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A detail from a 'cut-away' of Fireball XL5 ©2001 Carlton Books Limited. Illustration (and many others) by Graham Bleathman from *Gerry Anderson's Supermarionation Cross-Sections* by Graham Bleathman and published by Carlton books. Image used with permission.

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• Editorial • Edit

he Arthur C. Clarke Award has come a long way since its inception, and has altered even in the half dozen or so years since I started attending the ceremony. The first year I went we were tucked away, almost, plied with wine and nibbles, before being herded into the Science Museum's lecture theatre for the ceremony. The major drawback of this arrangement was the positioning of the revelry in relation to the um, ah, the facilities... many times there arose the cry, in response to a drunken query, "The toilets are at the end of space". And then we'd go back to the prawn cocktail-flavoured crisp shells, and blame them for our hangover.

There was the sense of us bulging at the seams – in terms of us all fitting into the lecture hall, rather than our overindulgence in saturated fat adding to our collective waist-lines, although the disappearance of the prawn cocktail-flavoured snacks might yet lead to our being leaner and meaner. (Although I still think we need something to soak up the red and white wine.) And so, last year, we moved into the Wellcome Wing, a new exhibition area build with the largesse of one of the world's largest multinational corporations, and we kind of hung around the exhibits whilst the announcement was made.

Perhaps such an arrangement was democratic, as there was no us and them separation of judges, judged, and audience. On the other hand, when the Clarke Jury produces one of its more eccentric judgements, perhaps such a separation is necessary. Unfortunately, it had the feel of someone's leaving do, with the retiree being called upon to say a few words and not interrupt our drinking for too long.

So it was with some relief that the Award for 2001 publication (or 2002's ceremony) was once more in an auditorium – the Science Museum's IMAX cinema. A huge blank screen towered above the Administrator Paul Kincaid, the judges and the judged, and we waited for Sir Arthur's head to materialise above us.

For once I had no idea who would win, no strong sense of whom I wanted to win, and no sense of who was going to be the eccentric choice. The award has never been won by a novel which was known to be part of a series (part one and two of trilogies tend to lose out as the judges can't tell how it will pan out, part three because it's too late in the day), first time novelists stand a good chance and it needed a female winner to even the man/woman balance. Like last year's award, the short list was dominated by British writers; would the jury buck the British boom and vote for the one American on the shortlist – Connie Willis?

Gwyneth Jones was on the ballot again, sharing with Stephen Baxter the unenviable bridesmaid role of author most often nominated without winning (although the BSFA has rightly recognised Stephen's talents, most recently for *Omegatropic*, and we welcome him back to these pages in an article elsewhere in this issue), and her *Bold as Love* was openly part of a series, and

clearly therefore stood no chance.

That just shows what I know; and Gwyneth proceeded to do an impression of Halle Berry's Oscar acceptance, being rendered speechless. Congratulation Gwyneth: it's been a long time coming, but no less deserved for that.

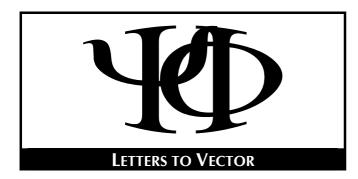
The win casts new light on the scope of the British sf boom we've been experiencing. In the last half dozen years - since Ken MacLeod's launch at Worldcon (and Gary Dalkin, Tony Cullen and myself taking over the reins of Vector, for what that's worth., something like forty issues ago) - we've seen at least a dozen excellent writers of sf and fantasy emerge in this country. Justina Robson and Jon Courtenay Grimwood are just two of this boom, both being short-listed this year; Peter Hamilton was also shortlisted although he is of a slightly earlier vintage (although inexplicably he doesn't have an entry in the CD-ROM edition of The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, released in 1995; was A Quantum Murder [1994] just too late - and was he not around before then?) Paul McAuley was the sixth name on the list, one of the most versatile of his generation of British sf writers, turning his hand to hard sf, space opera, steampunk, technothriller, detective fiction and more. By the time you read this he will have been a Guest of Honour (along with Ken MacLeod and Pat Cadigan) at the Science Fiction Research Association conference in New Lanark, Scotland. More on this, hopefully, in the next mailing.

The gratifying thing about the attention being paid to new British writers is that we're not forgetting those who have been publishing for longer. Gwyneth Jones deserves to be read by a wider audience – her books are challenging but repay any effort – and last year's Science Fiction Foundation event 2001: A Celebration of British Science Fiction and this year's joint SFF/BSFA AGM event, Signs of Life, were right to showcase Gwyneth's (and her alter ego Anne Halam's) considerable talents. Bold as Love and Dr Franklin's Island are two of the most impressive books I've read in the last year.

Meanwhile the meeting room at Friends House was packed in the afternoon of the *Signs of Life* event for Mark Bould's interview with M. John Harrison. Again, Harrison is a challenging writer – as much of his readers as he is of his characters, but he is a unique talent, and it was pleasing to see such a large crowd turn out to hear him speak. Hopefully the interview will see print in a revised form – so those who didn't make the event can see what they missed, and those who did can relive part of the unfolding history of British science fiction.

The BSFA award-winning Omegatropic is available from the 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, High Wycombe, Summer 2002



Matrix Übereditor Gary's Wilkinson article on Alan Moore in V220 generated a couple of letters, including one from Colin Greenland, who wrote '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'. *Gary Wilkinson responds*:

From Gary Wilkinson, via email

In reply to Colin Greenland's letter in *Vector* 222, there is a good reason why I did not include mention of *Promethea* in my article 'Close to Midnight: *Watchmen* and the Magic of Alan Moore:' I had not actually read it at the time. However I have, prompted by Colin's letter, recently read it and I agree with Colin that it is a case of Moore's theories of magic, creation and imagination made flesh

Unfortunately it also confirmed my opinion I had gained when I had previously flicked through it in a comic shop a while ago before spending my money elsewhere – that it's not a high water mark in Moore's oeuvre. Book One mostly consists of little more than an introduction to the leading character (well, 'characters', the many versions of Promethea are a bit confusing). It all seems a bit too loose and unfocused (like *The League of*

Extraordinary Gentlemen in fact). Although there are some fine touches such as the running jokes of the 'Weeping Gorilla' and the mayor's multiplying multiple personalities; and, of course, even bog-standard Moore is a million times better than most of anything else in the comic shop. It's obvious Moore's going for the epic. I'd be interested to see how it shapes up in the long term...

In Vector 223, Mark Greener wrote about the British science fiction writer Barrington J. Bayley and ended by declaring: 'I believe that because Bayley straddles sf's traditional and modern trends, his fiction is ripe for re-discovery'. Now multi-Award-winning Dave Langford offers good news:

From Dave Langford, via email:

Mark Greener missed one useful point in his Vector 223 call for a rediscovery of Barrington J. Bayley's science fiction. Cosmos Books, an imprint of Wildside Press in the USA, intends to reissue virtually the whole of this splendid author's backlist, plus previously unpublished work. A schedule shown to me in 2001 by Sean Wallace, the anglophile editor of Cosmos, featured the following Bayley titles – Reissued collections: Knights of the Limits*, The Seed of Evil. Reissued novels: Annihilation Factor, The Fall of Chronopolis*, Collision Course (aka Collision with Chronos*), Empire of Two Worlds, The Forest of Peldain, The Garments of Caean, The Grand Wheel, The Pillars of Eternity, The Rod of Light, The Soul of the Robot*, Star Virus, Star Winds, The Zen Gun. New releases: The Great Hydration, The Sinners of Erspia*, and two as yet untitled story collections.

