have got ridiculous – Ice monsters that are effectively animated snowman. However Newman handles it well with some bloody gore, straightforwardly told – plus, just as you get much better pictures on the radio, you get much better

special effects in a book than on the telly.

In *Time and Relative* Newman really goes to what is at the heart of *Dr Who* by exploring, but not fully explaining, the character's origins. Plus he really gets inside Forman – at once a 'normal' teenager whilst at the same time also utterly alien: "My hearts were racing." I found it a perfect accompaniment to the pre-Christmas cold-snap. Recommended.

Jerry Oltion - The Getaway Special

Tor, New York, 2001, 400pp, \$26.95, ISBN 0-312-87777-3 Reviewed by Colin Bird

Jerry Oltion was a regular contributor to *Analog* in the nineties and won the Nebula for his novella *Abandon In Place*. He's one of a new generation of sf writers who delve back a few generations, taking their inspiration from Golden Age figures such as E.E. "Doc" Smith and Poul Anderson rather than from new wavers like Norman Spinrad and Thomas Disch.

The Getaway Special examines the ramifications of a scientific discovery (a do-it-yourself hyperdrive) developed by the novel's hero, wacky scientist Alan Meisner. When he hijacks a space shuttle to test his revolutionary engine he is taken aback by heavy-handed government attempts to snuff out the data he attempts to make freely available on the internet. Meisner and his shuttle pilot accomplice, Judy Gallagher, return to Earth and hide out in small town USA whilst equipping a plastic septic tank with a Getaway Drive. Just before the government tracks them down, Meisner and Gallagher take their septic tank for an interstellar jaunt, in the process making first contact with a race of intelligent butterflies.

Returning to Earth, the explorers find humanity on the brink of Armageddon. The potential of the Getaway drive has plunged the world economy into turmoil and brought international tensions to boiling point. Meisner and Gallagher call on their new alien allies for assistance in averting catastrophe.

Judging by this novel, Oltion's fiction is straight from the USA hard-sf mould; his characters are imbued with bags of can-do frontier spirit and the future, no matter how bleak at first glance, is all going to work out just how Gene Roddenberry always said it would. However, this is low-cal hard sf: Oltion's portrayal of international relations has the depth of believability of a cartoon and his characters, whilst engaging at times, suffer from unconvincing motivation.

The Getaway Special works fine on the level of an interplanetary romp, fuelled by Oltion's relentless enthusiasm and tongue in cheek narrative, and if you are looking for some lightweight Space Opera this book will hit the mark.

Fletcher Pratt - The Well of the Unicorn

Gollancz, Fantasy Masterworks 23, London, 2001, 338pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07267-9

Reviewed by Penny Hill

Gollancz have republished this novel as "one of the greatest early heroic fantasies", so I was prepared to tolerate the usual run of clichés – being lenient because this is probably where they originated. In the end, my tolerance was not required. True, our hero Airar comes from a peasant family and he is thrown off his land in the opening scene, but his subsequent rise in status is due to merit, not to any secret noble descent.

During the course of the novel, Airar develops a knack for strategic thinking and for bringing together differing factions. Unfortunately I felt we were told this rather than shown it: sometimes it was hard to see what was so brilliant about his proposals as opposed to those of the other military leaders. The importance of strategy is strongly emphasised, with the campaign discussions taking up more space in the novel than the battle scenes. As I find battle scenes hard to read, I enjoyed this change of emphasis.

As well as strategy, the wider questions of what our heroes

were fighting for were also discussed. Airar is constantly challenged to think through what he will replace the current oppressive regime with. He is given two extremes to choose between - Briella and Carrhoene - and most of his debates with the other characters are on the weaknesses and strengths of these two forms of government.

The Well of the Unicorn itself is important as an off-stage reminder of one way of resolving conflict – by abdicating a certain amount of free will. This again is a course of action that Airar must consider.

This is a world where magical is possible, but costly. Airar has a small amount of magical skill, but is physically exhausted each time he uses it and does not progress to become a powerful magician. Another of the questions he faces is whether it is possible to use magic for good or whether it will always lead to evil consequences.

The romantic sub-plot just about managed to raise itself above the 'rescue princess and then marry her' school. Airar's first love affair is with a girl of his own class whom he fails to rescue from her fate as concubine. His subsequent love for the princess Argyra is therefore subdued by his feelings of guilt.

As a whole, this novel does offer more than just a generic fantasy, but the deliberately archaic language requires perhaps more patience and stamina than is actually rewarded.

John Sladek - The Complete Roderick

Gollancz, SF Masterworks 45, London, 2001, 611pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-85798-340-8

Reviewed by Mark Greener

Defining the differences between "real" and "artificial" life – not to mention intelligence – taxed the minds of philosophers, theologians and scientists for centuries. Today, they're no closer to solving the conundrum. However, since 1818, when a group of friends decided to tell ghost stories on the shores of Lake Geneva, sf has made an important, if under-appreciated, contribution to the debate.