Like so many small presses, Cosmos/Wildside has had scheduling problems and difficulty with print-on-demand contractors. But in May 2002, the starred Bayley titles above –

including Mark Greener's commended collection *The Knights of the Limits*, and a new novel – could be found on Amazon.com.

Interest declared: Cosmos/Wildside also publishes me. *The Complete Critical Assembly* (2001, so far available in hardback only) is a one-volume collection of the 101 book review columns I wrote for the British games mag *White Dwarf* and its rivals. *Guts* (2001) is a resolutely tasteless spoof horror novel co-written with John Grant, which the UK Grafton Books actually bought and paid for years ago but lacked the intestinal fortitude to publish. *Up Through an Empty House of Stars: Reviews and Essays 1980-2001* (not yet scheduled) is to be a vast collection of Langford sf/fantasy criticism, including a dozen pieces from *Vector*.

'But,' says the steely-eyed *Vector* reviews editor, 'why didn't we receive those 2001 Cosmos titles?' Alas, although the royalties arrive in good time, this small press is particularly economically challenged when it comes to complimentary and review copies. To wangle a review in SFX, I had to buy a copy of Guts and send it in myself. Grump. \square

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 and its policies should be sent to Matrix or to the administrators – see p. 2 for their contact addresses.

WE ARE PLEASED TO WELCOME THE BSFA AWARD-WINNING STEPHEN BAXTER BACK TO THE PAGES OF VECTOR...

Adventures in the 21st Century: The Future History of TV21 by Stephen Baxter

ere's a trivia quiz for all Gerry Anderson fans. I'm sure you know that Troy Tempest captained Stingray. But who test-piloted Stingray? Answer – Bradley Holden, also known as Captain Grey from the Captain Scarlet series.

And if Steve Zodiac piloted Fireball XL5, who piloted XL3? Answer – Conrad Turner, who went on to become Mysteronised super-villain Captain Black.

These factoids come from a remarkable unified future history – which I will call the 'TV21 universe' – developed between 1965 and 1969, and spun out of the TV shows by the publishing arm of the Anderson empire, the cornerstone of whose efforts was the mighty comic *TV21*. The TV21 universe was surely influential for its generation of readers. I was born in 1957, exactly the right age for the TV shows when they were first shown, and the launch of *TV21* in 1965 – not just a comic, it seemed, but a newspaper from the future – hooked me on sf for good.

But though Anderson's television work itself has been well documented, and is the centre of most fan interest, the comic future history is generally mentioned only peripherally; I've yet to find a good study of it. It has come to seem to me a great lost masterpiece of British comic art.

So why was this dazzling future developed, what was it like, how did its creators go about their work – and why did it die?

For a grounding, let's start with the TV shows.

Gerry Anderson's pioneering puppetry, a technique he

called 'supermarionation', has been well documented elsewhere (see for example the several Anderson biographies and D. Rogers et al, *Supermarionation Classics*¹). After relatively simple shows leading up to his western series *Four Feather Falls*, Anderson hit on the formula that would make his name. With *Supercar*, produced in 1959, Anderson's prime motivation was to achieve fast-moving action with puppets that couldn't even walk convincingly (he would say that he didn't even know what science fiction was). But still from now on his shows would feature fabulous futuristic vehicles, firm-jawed heroes, and impressive miniature sets.

The first of the shows which would prove a cornerstone of the TV21 universe was *Fireball XL5*, 39 episodes of which were produced in 1961 and first broadcast over 1962-3. Colonel Steve Zodiac of the World Space Patrol pilots the mighty XL5 craft against a series of outlandish alien baddies. There is a hint of a wider world beyond the characters' lives; unlike the mad-professor uniqueness of *Supercar*, XL5 is one of a fleet, for instance. I suspect it was *Fireball's* opening sequence that imprinted me, aged 5, on science fiction, and my first bit of merchandising, I think, was a Steve Zodiac puppet.

It had been Lew Grade, head of ATV, who had commissioned *Fireball*. In Grade's terms *Fireball* was successful, having sold to the American network NBC. Recovering production costs was everything, for without that there would be no more series, and the US market, which accounted for 60% of the entire world revenue of

sales, was essential. Now, on the basis of *Fireball's* success, Lew Grade bought out Anderson's company, AP Films, and asked for more shows.

From now on Grade's money would be essential for financing Anderson's expensive shows – but Anderson's relationship with Grade would be long and complex.

With increased funding Anderson became more ambitious. In *Stingray*, produced in colour over 1962-3 and first broadcast in October 1964, Captain Troy Tempest of WASP, the World Aquanaut Security Patrol, goes into battle against Titan and his undersea hordes. With an eye

We were

thrilled. "More

bloody puppets,"

said my dad.

on the US market, the show was set in America, with mostly American characters.

Anderson's apotheosis, of course, came with *Thunderbirds*, produced over 1964-66 and first broadcast in September 1965. Anderson's concept was inspired by news stories of a German mining disaster. We all know the mighty

Thunderbird machines, and Jeff Tracy and his sons, International Rescue's London Agent Lady Penelope, and their arch-foe the Hood, instigator of many disasters. The *Thunderbirds* premise was perhaps Anderson's most uplifting, with the Tracy brothers racing from their sunlit Pacific atoll to save innocent lives – a refreshing difference to the other shows whose characters were mostly government agents.

And the show was *long*. My mother heralded *Thunderbirds'* launch by reading us its listing in *TV Times*: whereas the earlier shows had been half-hour, with *Thunderbirds* you would get 30 minutes – a break for the news – and then 30 *more* minutes. We were thrilled. 'More bloody puppets,' said my dad.

After completing 26 episodes Anderson had expected to finish on a high, and move onto a new concept (perhaps based on the spacecraft Zero X, star of his feature film *Thunderbirds Are Go*). But Grade unexpectedly asked for six more episodes of *Thunderbirds*, duly broadcast in autumn 1966. After that, by late summer of that year, Anderson had been expecting Grade to commission still another series of *Thunderbirds*. But the switchback took another turn. Grade shocked Anderson by telling him he wanted a new show, comprising 30-minute films.

Thunderbirds' longer length had been Grade's idea, his first reaction to seeing the pilot, but paradoxically that length made *Thunderbirds* difficult to sell to the key US market; it never achieved a network sale there.

In response, Anderson came up with Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons, produced in 1967 and first broadcast in September of that year. Captain Scarlet works for Spectrum, engaged in a war with the alien Mysterons. Though the gadgets were marvellous as ever perhaps there was something too dark about the show: the Mysterons' key weapon was the rather grisly resurrection of corpses, which had made Scarlet himself 'indestructible'.

By now Anderson's relationship with Grade was becoming strained; Anderson would say that 'After the shock with *Thunderbirds* being cancelled, I'd just assumed that *Scarlet* would be cancelled after one series.'². Before the last new *Scarlet* episode was broadcast in May 1968, the next project, *Joe 90*, was already in production, and would first be broadcast on 29th September 1968.