Indeed, st's ability to take a step back from, and reflect upon, pressing societal issues, combined with its inherent technological focus, puts the genre in an unrivalled position from which to comment on artificial life and intelligence. From Frankenstein to Data and HAL, to AI, st's obsession with this topic consistently counterpoints our, somewhat frail, humanity.

The late John Sladek's books *Roderick* (1980) and *Roderick at Random* (1983) are among the high-points of this sub-genre. Indeed, Sladek revisited the theme in several stories, including the wonderful novel *Tik-Tok* (1983). Now reprinted in a single volume as part of Gollancz's SF Masterworks series, the novels chronicle the maturation of Roderick, the product of a secret NASA programme to develop a "cheap, durable intelligence" for planetary landings.

Initially, Roderick looks like a reject from *Robot Wars*. "a large spherical head, a small, conical body, and a pair of tiny tank tracks". When corruption charges close the project, Roderick is fostered by techno-hippies. After being kidnapped and enduring numerous adventures, Roderick's form becomes increasingly human and he comes to maturity in *Random*.

As Anthony Burgess noted in *Snow White and Rose Red*, many fairy tales are "lay moral sermons" that encapsulate our dreams and hopes. According to Burgess's definition, the Roderick books are modern fairy tales. There is strong moral-philosophical thread underlying the books – although Sladek's too good a writer to preach. The stories encapsulate our – and sf's – ambiguous attitudes about robots: our dreams as well as our nightmares. In Roderick, a secret agency ensures that research into Al doesn't become too advanced. And like so many Al stories, there's a hint of *Pinocchio* retold: Roderick is even stolen by gypsies and sold into slavery at a fair ground.

At times, the Roderick stories are funny - occasionally very funny. The debates about funding research reminded me of the facility meetings in *Wilt*, for example. But it has a serious undercurrent. Indeed, while *The Complete Roderick* works as a single book, it evolves considerably over the 600-odd pages. I found myself less likely to laugh and more likely to smile in admiration at a satirical witticism as the book progressed. And it becomes increasingly intellectual in both ambition and execution as *Roderick* moves into *Random*. But that's at the expense of the narrative drive and, in places, the characterisation. Frankly, I felt that *Random*, in places, dragged.

Some critics compare Sladek's Roderick stories to early Vonnegut. But to me Sladek lacks Vonnegut's sharp bite and the sheer intensity of his dark humour. Sladek's satire is a shade of grey to Vonnegut's pitch black. However, the horrors of Dresden's firebombed ruins forged Vonnegut's satirical voice. Sladek's honed his in the heady intellectualism of the counterculture of the 60s and early 70s. So, the difference, perhaps, reflects the origins of the authors' satirical worldview.

Sladek also lacks Vonnegut's literary finesse. Sladek isn't a hack: the streams of artificial consciousness that take you inside Roderick's mind exemplify sf writing at its best. However, Vonnegut's style is simpler, less ornate, less overtly intellectual. Sladek exposes his intelligence; Vonnegut's embeds his in the story. For me, Vonnegut's simplicity and the fact he doesn't wear his intellect on his sleeve gives his satire more bite.

Nevertheless, re-reading Roderick made me realise just how great a talent sf lost when Sladek died in 2000. The re-issue of the Roderick novels is a fitting legacy for one of sf's most intelligent, philosophical, witty and thought-provoking writers.

L. Neil Smith - The American Zone

Tor, New York, 2001, 350pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-312-87369-7 Reviewed by Stuart Carter

That awful whining shriek you can hear for the whole time you're reading *The American Zone* is the sound of a very large axe being ground. L.Neil Smith is a prominent American Libertarian. Libertarians (US ones, that is) favour absolute personal freedom (what we here would probably refer to as anarchy). Smith believes (boy, does he believe) in the inherent evil of government – any government.

William 'Win' Bear is a refugee from a world much like our own who, like many others, has found refuge in a parallel universe where the USA never happened and Libertarian values have triumphed instead. The Confederacy, as it is called, is a utopia: technologically advanced, prosperous and peaceful. But when a strange new phenomenon called 'terrorism' arrives in this world Win and his friends have to figure out who's behind it before something even worse called 'a government' takes over the Confederacy.

To begin with I was intrigued by *The American Zone*: I find a lot of anarchist ideals really quite sensible (on paper, at least), and found myself nodding in agreement at Smith's views on things such as war, state-sponsored capitalism and individual freedom (post 9/11 his theories on government curtailment of liberties for 'security' following terrorist attacks are frighteningly spot-on).

Initially *The American Zone* reads well, a little like Harrison's *Stainless Steel Rat* books: raucous and observant, with a drinkin', smokin', gun-totin', mechanically-minded hetero wit for a hero, but after a while you soon begin to notice a pattern forming. Every single character in this book is there to make the point about how great the Libertarian world of the Confederacy is. Those who think differently are all, without exception, ugly, stupid, evil, prissy, ill-informed or lazy – sometimes all at once. Our Libertarian rhetoric-spouting heroes (and believe me, they don't do much else *but* spout) meanwhile, are all beautiful, smart, caring, easy-going, industrious *and* well-read. Their conversations invariably end up as polemics on either the perils of government, how truly wonderful the Confederacy is thanks to

its Libertarian ideals, or who has the biggest and best guns. They're very, very boring after just a few chapters.

The American Zone is simply pamphlet for Smith's strongly held views, with barely a token plot to disguise it as anything else. "Give me Libertarians or give me death"? I'll take death, please.

Errol Vieth - Screening Science: Contexts, Texts and Science in Fifties Science Fiction Film

The Scarecrow Press Inc., (Maryland & Folkestone), 2002, 263pp, £52.25 ISBN 0-8108-4023-5 Reviewed by Gary S. Dalkin

There was a point where I was getting quite well disposed towards this book.

Really, I was. It was after the *Pythonesque* passage suggesting a conservationist and a logger may have different definitions of the word 'tree': "On the other hand, the logger operates in a different cultural context and the meaning of tree within his context of existence is arguably a sign of a different operational paradigm – a paradigm in which a tree signifies a set of values inherent in the timber-industry discourses in which a tree is a part." (page 4). Back on planet earth a tree does not signify a set of values. A tree is a large plant. Regardless of what one does for a living.

What, you may ask, has this to do with on book concerned with the representation of science in 1950's science fiction films? Not much, but it's the Emperor's New Clothes waffle one must include to be taken seriously when writing about old science fiction films for the academic market, and to be able to pencil £52.25 on the flyleaf. Personally, from a book costing that much I expect to learn something without getting a headache.

Fortunately the rest of the first chapter lightens up, and while Vieth wastes a significant number of pages playing the old game of defining the genre, I was heartened to discover he has more than a passing familiarity with written sf. In short, he seemed to know what he was talking about, and while saying nothing particularly illuminating, likewise said nothing which revealed the laughable ignorance of most academics fiddling with the tyre pressure of our particular wheel.

And then, oh dear, it went terribly wrong in chapter two. The writing becomes simply dreadful. Was this book edited? Is the following sentence written in English? "A subset of that discourse is the argument that technology – through its promised conversion of those theories, relating in some way to the creation of life, into practice – promised the manufacture of creatures that were like humans, thereby displacing the certainty of the fabric of the human into the shifting realms of problematic." (page 49).

It is not that Vieth's arguments are complex – we are enrolled in Existentialism 101 – but that they are so badly expressed as to suggest an early draft. On page 53 he argues that a letter written by Robert Heinlein to his agent around the time of the publication of *Stranger in a Strange Land* "echoes" a sentiment expressed by Mark Rose in the book *Alien Encounters*, published two decades later, in 1981. Not content with this, Vieth then argues on the following page that Heinlein's letter simultaneously prefigures John Lennon's *Imagine* (1971).

And so it goes on, some genuinely interesting insights, much stating the obvious, and a large helping of pretension dressed in such complex yet ill-conceived prose students will think it is their own stupid fault for not understanding. I'd demand my money back.

The remainder of the book, which feels like a standard £17.99 hardback, covers "Cultural and Historical Contexts", "Industrial Contexts" (with some good passages on changing business practices in Hollywood), "The Nature and Function of Science" and a final chapter which headed "Medical and Psychological Science" which looks at *Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Invaders From Mars, The Thing* and *The Amazing Colossal Man*. Illustrations are confined to a small number of b/w poster

reproductions. The author is an Australian. He has a PhD in philosophy and is a senior lecturer at the Central Queensland University, School of Contemporary Communication. You'd have to read the book to realise how ironic that is.

Vernor Vinge - *The Collected Stories of Vernor Vinge*Tor, New York, 2001, 464pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-312-87372-5
Reviewed by Chris Hill

Vernor Vinge is not a prolific short story writer and this volume contains all of his short fiction excluding 'True Names' and 'Grimm's Story' – 17 stories all told. The earliest, 'Apartness', was written in 1965 and the latest, 'Fast Times at Fairmont High' is new to this volume. The largest proportion (11 of 17) are from the 1960s and 1970s. Reading these stories does show Vinge's growth as a writer – with a couple of exceptions the best stories are the later ones.

The best of these earlier stories is 'The Peddler's Apprentice' (1975) co-written with his then-wife Joan D. Vinge. In this tale a young cutpurse in a primitive far future falls into the company of a wandering peddler who seems to have some secret mission concerning the world's rulers. It is an intriguing adventure story with strong characters and an interesting background.