Anderson's career would of course go on through more puppet and live-action shows. But *Scarlet* was the last show to be of significance for the *TV21* story.

The chief architect of the TV21 universe seems to have been the writer Alan Fennell.³ My first exposure to Fennell's work (though I didn't know it at the time) was the 1964 *Fireball XL5* annual, all of which he wrote. In 1965, when *TV21* was launched, Fennell was 28 years old.

Fennell had begun his career in the 1950s writing comic strips. In the early 1960s, as assistant editor of *TV Comic*, he had acquired the licence for a strip based on *Four Feather Falls*. Fennell became a regular at Anderson's studios in Slough, and as a result of his work on a *Supercar*

strip Anderson offered him scriptwriting work on *Fireball XL5*. Fennell became a full-time employee, and went on to write 16 of 39 episodes of *Fireball*, 24 of 39 of *Stingray*, and 10 of 32 of *Thunderbirds*.

During 1964, to follow up the October launch of *Stingray*, Keith Shackleton, the merchandising director of AP Films, decided to publish a new Gerry

Anderson comic, to be called *TV Century 21*. (Though the comic's true name would change during its incarnation, I'll refer to it throughout as *TV21*, as we always affectionately knew it.) It would be co-published with City Magazines. Fennell's comics background made him the natural choice as editor.

From the beginning it seems that Fennell and his team were determined to make the new comic more than a compilation of disparate strips. They wanted *TV21* to feel like a glimpse into a genuine, coherent future. This would tie in fans of the different shows, and would help spin out stories from shows whose production runs were already over. So *TV21* was to be a broadsheet comic, and the front cover was to look like a newspaper's (apparently Anderson's idea), with still photographs from the TV shows and headlines about the latest perils encountered by Zodiac and Tempest.

TV21's launch was in January 1965 – three months after Stingray's TV debut, and nine months before that of Thunderbirds. After a nervous start, TV21's sales would peak at 630,000 a week, making it the most widely read British comic since the Eagle.

Aged seven, I devoured every page: '7d – Adventures in the 21st Century – Dateline: January 23, 2065 – Every Wednesday' (though for some reason it was always available on Tuesdays). Even the name was cool – unlike the lame *TV Comic*, say. There were giveaways, including, in the first issue, a cardboard encoding gadget called an 'Identicode', tied to a multi-part competition which baffled everybody, including my parents. Later there was a fantastic Fireball glider you could launch with a rubber band.

And in the brightly coloured strips, you could live all week with your favourite shows – at a time, pre-video recorders, when you were otherwise restricted to a weekly half-hour dose in black and white. In these pages the characters from the early Anderson shows were taken far beyond their somewhat cartoonish TV origins. I particularly remember a very dark *Fireball* story, running from issues 52-63, in which rogue WSP novices nearly kill Zodiac.

Not only that, although the comic included non-Anderson material (like a wonderful strip on the Daleks) the Anderson strips were explicitly linked. They were set against a common background, so that WASP and WSP (the World Space Patrol) were both arms of a unified world government. There was a new common enemy, a rogue

:

Eastern European state called Bereznik, first mentioned in issue 12. Over issues 15-26 was developed a story in which the Kaplan, the leader of the Astrans (aliens oddly like huge jelly beans) is assassinated, JFK-style. Steve Zodiac takes the lead in the resulting struggle – but in issue 22 Troy Tempest tracks down the assassin in WASP's home base of Marineville.

This nascent future history wasn't expressed solely in *TV21*, but also through tie-in novels, annuals timed for Christmas, and in summer specials – three in that first year alone. (The *Stingray* special had nifty peel-off badges as giveaways.) These products would feature biographies of the characters and cutaways of the marvellous vehicles – the 1966 *TV21* annual contained a terrific Fireball. All of this stuff was produced by the prolific Fennell and his team.

But Fennell had undoubtedly faced challenges in creating his universe.

In developing his shows Anderson had followed his own career logic. Though fans will point to evidence of dates and so forth in the series themselves,⁴ Anderson, at least in these early years, was certainly not consciously devising a background common future; as screened, each of his series was (nearly – see below) independent of the rest. Fennell's challenge was to take the raw material of the shows and spin them into the commonality of the TV21 universe – which he and his team succeeded in doing imaginatively and admirably, building on the shows' undoubted common thematic elements.

Fennell's main object, of course, was commercial, to promote the shows and related products. And in this he certainly succeeded. But there was artistry here. I for one was utterly captivated. Of course I knew it was all fantasy, but this future, if technocratic, was sunny and optimistic, a place you would most definitely want to live.

And, most importantly, the intricacy and coherence of this attractive vision made the *TV21* future seem *plausible*. It was my first real exposure to the central rhetorical power of science fiction: the future could be like this, these things could really happen. Future histories have been a key technique of science fiction writers from Heinlein to Reynolds. For the reader, cross-reference and context can provide the magic of a glimpse beyond a single piece of fiction and into a fully integrated future. I'm sure it's no coincidence after this early exposure that I would go on to develop future histories of my own.⁵

Even as *TV21* was launched in January 1965 Anderson was producing his *Thunderbirds* shows, to be screened in October. We, the audience, had to be prepared.

And so from issue 1, *TV21* dutifully ran a strip called 'Lady Penelope: Elegance, Charm and Deadly Danger'. This was a kind of prologue to the still-unseen series itself, describing for example how Penelope meets Parker as he tries to rob her house. It was made clear that Penelope (and so *Thunderbirds*) was part of the TV21 universe; in issue 19 she helps track down the Kaplan's assassin.

But in issue 44 Penelope is sent an 'invisible ray' which the Hood tries to steal. It emerges that Jeff Tracy sent Penelope the gadget as a test of her mettle; by issue 51 he has recruited her as his London agent. 'Thunderbirds are nearly go!' says Jeff.

And from issue 52, published on 15th January 1966, in the pages of the comic indeed they were. The first Thunderbirds giveaway I recall was a cardboard International Rescue hat. I walked around with a kind of

envelope balanced on my head, until my dad showed me how you had to fold it out and 'pop' it into shape.

From issue 52 to 140 (January 1966 to September 1967) the Thunderbirds were pretty much pre-eminent in the pages of TV21. Memorably drawn in centre spreads by Frank Bellamy, they went to places the TV shows couldn't match (such as a disaster in a mighty Atlantic tunnel (issues 73-92) and a jaunt to a jungle-covered Venus (83-98)). And these strips were tied into the established TV21 universe. Gordon Tracy, pilot of the submarine Thunderbird 4, had once worked for WASP, and the Tracy brothers battled the bad guys from Bereznik (issues 105-9), rescued World Army crews from the Arctic (issues 99-104), and so on. Sometimes the wider background was used to pose Jeff Tracy tough dilemmas. In issues 110-117 an agent for the World Security Council is trapped in Bereznik; should International Rescue violate its vows of political neutrality and get him out?

Meanwhile, in the real world, things were going from strength to strength. AP Films Merchandising had become Century 21, and on the back of the success of *Thunderbirds* Shackleton introduced a new comic called *Lady Penelope*, in which that lady's sidebar adventures were developed.