'Bookworm, Run!' (1966) is a so-so affair concerning a runaway subject in an experiment to give someone access to all the world's knowledge. The Accomplice' (1967) is amusing in predicting the discovery of computer animation but totally failing to predict the improvement in computer technology that goes with it

The Barbarian Princess' (1986) is a prequel to the novel *Grimm's World* (and is indeed collected with it in a revised edition) concerning the early career of Tatja Grimm. It is an okay adventure story but really could have been written at any time in the last forty years.

The Blabber' (1988) is set in the same background as the later A Fire Upon the Deep and concerns the arrival of a Tine on a human colony in the Slow Zone. It is an enjoyable and well-written story and the only problem is that it feels like the first part of a novel that has not yet been finished.

Probably my favourite story in the collection is 'Gemstone' (1983), a fantasy about a girl staying with her grandmother. In the house she discovers a stone that her now-deceased grandfather brought back from the Antarctic and which seems to store the emotions of the last person who touched it. In his introduction Vinge claims that it is 'surely the most unbalanced thing I have ever written'. This may be true, but it is also the most human and charming story in the collection.

It is a rather uneven collection, but the taking the stories in chronological order you can see the progress of a writer from a Heinlein-influenced beginner to an important writer with a voice of his own. It is worth working through the less-impressive pieces to get to the gems.

Vernor Vinge and Others – *True Names and the Opening of the Cyberspace Frontier*

Tor, New York, 2001, 384pp, \$14.95 ISBN 0-312-86207-5 Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

In 1981, three years before the publication of Gibson's Neuromancer, Vinge wrote a novella length story called True Names' in which he invented and explored the idea of a consensual shared virtual reality (for which Gibson would later coin the world 'cyberspace') hosted inside a network of computers, in which people would meet and interact as virtual personas, careful never to reveal their true identities even to each other. Unlike Gibson's bright geometric data spaces, Vinge took the worlds of fantasy role-playing games as his model for The Other World, but his central theme, of an almost paranoid secrecy of one's real identity, one's True Name, from Le Guin's A Wizard of Earthsea.

"In the once-upon-a-time days of the First Age of Magic, the prudent sorcerer regarded his true name as his most valued possession but also greatest threat to his continued good health, for – as stories go – once an enemy, even a weak unskilled enemy, learned the sorcerer's name, then routine and widely known spells could destroy or enslave even the most powerful. As times passed, and we graduated to the Age of Reason and thence to the first and second industrial revolutions, such notions were discredited. Now it seem the Wheel has turned full circle (even if there never really was a First Age) and we are back to worrying about true names again."

So begins 'True Names', which proved hugely influential on a number of people working in the then-fledging computer industry. A later edition by James Frenkel's (who also edits this Tor anthology) Bluejay Books included an afterword by Al guru Marvin Minsky, which is reproduced here.

For this edition, originally conceived in 1995, editor James Frenkel has placed Vinge's novella and Minsky's afterword at the back of the book, and assembled ten essays (and one other short fiction fable - 'The Right To Read' by Richard M. Stallman) from people then (and now) at the forefront of research into computer networking communications, virtual and artificial environments and the technology and politics of privacy and cryptography. Much of this debate is still going on now, and shows every sign of still going on 20 years hence. Contributors to that debate include 'True Names and Crypto-Anarchy' by Timothy May, former Intel chief scientist, and 'Cryptography and the Politics of One's True Name' by Leonard N. Foner, a researcher at MIT's Media Labs. The rather wonderfully named Chip Morningstar and F. Randall Farmer report on a "real" virtual environment, the LucasFilm sponsored 'Habitat: Reports from an Online Community', while human-computer interfaces and the problems and promises of machine intelligence are explored by Danny Hillis, (founder of Thinking Machines and Disney Research Fellow) in 'A Time of Transition/the human connection' and Pattie Maes (MIT Media Lab) in 'Intelligent Software'. Mark Pesce, creator of VRML and author of The Playful World: How Technology Transforms Our Imagination, rounds off the non-fiction articles with 'True Magic', which ranges from the sfnal precursors to Vinge's novella (including Brunner's The Shockwave Rider, which Vinge also acknowledges in his introduction), and those that followed, from Gibson's Neuromancer and Bear's Blood Music to Neal Stephenson's Snow Crash, while also exploring those aspects of consensual agreement, magic and naming that Vinge borrowed from Le Guin and fantasy gaming: "every object in cyberspace is a magical object." It's a wonderfully thought-provoking essay, and a splendid point at which to finally step into 'True Names' and discover just what it was that inspired and excited so many of the people building the electronic world we now take almost for granted.

Freda Warrington - The Obsidian Tower

Earthlight, London, 2001, 708 pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-7434-1607-4 Reviewed by Graham Andrews.

As luck would have it, I'd just finished reading Richard Purtill's Lord of the Elves and Eldils: Fantasy and Philosophy in C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien* when The Obsidian Tower came along to form the subject of my next scholarly monograph. "The successful fantasy writer must create Secondary Worlds in which the reader can believe...". But that's enough recycled blether from me – read Purtill instead.

Better still, you should read *The Obsidian Tower*, volume three of Freda Warrington's Jewelfire trilogy. I confess to not having read *The Amber Citadel* and *The Sapphire Throne*. But, as a detailed summary of *Obsidian* alone would take up every available word, it's enough for me to say here that Warrington writes more like Jack Vance than either Lewis or Tolkien. And that's a big compliment, coming from me.

Teaser: "...all seems lost for the humans of Aventuria. The shape-

changing Bhahdradomen have invaded their lands and usurped their Queen, aided by Aelyr lord Falthorn. Queen Helenanthe has been forced to stand down or see the death of her mother and brother" (blurb).

Warrington emulates Vance in using deceptively plain-spoken English. Too much 'high' fantasy evokes the smelly sense of that word. "More skilled though I am at wielding the broadsword than the quill, I will set down for all to read the tale of how I, plain John Blunt, did follow my dear liege to the wars when Harry, y-clept the fifth, sat on our English throne" (P.G. Wodehouse, gleefully anticipating the likes of Lin Carter). The Vancian tickling stick also comes into frequent play:

The wine was good, burning away the sick feeling in [Saphaeyender's] stomach. He'd been trying for days, weeks, to forget the scene in the temple but wherever he went, whatever he did, it was there ... He couldn't help thinking about the ghastly ecstasy he'd experienced. How it had hurt to resist the Ancestor, how blissful it had felt to surrender... opening his arms to let in the light... 'Yes come into me, Ancestor, I am yours' (p. 145).

Above all, Warrington refutes the silly proposition that interesting work can no longer be done in some traditional form. Complete originality is perforce impossible; any given work has a great deal in common with works that have gone before it.

*Published in 1974, by the Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Purtill isn't one of those critics who knows the way but can't drive a car, viz. *The Mirror of Helen* (DAW, 1983).

Lawrence Watt-Evans - The Dragon Society

Tor, New York, 2001, 428pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-765-30007-9 Reviewed by Fiona Grove

This is the second in a trilogy, begun with *Dragon Weather*, which I haven't read, so this took some getting into as I had to work out what had happened previously and there was no explanatory preamble. The cover of this book describes it as "exploring the theme of whether any man can single-handedly right all the wrongs of the world." A bit of a tall order.

Arlian, Lord Obsidian, and his man, Black, return to Manfort, the home of the Dragon Society with Rune, another member of the society. Almost immediately someone tries to kill him. From then on there is a series of deaths, some planned and some not, almost all of whom are members of the secretive Dragon Society, a group of people who have had their lives unnaturally prolonged by the accidental swallowing of a mixture of their own, or someone else's, blood with dragon blood.

Arlian is sworn to destroy all the dragons, as they had destroyed his home village as a child. He has successfully killed one dragon, and in doing so discovered the secret of the Dragon Heart, unknown to any of the other members of the society, and likely to cause great upset when the truth is found out. This book follows what he does with this knowledge and how he tries to find a solution to a problem which could very easily mean his own death, and very soon if some members of the society, or the dragons, have a say in the matter.

With the help of Black and several Aritheian magicians, magic wielders from an adjoining country where magic is much more in evidence and there are no dragons, and using Obsidian weapons, Arlian sets out to rid the land of dragons, and dragon hearts.

Although I enjoyed this book I felt that it suffered form not reading the first in the series. However I will probably go back and read the first and also read the third book as it develops the story and looks at the ongoing battle to rid the world of the evil(?) dragons.

I would also have appreciated having a map at the front of the book, so that the geography of the land and of various locations referred to in the text could have been more clearly understood.

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro - A Feast in Exile

Tor, New York, 2001, 496pp. \$27.95 ISBN 0-312-87843-5 Reviewed by Brian Stableford

The latest episode in Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's continuing biography of the vampire Count Saint-Germain begins in Delhi in 1398 and follows his painful misadventures after the conquest of that city by Timur-i Lenkh (i.e. Timur the Lame, aka Tamerlane). Although the novel must have been written in the year prior to its publication it has gained a peculiar timeliness, much of its action being set in the southern regions of what is now Afghanistan. Given that the novel's primary theme is the appalling destructiveness of war and the pathological vainglory of would-be conquerors of the world it may be slightly at odds with the prevailing mood of America but its pertinence can hardly be doubted.