But during 1967 the TV21 universe began to change again.

To the best of my knowledge, *Captain Scarlet*, first aired in September 1967, is the only one of Anderson's shows in which he made an explicit link with other productions.

In 1966 the feature film *Thunderbirds Are Go* saw the Tracy brothers rescue the crew of a new interplanetary spacecraft, the Zero X. In case anybody missed the film (as I did!), over Christmas 1966 *TV21* re-ran its story as a photo feature. Then, from issue 105 (January 1967) onwards, a new strip featuring the adventures of Zero X began to run (as noted, Anderson had considered this craft as the basis for a new series). Unlike Fireball XL5, Zero X was confined to the solar system.

And in its first adventure (issues 105-9) Zero X makes a return trip to Mars, where it comes under attack from firebreathing rock snakes.

All of this, of course, was a softening-up prelude to *Captain Scarlet*, whose inciting incident, shown in its first episode, was a mistaken attack by a Zero X crew, led by Captain Black, on a Mysteron complex on Mars.

More material built anticipation for the new show. *Lady Penelope* ran a strip showing Scarlet's female fighter-pilot colleagues the Angels being recruited by an as-yet unknown agency. Meanwhile in another Century 21 comic called *Solo* (starring *The Man from UNCLE*) there were text articles warning of an alien malevolent force at work, and an interesting (pre-*X Files?*) strip called 'The Mark of the Mysterons' about alien bodysnatchers at work in 1967, a century before Scarlet.

These were the first shots in the biggest TV tie-in merchandising assault Britain had yet seen. In the endless drive to recoup production costs merchandising had come to be seen as an essential source of income. There would even be a fake pop group, The Spectrum, to sing the show's closing credits.

And by now Fennel's TV21 universe was clearly seen as a crucial marketing tool. Months before the series had finished filming, Fennell and his team had made a determined effort to reconstruct the TV21 universe to accommodate the elements of the show.

But the Century 21 titles had become so successful that Fennell himself couldn't work on the new TV show. And he found Scarlet difficult to work with. For one thing the show, still in production, kept evolving. Anderson liked to work without a 'bible' for his shows, and with completed scripts only one episode ahead of filming, so that the concept would evolve as the writers, actors and directors reacted to the final look of the puppets and the sets. For example, Captain Black was supposed to have been killed off in the pilot, but Anderson liked the look of his pallid Mysteronised face, and promoted him to become a major element of the show.

And besides, Fennell hit some conceptual problems. 'What works in film doesn't always work in comics,' he would say.⁶ 'An indestructible hero presents problems in comics because there is nothing that can threaten him and therefore there is no drama.' There was no kryptonite for Captain Scarlet.

At last, *TV21*'s issue 140 (23rd September 1967) ran a front cover feature on Captain Black's mysterious return from Mars. Over in *Penelope* in the same week the Angels were revealed actually to have been recruited by Spectrum. All this was timed for 29th September, when the *Scarlet* TV show premiered on ATV Midlands.

From that week the Captain's adventures began to feature in the pages of *TV21*: the Mysterons debuted in uncompromising fashion in issues 141-149, attempting to destroy the seat of the World Government by crashing Spectrum's Cloudbase onto it.

It was perhaps in the next few TV21 issues – from 141 to 154, published from September to December 1967 that the TV21 universe reached its full flowering. All four of the canonical strips, Fireball, Stingray, Thunderbirds and Scarlet (along with Zero X), were running side by side in the comic. Under a World President and a World Senate, sitting at Unity City in Bermuda, the Supreme Headquarters Earth Forces runs the World Navy, the World Army Air Force, and WASP and the World Space Patrol. The latter has three fleets, of XK shuttles to Moon bases, the Zero X series for interplanetary flight, and the mighty interstellar XL squadron, run from Space City in the Pacific. Spectrum, meanwhile, is a rapid-response agency reporting directly to the President, actually set up before the encounter with the Mysterons. All of this is necessary to counter threats to world peace from such foes as Titan, Bereznik and assorted hoodlums and terrorists.

Scarlet would combat Mysteronised WASP and WSP agents, and call on those agencies in his battle against his relentless foe. There were sidebar stories too. As well as Zero X in *TV21*, the adventures of the Angels continued in *Penelope* – and there was even a one-page strip about the adventures of the Spectrum pop group.

Out of all this material, a detailed chronology was built up, to be reconstructed and argued over by the fans from that day onwards (see for example www.members.tripod.com/chris_bishop_ca). This stretched from the Mysterons' abandonment of Mars in 1901, through a Third World War in the 1980s to the establishment of Bereznik and the World Government, and the events of the TV series themselves, generally taken to conclude in 2069.

The *Scarlet* characters were given biographies to fit in with this background. This was left to the tie-in writers. As Fennell said, 'The film people were more concerned with the visual side, so they didn't have time to produce character profiles. Instead we'd get together round a table and decide where each character came from.' Thus the

prior careers of Black in WSP, and Grey in WASP. Lieutenant Green, the Uhura of Cloudbase, was formerly a WASP hydrophones operator, like Troy Tempest's chum Phones.

And there were tie-in novels, provided by the Century 21 writers to Armada Paperbacks (For Boys & Girls, 2s/6d) under their house pseudonym of 'John Theydon'. Some of the writing could be fine. In the first Scarlet novel, Scarlet and Rhapsody Angel visit a 2067 London (which as luck would have it is about to be assailed by a Mysteron-controlled freak storm). This is no wiped-clean cartoon future, but one that has grown out of the present: 'Most of the old historic buildings remained, carefully restored ... And towering above it all ... Nelson gazed stoically out of his one eye with apparent stone-faced disapproval of the vast changes he had witnessed to his beloved city.' I am sure these books led me to a taste for adult sf.

There was some contradiction, of course. *TV Tornado* (another City title carrying on from *Solo*) ran stories about the wider misadventures of the Mysterons, developed here as formless beings somehow controlled by a giant computer. But in the 1967 *Captain Scarlet* annual they were a 'strange race of people from an unknown galaxy' who had built a computerised city on Mars. (This may have reflected some conceptual muddle in the show itself, which after all Anderson made up as he went along.) Meanwhile some concepts were exploited in the tie-in material that had been floated for the TV show but either dropped or never developed, such as Scarlet's queasy 'sixth sense' when in the presence of a Mysteron agent.

I continued to be utterly absorbed by all this. In the spring of 1968 I was bedridden for a few weeks with a nasty stomach bug, and spent much of the time reading through my stack of *TV21s*. There were still links back to the earliest issues: for example a *Fireball* strip in issues 149-154 featured the Astrans again, characters first introduced around 130 issues ago, a long time ago when you're 10 years old. Enmeshed in interconnections, I fell even deeper into the world of science fiction, arguably never to resurface.

But, just as in another part of the forest the Beatles were following up *Sergeant Pepper* with *The White Album*, so *TV21*'s brief and brilliant period of creativity was already ending.