A Feast in Exile's direct predecessor, Come Twilight, was grimmer than the earlier novels in the series, but this one advances the grimness by an order of magnitude; Sanat Ji Mani, as the Count is here called, spends the greater part of the novel in sore distress, hobbled by his captor and completely cut off from the native soil on which he relies to ease his existential malaise. His successes are always small by comparison with the sweeping historical movements to which he bears witness, but here his achievements are more-or-less restricted to mere survival, itself a direly difficult project in a world utterly given over to extreme cruelty and futile mayhem. It is not a comfortable read – but for that very reason it is a triumph. It continues the process by which Chelsea Quinn Yarbro has carefully added moral depth to her gradually-unfolding epic.

What started out as an entertainment cleverly leavened with shrewd historical insight is now a unique artistic and philosophical enterprise, awesome not merely in its scope but in its relentless reproduction and meticulous measurement of the obstacles which have stood in the way of human progress. As the count's sufferings have intensified, his various female consorts have increasingly been found wanting.

Although neither Avasa Dani nor Tulsi Kil is a monster to compare with *Come Twilight's* Csimenae they are both weighed in the scales of the unfolding plot and found wanting. Yarbro has little choice in this Matter – Saint-Germain is required by the overarching enterprise to remain alone and unequalled, so none of his consorts can ever measure up to his noble example – but the necessity of discarding her hero's female sidekicks is beginning to take on a quasi-ritualistic aspect whose misogynistic subtext is developed with a little too much exactitude to be reckoned wholly accidental.

I have no idea how far this amazing *tour de force* has still to be extended, but the enthusiasm for series of Tor's editors is now so great as to equal the fervour of the late lamented Don Wollheim, so it seems probable that we shall not see the last of Saint-Germain until the resources of world history are quite exhausted – which is as it should be. Where is he now, I wonder, and what thoughts are passing through his head while he watches CNN?

Chris Amies - Dead Ground 🛄

Big Engine, 2002, 227pp, £8.99 ISBN 1-903468-01-9

Dead Ground: the terrain you can't see, the places on a map that cartographers can't see into. The ghost space inside out heads.

"Here be monsters". This is first novel from Amies, a long-time stalwart of the small press short story market and has apparently been described by one critic as W. Somerset Maugham meets H.P. Lovecraft. In the last failing days of British

imperialism in the 1930s, an expedition travels to a small group of Pacific Islands to investigate a temple scared to Tarohoa, Sea God of the Condal islanders.

Stephen Baxter- The Timeships

Voyager Classics (No. 21), 2002, 630pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-00-711792-2

Stephen Donaldson - Lord Foul's Bane

Voyager Classics (No. 23), 2002, 540pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-00-712438-4

J.R.R. Tolkien - The Silmarillion

Voyager Classics (No. 22), 2002, 370pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-00-712439-

David Zindell - Neverness

Voyager Classics (No. 24), 2002, 685pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-00-712437-6

These are the first review copies we've seen of the Voyager Classics line, which are being published in smart (if not particularly attention-grabbing) dark blue uniform paperback covers. 36 titles are scheduled so far (starting with Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring* and T.H White's *The Once and Future King*, through to Michael Marshall Smith's *Only Forward* at No. 36). Included here are Baxter's Clarke Award shortlisted homage and centenary sequel to Wells' *The Time Machine*, and the first volume of Donaldson's The First Chronicles of Thomas Covenant The Unbeliever (to be followed by *The Illearth War* at No. 26 and *The Power That Preserves* at No. 31).

Chaz Brenchley - Hand of the King's Evil

Orbit, 2002, 760pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-84149-035-0

The Third (and concluding) Book of Outremer, following *Tower of the King's Daughter* and *Feast of the King's Shadow* (reviewed by Sue Thomason in V204 and V211 respectively). The fragile peace in the Kingdom of Outremer is about to be shattered again by the kidnapping of Julianne, wife of both a Lord of Outremer and now of Outremer's enemy, Hassan, war leader of the Sharai tribes.

Jonathan Carroll - Voice of the Shadow

Gollancz, Fantasy Masterworks 25, 2002 (©1983), 190pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07367-5

Carroll's dark psychological horror story of a man haunted by the death of a friend is the second of Carroll's novels to be selected for Gollancz's Fantasy Masterworks series (the first being *Land of Laughs*, No 9).

John Clute - Appleseed

Tor, 2002, 337pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-765-30378-7

John Clute's first sf novel, is, as might be expected, both "dazzling and difficult" and "an exhuberant display of wordplay" according to Tony Cullen, who reviewed the Orbit UK hardcover edition in V219. A dazzling space opera that "demands attention and concentration...Clute is bring 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." *Appleseed* is also one of the top placed sf novels in this issue's reviewers' poll.

Storm Constantine - *The Crown of Silence*

Tor 2001, 431pp, \$16.95 ISBN 0-312-87365-4

Storm Constantine - The Way of Light

Tor 2001, 493pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-312-87328-X

The second (in trade paperback) and third and concluding books of The Magravandias Chronicles, which began with Sea Dragon Heir. Originally published by Gollancz in the UK, the three volumes of Constantine's interweaving of symbolic elemental and dynastic fantasy have been followed and praised by reviewer K.V. Bailey in Vectors 208, 204 and 219 – "an intermeshing of deeply symbolic action and characterisation with intrigues of state and dynasty which enables the reader to experience the story of two planes of realism and of fantasy, and then to recognise them as two sides of one coin".

Jack Dann and Janeen Webb- Dreaming Down Under

Tor, 2002, 550pp, \$17.95 ISBN 0-312-87812-5

A splendid and highly regarded anthology of Australian speculative fiction, first published by HarperCollins Voyager in Australia in 1998, to great praise ("May well be the best overall anthology of the year" – Gardner Dozois) Contributors include George Turner, Sara Douglass, Terry Dowling, Damien Broderick, Isobelle Carmody, Lucy Sussex, Sean McMullen, Rosaleen Love and many more. Now published in US trade paperback edition by Tor.

I Was Elvis Presley's Bastard Love-Child & other stories of Rock 'n' Roll excess (Manchester: Critical Vision, 2001, ISBN 1-900486-17-2, £13.99 / \$19.95, 224pp [40 Rossall Avenue, Radclifee, Manchester, M26 IJD]), by poet and occasional Vector contributor, Andrew Darlington, contains both the sound of dancing architecture and autobiography, and material on Robert Plant, Mark E. Smith, The Stone Roses, Leftfield and much, much more.

Maggie Furey - Spirit of the Stone

Orbit, 2002, 583pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-84149-056-3

Book Two of The Shadowleague, following from and expanding the story that started with *The Heart of Myrial*. Reviewed in Orbit hardcover edition and highly recommended as a "well-told, action packed tale" by Vikki Lee in V219 (*Myrial* was also reviewed on V207).

Robert Holdstock - Celtika

Earthlight, 2002, 435pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-671-02882-0

Book One of The Melin Codex, *Celtika* is an enthralling and brilliantly written mix of myth and historical events. Merlin, one-time companion of Jason in the quest for the Golden Fleece, is drawn to raise the Argo and the undead shade of his friend from a frozen lake in the North, and to embark on a new quest of revenge and reconciliation, which will take them to the Isle of Ghosts, in the land that will one day become England, and, in the trail of a mighty barbarian army, to the sacking of the Oracle of Delphi. Originally reviewed in hardback by Steve Jeffery in V215.

Kim Hunter - Knight's Dawn

Orbit, 2002, 374pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-090-3

Another first book in a new series, *Knight's Dawn* is Book One of The Red Pavilions. The central premise, of an amnesiac soldier waking on a battlefield where no battle has been fought for a hundred years, raises echoes of Gene Wolfe's *Soldier in the Mist*. The world in which he finds himself seems equally confused. The city of Zamerkand, ruled by a sick king and a mad queen, stands on the brink of chaos. 'Soldier' (who is also apt to be overtaken by sudden acts of violence) marries the mad queen's mad sister, Lanya, and finds service with he mercenaries of the Red Pavilion before being sent on a quest to restore the sanity of the queen and her sister. N.M Browne, reviewing the trade paperback edition in V217, found herself unable to identify with a protagonist who shows almost no introspection or curiosity, or work out whether the tone of the book was meant to be heroic, comic, ironic or dramatic, or a mixture of all of these.

Michael Moorcock - The Dreamthief's Daughter

Earthlight, 2002, 342pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-671-03725-0

Carol Ann Kerry Green confessed to being "captivated by this tale from the beginning. A tale of the Grail set in a different genre than the Arthurian" when reviewing this in the trade paperback edition in V217. Subtitled "a tale of the albino", *The Dreamthief's Daughter* features Moorcock most famous creation, the morose albino prince, Elric of Melniboné, but also other heroes of the Moorcock Multiverse, Count Ulric von Bek and English agent Oswald Bastable, ranged against the agents of Nazi Germany (including Bek's cousin Gaynor von Minct) who are trying to secure the Grail

and Bek's ancestral sword. Ravenbrand, for Hitler.

Andre Norton - The Gates to the Witch World

Tor Books, 2001, 461pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-765-30058-8

Seen in proof, this is hardcover omnibus edition of the first three of Norton's Witch World novels, originally published in paperback: Witch World (1963), Web of the Witch World (1964) and Year of the Unicorn (1965), together with an introduction by C J Cherryh.

Sheri S. Tepper - Grass

Gollancz, SF Masterworks 48,2002 (©1989), 540pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-5

First published in 1989 as the first of the 'Marjorie Westriding' trilogy (*Grass, Raising the Stones* and *Sideshow*), this is Tepper near the best of her form, in a thought-provoking blend of sf and fantasy, before her tendency to didactic soapbox lecturing in later works got in the way of her unique and inspired storytelling. Why is the prairie-like planet of Grass alone immune to a deadly plague sweeping the inhabited planets? And does Grass's apparent immunity hide an even deadlier secret?