As the run of the *Scarlet* TV show continued, the creative teams focussed on their main asset. From issue 155, dated 6th January 1968, *TV21* was relaunched – no longer *TV Century 21* but simply *TV21*. The Spectrum logo was incorporated into the *TV21* masthead, Scarlet's strip was promoted to four full pages a week, and the 'classic' newspaper-style covers were replaced by the first page of Scarlet's weekly adventure. Perhaps this was inevitable, but the dropping of the front-page gimmick made *TV21* seem just another comic.

And to make room for Scarlet the first of the canonical strips, *Fireball XL5*, was dropped after issue 154 (though a series of text adventures continued through to issue 167).

Then *Stingray*, the first star of the comic, was dropped after issue 189. Troy Tempest went out with a bang, in an ongoing story that spanned issues 155 to 189 (January to August 1968) in which he is apparently framed for sabotage by the World Government, steals Stingray and battles to clear his name – a pretty good exeunt.

But for these old shows the sustaining oxygen of the TV21 universe had run out. After all, even when TV21 was

first launched *Fireball's* first TV run had been over for eighteen months; it's hard to imagine a new comic featuring such 'old' material nowadays. But I was beginning to think I was the only person on Earth who remembered *Fireball*: at age 10, I was an old fart.

By now the Century 21 machine was cranking up for the TV debut of *Joe 90*, in September 1968. But this time the merchandising approach was different. Joe would not feature in *TV21* but was to be given his *own* comic, which would feature such non-Anderson material as *Land of the Giants*. Although the writers dutifully provided links between Joe and the established TV21 universe, they were never explored, and from this point there was a dissipation of energy and a loss of coherence.

In September 1968, from issue 192, *TV21* merged with *TV Tornado*. For fifty issues the merged comic continued to run the *Scarlet* strip, along with *Thunderbirds* and *Zero X*. But for Scarlet, with the TV show over, the Mysteron threat seemed to be running out of steam. In a story run in issues 196-198 it even appears that the Mysterons have conceded defeat. Spectrum is disbanded, and Captains Scarlet and Blue are transferred to the WSP as pilots of Fireball XL19. But it was all a ruse – as is revealed by good old Steve Zodiac, Anderson's first true hero – and Spectrum is hastily reformed.

Meanwhile, back in the real world, Joe 90 was proving Anderson's least popular endeavour so far: just as the great shows were no longer current, so the current show was no longer great. And during 1969 a government tax on advertising revenue made life more difficult for the TV stations. ATV was forced to cut costs. Century 21 was streamlined; the toy company was closed down and the publishing company sold off.

City Magazines continued with *TV21* for a while, however. Perhaps by now the writers sensed the end: while the TV21 universe had been a merchandising ploy, still it had clearly been a labour of love that its creators were reluctant to leave unfinished. As late as the last issue of *TV21* proper – no. 242, published on 6th September 1969 – the Tracy boys are still fighting Bereznik agents. And the Mysteron war is concluded in the Scarlet strip in issues 234-238, published from July 12th: new cosmic rays immobilise the computers on Mars and the Mysterons are driven off, leaving Captain Black a lifeless corpse. In his last adventure of all (issues 239-242) Scarlet had become a kind of indestructible cop fighting extraterrestrial criminals.

It was the end of the coherent TV21 universe. *TV21* did actually limp on for a while, merging with the failing *Joe 90 Top Secret* comic from September 1969, and later being merged into *Valiant*. But after no. 242 Scarlet and Zero X were gone. A *Thunderbirds* strip continued to appear, but in black and white, and even this would fail to be featured after June 1970.

That still wasn't quite that, however. The liquidation of Century 21 had come too late to stop the preparation for the 1969 Christmas market of a combined *Thunderbirds* and *Captain Scarlet* annual. The annual tried to establish more continuity between the two series, for example with a map of Mars. Meanwhile Century 21 had packaged a diary for Letts. This revealed, for example, that in 2077 the Mysterons negotiated a peace treaty with Earth, signed by Captain Black and the World President at Unity City.

In these late endeavours, Century 21's creative people seemed to be striving for a kind of closure. But their efforts haven't always been welcomed by ardent fans, as some of them contradicted earlier drafts of the future history. For example *Thunderbirds* was now held to be set around 2026; in 2063 Lady Penelope, by then aged 63 and director of the Federal Agents Bureau – FAB – would recruit a young Dianne Simms, later to become Rhapsody Angel. But this violates the continuity not just of the old TV21 universe but the Zero X link between the TV shows themselves.

Anyhow it didn't matter; the bubble had burst. Aged about 12, I was ordered by my parents to get rid of my *TV21* collection. It made sense; we had no room – but what a loss!

*

For me this essay has been a nostalgic labour of love. But I fully admit that my scholarship is a bit dodgy. I have had to rely mostly on secondary sources (such as *Supermarionation Classics* and a listing of all the Anderson strips in *TV21*'s various incarnations⁹). (Any errors are my responsibility, of course.) I'm grateful to Andy Sawyer of the Science Fiction Foundation and the secretary of Fanderson for answering my research queries, but neither the Science Fiction Foundation nor Fanderson hold anything on this aspect of the Anderson saga. Furthermore, sadly, Alan Fennell died in December 2001. It may never be possible to give an authoritative account of the TV21 universe – but it was an important and formative part of my life, and no doubt of others, and I think it's a story worth telling as best it can be.

In later years I met Gerry Anderson himself, when we took part in a signing tour in Ireland. And it has been pleasing to see the TV shows restored. As Anderson himself said, 'Every three years there was a new audience of children and so the shows were repeated and repeated'. From time to time even the old *TV21* strips are reprinted, either in fan magazines or repackaged for those new generations of kids. But all of this seems out of context now, like broken shards of pottery. I feel privileged that it was only my generation that saw the real stuff, the full flowering of Alan Fennell's TV21 universe.

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Messing Around with It

an Interview with Chris Amies by Tanya Brown

Tanya Brown: Chris Amies's first novel, *Dead Ground*, has just been published by Big Engine. Chris, can you tell us about the novel?

Chris Amies: It's the story of an archaeological expedition in the 1930s that sets off to a remote chain of islands in the southern Pacific to investigate a mysterious structure known colloquially as the Shark Temple. It's a structure that's sacred to the island gods. Of course, when they arrive the local people tell them not to dig the temple up. 'Very bad things will happen if you do.' Being arrogant Westerners, the expedition carry on and dig it up, and of course terrible things do happen.

There's quite a bit of a Lovecraft influence in it. I didn't start off writing Lovecraftian stuff originally: I started off writing science fiction. I've always been a Lovecraft fan. I like his purple prose and his names that shouldn't be pronounced by human mouths.

TB: A lot of science fiction writers seem to have this dark, secret fondness for Lovecraft.

CA: Actually, Lovecraft did write science fiction. Although everything he wrote was actually more or less Cthulhu mythos, some things like *At the Mountains of Madness* are essentially science fiction. What you have there is the investigation of a lost civilisation in the depths of Antarctica. Some Lovecraftiana is science fiction. I think it appeals to many science fiction authors and readers.

TB: So you get to write about strange monsters and unhealthy happenings in a Thirties South Pacific. Are the Condal Islands real?

CA: No. They're based partly on the Marquesas Islands, and partly on the Cook Islands. They're at the tail end of the British Empire: they don't actually exist. That's all to the good, because otherwise you have to go and research a real place! If you invent the place, you can play games with it: you can play tunes on the local geography, so to speak. I drew a map – which tells you it *must* be a fantasy novel!

TB: That's almost exactly the opposite of what Liz Williams said in a previous interview, in *Vector* 222, about writing so that she can get to visit real places.

CA: I was reading an article in the *Times* today by somebody who's recently won an award for a novel set in China. He said he'd never actually been to China, and it would have detracted from the novel if he *had* been there. He'd have only been able to write about what he saw when he was over there; whereas so many people who've been to China have written at great length about it, and they can provide very convincing background information for him to use.

TB: Dead Ground, like some of your short stories, foregrounds the idea of outsiders visiting a place. That's a very sfnal theme, the alien incomer.

CA: That's something I've dealt with a lot, that theme of the outsider coming into a place, and the people they meet knowing more about what's going on. It's a classic sf theme from the golden age of sf.

TB: You could have written Dead Ground as an sf novel.

CA: It could easily be sf. That thing that's globbering in the darkness, is it a demon or is it an alien? If it's a demon it's fantasy: if it's an alien it's sf. Sometimes the boundaries are

a bit difficult to mark.

TB: One archetype who appears in several guises throughout your work is the English eccentric. In *Dead Ground* it's spinster-archaeologist Cosima Garton.

CA: I suppose she is an English eccentric, but at the same time she's a woman in a profession which was maledominated at the time. She gets away with a lot more eccentricity, a lot more going off and doing her own thing. I think that's another part of the outsider. People who are outsiders do tend to make their own rules, so to the rest of the world they do come across as eccentric, or very strange.

TB: Why did you start writing?

CA: I first started writing when I was at school. I think I started writing because I liked reading and I wasn't reading the sorts of things I wanted to read. That may have been a function of being at boarding school. There were a limited number of books available: if it wasn't in the school library, there wasn't much you could do about it. This was just before the upsurge of fantasy. The stuff I was reading was definitely sf, whenever I could get my hands on it. Like many people, I went round looking for the yellow spines of Gollancz books in the library. I was reading Silverberg and Zelazny and Cordwainer Smith and stuff like that. My influences weren't fantasy, because there wasn't an awful lot of it about.

TB: You carried on writing when you left school?

CA: I was just writing for my own amusement for many years, until 1989 when I went on an Arvon Foundation course up in Yorkshire, taught by Iain Banks and Lisa Tuttle. That was a science fiction course. Until that point I hadn't actually realised that what I was writing was science fiction. That may sound like an ingenuous thing to say, considering that one of the novels I'd actually written at that point had been a parallel worlds story involving reincarnation in a just-post-revolutionary England! But I looked through the prospectus, and the course that was closest to what I wanted to write was the science fiction course... The class exercise was 'write a story in which one thing is different from our own world'. An idea which I'd been thinking through for a while was, what if the terminal velocity of falling objects - falling humans - was much less? You'd develop flight much earlier, because if you had a primitive flying machine and you fell out of it, you'd bounce. In our world you. might splash, but you wouldn't bounce. I wrote the story based on a variable terminal velocity. It was called 'Terminal Velocity', and it sold to a magazine called *The Gate*. It was published in about 1990.

TB: What was it that made you take your writing seriously enough to go on a course? There are a lot of people who write, but who never take that step.

CA: I was writing: I was churning out the stories and the novels. But I was floundering, because I didn't know exactly what I wanted to write. I thought going on the course would help with that. I needed direction and focus.

TB: You published quite a few stories in various small press magazines. Then you became involved with the Midnight Rose anthologies. How did that happen?

CA: Through the Milford writers' workshop, which happens every year. One year – I think it was 1989 or 1990 – Alex Stewart and Mary Gentle were involved in

setting up Midnight Rose there. They were talking about this series of shared world anthologies that they wanted to put out. There were three basic subjects. I think the first one had already appeared: that was Temps, in which rather like the Wild Cards series in the States - the premise is that superheroes are real. Temps, being British, was slightly more low-key than the American version: no strange costumes, no whizzing around in the sky. The eponymous temps are on a government register and are sent off to do jobs involving their superpowers. The next was The Weerde: the Weerde shapeshifters, a parallel race who were the originals of werewolves, vampires and things like that. The third anthology was Villains, which was a fantasy spoof: heroic fantasy, written from the viewpoint of the villains. I came up with a couple of stories for them: one for The Weerde, which is called 'Rain', is set in Spain in the 1960s, and one for EuroTemps, which is called 'A Virus in the System'. That story got me slightly twitted in some quarters for using a female protagonist. It was set in Greece - all the stories in that anthology had to be set abroad, in a European

TB: 'Rain' got an 'Honourable Mention' in the Year's Best Fantasy And Horror.

CA: It did. didn't it?

TB: Whatever happened to Midnight Rose, anyway?

CA: I think it was a project that ran its course. They said they were going to produce a certain number of anthologies and that's what they did: then the people responsible for it went and did something else. I think there is a place for anthologies like that, because they are a way of getting stories published.

TB: Your short fiction is wide-ranging. I'd class some of it as dark fantasy, some as horror... There's very little straightforward science fiction: there's very little straightforward anything, really.

CA: A lot of it is dark fantasy, yes. If you look at something like 'By the Real Sea' – although that involves some kind of nanomachinery, people getting things from stones that they suck which allow them to become telepathic with the people around them. You could actually see this as a science fiction premise, except that it isn't explained scientifically, and the whole tone of the story is more fantastical. 'In Death's Dream Kingdom' is a straight-downthe-line zombie story, so you can't say that's science fiction. The short stories cover quite a wide range, it's true, but I do tend towards dark fantasy.

TB: You write characters very much *in* places, even when they're outsiders. They're quite rooted in the culture they come from, and also in the country they're living in.

CA: Going back to Dead Ground for a second, you have the native population and you have the outsiders - the archaeological expedition – who come in. Those people who are there already, the native population, have a very strong sense of where they're from. A novel I was working on for a couple of years – which doesn't yet have a proper ending, but I might pick this one up and finish it - was actually set around the area of London where I live. I had some characters who were very, very rooted in that area. I've lived in that part of London for twenty years, I'm a member of the local history society, and I'm generating mythology from what I know about the area. If you look at the stories, 'Rain' in The Weerde did have an outsider - an English ex-soldier who goes to live in south-western Spain, and then really merges into the landscape there. Literally. Being a shapeshifter, he does actually change to make

himself look more like the locals.

TB: He starts off as a tall, blond Englishman. By the time the story takes place, he's short and square and dark. The only way he betrays his Englishness is by a slight accent.

CA: He really has merged in. It's defensive coloration, and it's why he's such a good character to come up against the invader from outside. The invaders are the prehumans, the Neanderthals. They're very badly treated in this story: they were not grunting savages, they did have language and culture, they were just the ones who lost to *Homo Sapiens*.

TB: Dead Ground is being published by Big Engine. You've known Ben Jeapes who runs Big Engine for a while, I believe?

CA: I workshopped *Dead Ground* through 3sf, a writers' workshop which Ben and I have both been in for a few years, and Ben asked me if I would be prepared to submit it to Big Engine for publication.