Stephen William Theaker - Quiet, the Tin Can Brains Are Hunting!

Silver Age Books, 2001, 158pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-9537650-1-6 Quirky, surreal and off-the-wall in the style of Steve Aylett and R A Lafferty meets Douglas Adams or just confused and self-indulgent? I really can't decide. Nanotus the Giant, Milon the Assassin, Mrs Challenger and Professor Quigg the noted brain specialist must band together to save the universe from the attack of the tin can brains and the Dark Matter Destroyer. Silver Age Books have previously published Stephen Theaker's *Professor Challenger in Space*, of which David Langford wrote "I liked the subtitle."

56 Leyton Road, Birmingham B219EE www.silveragebooks.co.uk

Harry Turtledove - American Empire 1: Blood and Iron

Hodder & Stoughton, 2001, 503pp, £18.99 ISBN 0-340-71551-0 The astoundingly prolific Turtledove embarks on yet another alternate-history war series following on from The Great War quartet, in which the United States America, in alliance with Germany, had defeated Great Britain, France and the Confederate States of America. But now, in 1920, The triumphant US, under Roosevelt, swings towards socialism while the defeated and economically depressed Confederate States are fired toward fascism by a charismatic leader.

H.G. Wells - The Invisible Man

Gollancz, SF Masterworks 47, 2001, 138pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-949-X

The fourth of Wells' novels to be included in the SF Masterworks series. *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds* were combined as Masterworks 24, and *First Men in the Moon* as No.38 in the series.

Chris Amies – *Dead Ground* [P] James Barclay - Nightchild [VL] Stephen Baxter - The Timeships [P] Carol Berg - Revelation [VL] Ray Bradbury - From the Dust Returned [ASaw] Chaz Brenchley - Hand of the King's Evil [P] Jonathan Carroll - *Voice of the Shadow*[P] Suzy McKee Charnas - *The Furies* [CAKG] John Clute - Appleseed [P] Storm Constantine - Crown of Silence [P] Storm Constantine - Way of Light [P] Jack Dann and Janeen Webb - Dreaming Down Under[P] Cecilia Dart-Thompson - The Ill-Made Mute [KVB] Stephen Dedman - Shadows Bite [TB] Stephen Donaldson - The Man Who Fought Alone [IE] Stephen Donaldson - Reed Stephens Novels [IE]

Stephen Donaldson – *Lord Foul's Bane* [P]
Candas Jane Dorsey – *A Paradigm of Earth* [ST]

John M.Ford - The Last Hot Time [AB]

Maggie Furey - Spirit of the Stone [P]

Terry Goodkind - Debt of Bones [IE]

Ed Gorman (editor) - The Blue and the Gray Undercover [PK]

Simon R.Green - Drinking Midnight Wine [SD]

Ray Hammond - Emergence [MG]

Harvard Lampoon - Bored of the Rings [ST]

Brian Herbert, & Kevin J Anderson - House Corrino [AA]

Robert Holdstock - Celtika [P]

Kim Hunter - Knight's Dawn [P]

MacKinlay Kantor - If the South had Won the Civil War [PK]

Ursula Le Guin - The Telling [LB]

Valery Leith - The Way of the Rose [KT]

Ken MacLeod - Dark Light [ASea]

Juliet Marrillier - Child of the Prophecy [CB]

Sean McMullen - Eyes of the Calculor [SJ]

L E Modesitt, Jr. - Ghost of the White Nights [AF]

Michael Moorcock - The Dreamthief's Daughter [P]

Alan Moore,Stephen Bissette et al. - Swamp Thing: A Murder of Crows[JW]

Pat Murphy – Adventures in Time and Space with Max Merriwell [5]

Kim Newman - Time and Relative [GW]

Andre Norton - The Gates to the Witch World [P]

Jerry Oltion - The Getaway Special [CBi]

Fletcher Pratt - The Well of the Unicorn [PH]

John Sladek - The Complete Roderick [MG]

L. Neil Smith - The American Zone [SC]

Sheri S Tepper - Grass [P]

Stephen William Theaker – *Quiet, the Tin Can Brains Are Hunting!*

J.R.R. Tolkien - The Silmarillion [P]

Harry Turtledove - American Empire 1: Blood and Iron[P]

Errol Veith - Screening Science: contexts, Texts and Science in Fifties Science Fiction Films [GD]

Vernor Vinge - The Collected Stories of Vernor Vinge [CH]

Vernor Vinge and others - *True Names and the Opening of the Cyberspace Frontier*[SJ]

Freda Warrington - The Obsidian Tower [GA]

Lawrence Watt-Evans - The Dragon Society [FG]

H G Wells - The Invisible Man [P]

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro - A Feast in Exile [BS]

David Zindell - Neverness [P]