TB: What do you think about what Big Engine's doing?

CA: I think it's a great effort and one that's been very successful. Big Engine are publishing new titles as well as reprints: they started with Dave Langford's *The Leaky Establishment*, which had been out of print for many years, and which is a great read. Ben's continued the series of *Interzone* anthologies: early ones had been published in the Eighties and Nineties, and the next one is *The Ant-Men of Tibet*. Big Engine is a twenty-first century publisher, really, using new technologies such as print-on-demand.

TB: Tell us about your involvement with the Milford writers' workshop.

CA: I went to Milford many times: I was secretary of Milford for a few years. More recently I've been going to Milford about once every two years, so my finger hasn't been on that pulse quite so much. The whole thing of a Milford is to bring a group of writers together for a week to workshop each other's work. You do get very good discussions, very intense at times. It used to take place by the sea so that people could go down and throw stones at the sea after they'd had their stories ripped to pieces. The whole thing is based on another workshop, also called Milford, that started in the United States. It was established in Britain by James Blish, who lived over here for a while. There's nothing else quite like Milford in Britain.

TB: What's in the pipeline?

CA: At the moment I'm working on a sequel to Dead Ground. The working title is Sea of Stones. Unlike Dead Ground, which is set in the 1930s, this is set in the present day – perhaps slightly in the future. It's the return to Koiha, seventy years on; and, as you might imagine, weird stuff starts to happen. Once again the boundary between science fiction and fantasy is a bit blurred in this – not to mention horror! I'm not sure if it's going to be gorier than Dead Ground. It brings to mind Scream 2, where the characters outline the requirements for a sequel: 'Requirement One: the body count must always be higher than the previous film'. I don't know if this is necessarily true in Sea of Stone.

TB: I think it depends which market you're aiming for. Which market *are* you aiming for?

CA: It's not out-and-out horror. A horror novel should inspire terror, not disgust.

TB: What else? Any more short fiction? Other novels, novellas?

CA: I may try to resurrect the novel I was working on previously, called *Walking on the Bones* – the one set in Hammersmith.

TB: 'In Death's Dream Kingdom', the zombie story, is set

in Hammersmith, and it's very much rooted in place: there's a real sense of familiarity, even if the reader has never been to Hammersmith. I can see the appeal of writing in a setting you don't have to research. What advice would you give to a younger writer? Write what you know? Or make it all up?

CA: Hard to say, isn't it? I would say 'write what you know, but mess around with it a bit: find a new angle on it'. Iain Sinclair does it by drawing a new map of London and superimposing it on the existing one. Moorcock does it by ripping up the real structure and putting in one that might have been.

TB: And what about the characters?

CA: The character comes first of all, I think. Character *in* place. Characters will be influenced by the setting they're in. I think it's important to have very strongly defined characters, but quite often you can't tell how they're going to be defined until you start writing them.

TB: You've written some humorous short stories, though they're not the sort of stories which only exist as a vehicle for humour.

CA: 'Other Stories', about the recluse who finds the Little Folk at the bottom of his garden making shrines with cat skulls in them – 'ah, that's what happened to you, Tashlan', he thinks sadly – was intended as a funny story. The Hammersmith novel, *Walking on the Bones*, will have a lot more humour in it than there is in some of the other stuff I've written. I don't know whether I was actually trying to do a Robert Rankin: Robert Rankin does Robert Rankin. I found that it was quite good to try to write funny stuff over a few years.

TB: What do you think of the current state of humorous fantasy?

CA: I don't really read any. Oh, Pratchett's good. Pratchett writes proper novels that happen to be funny. He proves that you can have humour and tell a proper story at the same time. Some films, and some supposedly humorous

books, only parody one thing. The film *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* was *only* a parody on *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*: if you hadn't seen that, it didn't make sense. A successful parody needs to be part of the genre it's sending up. In the case of Terry Pratchett, he is writing proper magical fantasy novels: he just happens to be sending the genre up at the same time. And they *are* postmodern: they are just pendant off the genre as a whole.

[Audience]: What are the differences between writing a totally familiar setting and one that's totally fictional?

CA: The familiar can actually be a trap as well, because if you're too familiar with something you work really hard on getting it completely right. Sometimes you have to allow yourself a certain amount of leeway. You don't have to describe it in street-by-street detail. You can be fairly vague about it, so that your writing just assumes that background knowledge. Koiha's background came from Gavin Young's book Slow Boats Home and Martha Grimwood's book Islands, and from one or two other things. It's not entirely invented, because although the islands don't exist they can't be too radically different from the Marquesas or Fiji or Tonga. What I do find myself doing, as well as defining the place, is defining the people. I was very definite about where these people came from and what their origin is. I found myself having to work out what the language of these people would be as well.

[Audience]: Did that make you more fascinated with it?

CA: I must have gone fairly deeply into it, but I don't remember getting totally side-tracked. Apart from *Dead Ground* there's one other story set in those islands, called 'Radio Afterlife', and it's off with a magazine at the moment. It would be possible for an invented world to take over, but not completely. By the time I'd finished writing the book, I think I knew the islands fairly well.

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A FILM OF PERENNIAL INTEREST IS RIDLEY SCOTT'S ALIEN. HERE JOHN TRUSHELL EXPLORES THE SOURCES AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT WHICH LED TO THE FILM, AND A HOST OF OTHERS

Material Interests: Repetition and Innovation in *Alien*by John Trushell

Ithough the makers of the film *Alien* (1979) were sued by A(lfred) E(lton) van Vogt for plagiarising his early short stories, 'Discord in Scarlet' and 'The Black Destroyer' (1939),¹ and paid a \$50,000 out-of-court settlement,² the antecedents of *Alien* are considerably more complex than direct dependence upon these two short stories.

Van Vogt's short stories were modelled on John W. Campbell's short story 'Who Goes There?' which was translated into the film *The Thing (from Another World)* (1951), considered to have been "the first real spacemonster film". The *Thing,* in turn, served as a model for the film *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958) – as acknowledged in an interview by screenwriter Jerome Bixby which also bore correspondences with van Vogt's stories. And elements of *It!* were traced by *Alien*: Bixby remarked that 'a degree of affectionate homage was paid to *It!* during preparation of *Alien'*, adding wryly 'was I respected in the morning?'

Thus, allegedly, there is a tangled skein of repetition:

'Who Goes There?' was traced by 'Discord in Scarlet' and 'The Black Destroyer' and translated as *The Thing*; *The Thing*, 'Discord in Scarlet' and 'The Black Destroyer' were traced by *It!*; and *It!*, 'Discord in Scarlet' and 'The Black Destroyer' were traced by *Alien*. Intriguingly, as Eco remarks, this 'repetitive procedure can produce either excellence or banality': ⁹ the banality of *It!* – reviewed in *Variety* as 'old stuff, with only a slight twist' ¹⁰ – was due to an excess of repetition and a lack of innovation; ¹¹ but the acclaim achieved by *Alien* – reviewed in *Variety* as 'an old fashioned scary movie set in a highly realistic sci-fi future' ¹² – was due to its 'provocative proposal of a new (and difficult to accept) world vision'. ¹³

The different receptions of *It!* and *Alien*, by contemporary critics and audiences, can be accounted for in terms of the respective historical contexts of the films. Apropos science fiction films, Mather has observed that: 'all texts have a contextual dimension, but certain genres... require the reader to be conscious of a text's original

historic context if it is to be correctly understood.'14 The stories 'Who Goes There?', 'The Black Destroyer' and 'Discord in Scarlet' were published in Astounding Science-Fiction during the 1930s and established a formula:15 a story pattern - a predatory alien being countered by rational action – was combined with contemporary cultural materials. A central cultural concern was that the Great Depression jeopardised American liberty: people feared $revolution ^{16} \\$ and the menace of totalitarianism,1 particularly the rise of 'an American fascist movement'. 18

Campbell's 'Who Goes There?' concerns the discovery of a wrecked spaceship and a predatory alien by an Antarctic scientific expedition: the shape-shifting alien menaces the expedition - and humanity - but is defeated by scientific deduction and collective action. The story traces anterior and contemporary texts - from the Greek mythology of Pandora's Box, Proteus and the Gorgon, to the Martians and micro-organisms of H. G. Wells's The War of the Worlds (1898)¹⁹ – while evoking contemporary discussions, in erudite and popular fiction and speculative non-fiction of the 1930s, 20 concerning the future of biology. The emphasis on collective action was consistent with the displacement of individualist scientist's exploits by group scientific endeavours in American science fiction of

the 1930s:21 individualism was perceived as having contributed to the 'selfish and materialistic betrayal of the dream'22 which culminated in the Wall Street Crash in 1929 and the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Van Vogt's stories, too, concern encounters between an (interstellar) scientific expedition and alien menaces: respectively, an immortal scarlet devil which

recalls the solitary digger wasp that captures, paralyses and implants eggs in bees that it then stores in burrows, 23 and a feline black destroyer that lives by draining phosphorus from its prey.²⁴ These menaces are defeated by collective action informed not by laws of science but by a theory of cyclical history proposed by Oswald Spengler in Der Untergang Des Abendlandes, published in Germany in two volumes (1918 and 1922) and in English translation as The Decline of the West (1926 and 1928).25 Spengler alleged that history was a succession of cultures, with each culture, potentially, passing through a cycle of 'youth, growth, maturity and decay'. ²⁶ He discerned this 'universal' principle of cycles in precedent cultures - such as Egyptian, Indian, Chinese, Classical and Arabian cultures and traced the onset of decay in contemporary West-European-American culture.²⁷ Both the scarlet devil and the black destroyer are deduced, by the scientists, to be survivors of cultures which have passed through decay to violent dissolution, and this informs their collective actions.

The menace of Campbell's story - which could 'take over the world'28 - and the escalating menaces of van Vogt's stories - a black destroyer that seeks 'galactic power'29 and a scarlet devil bent on the 'domination of the entire universe'30 - are each averted by the actions of a scientific élite: ironically, the intervention of a cultural, potentially authoritarian, élite preserved the liberty of the world/galaxy/universe.

By contrast, science fiction films first released in the

early 1950s tended to be marked by mistrust of scientists consistent with a decline in 'the cultural standing of and post-war anti-intellectualism:³¹ Republican President Eisenhower had criticised 'longhaired academic men in Washington'32 while opportunistic Republican Senator McCarthy's Red Scare-mongering and liberal-baiting had compounded this 'attack on the "egghead"'.33 Correspondingly, the translation of 'Who Goes There?' as The Thing (from Another World) retained the Campbell/van Vogt story pattern - a polar setting, a wrecked spacecraft and a thawed alien menace - but cast the scientists as villains and a collective comprising a military flight crew and civilians as heroes.

The film was resited to Alaska and the Arctic and, topically, referred to the numerous reports of unidentified flying objects [UFOs] in the Pacific North-West during 1947.34 The wrecked spaceship in the film was discovered to be a 'flying saucer' – the term coined by reporters to describe these $UFOs^{35}$ – and the alien was not a shapeshifter but an anthropomorphous vegetable - an 'intellectual carrot' - bent upon self-propagation. The leader of the scientists, Dr Carrington, admires the alien for its inferred vegetable attributes: 'not handicapped by emotional or sexual factors... No pain or pleasure as we

Both the scarlet devil

and the black destroyer

are ... survivors of

cultures which have

passed through decay to

violent dissolution

know it. No emotions. No heart. Our superior, our superior in every way...' Dr Carrington counsels the collective 'to stand here and die without destroying source of wisdom... Civilization has given us orders', but the military/civilian collective set 'an electric fly trap' and fry the alien rather than comply.

When, in the late 1950s, It! The Terror from Beyond Space was released - in a science

fiction 'B' movie double bill with Curse of the Faceless Man, 36 - the translated Campbell/van Vogt story pattern was considered passé when reviewed in Variety:

'It' is a Martian by birth... and a copycat... Most of the film is spent aboard [a] rocketship on its way to Earth, and, to spice up the trip, the monster has stowed away. It kills with a swat of its grisly hands, then sucks all available liquids from its victims.³

The film was set in a near future when America has embarked upon the conquest of space. The United States Space Command [USCC] has launched a spacecraft, the Challenge 1-4-1, on an expedition to Mars, led by Colonel Edward Carruthers, described at a press conference at the Science Advisory Committee, Division of Interplanetary Exploration, as 'the first man to be shot into space, the man who pioneered interplanetary space travel.' The USSC Challenge 1-4-1 crashes on landing, in January 1973, and another expedition - the Challenge 1-4-2 - arrives on a rescue mission, six months later, to find a sole survivor, Carruthers, who maintains that his crew were killed during a sandstorm on the surface of Mars, by an incredible monster. However, the rescuers suspect Carruthers of having murdered his crew for their supplies. Colonel James Van Heusen, commander of the Challenge 1-4-2, is determined to return with Carruthers' confession on tape and 'to turn him over to... court-martial tied up in little pink ribbon'.

Rescuers and suspect take off for Earth, but a monster has stowed away on the rocketship. The monster preys upon the rescuers: the dying and dead are cached in air generation and moisture recovery ducts; the wounded, including Van Heusen, become infected by alien bacteria which attack the bone marrow 'resulting in a leukaemia condition.' The astronauts attempt to kill the monster – with gunshots, grenades, gas, electrocution and atomic radiation – but to no avail. When sealed in the lower sections of the rocketship, the monster breaks into the upper sections. The astronauts retreat, section by section, toward the nose cone where, donning spacesuits, they pump out the oxygen from the rocket to asphyxiate the monster. Carruthers is exonerated, and the surviving rescuers are saved.³⁸

The premise of the film – a lost expedition and a rescue expedition – recalls that of the film *Forbidden Planet* (1956) in which the loss of the Bellerophon expedition is investigated by the spaceship C-57-D, while the footage of the rescue expedition's rocketship is taken from the early science fiction film *Flight to Mars* (1951), described by a contemporary critic as:

one of the 'cheapies'... a Cinecolored voyage to a Mars peopled with very human-looking girls in short skirts.³⁹

While *The Thing* was critical of scientists, 40 *It!* scarcely considered scientists or science, but condemned unprincipled actions: the alleged murder of a crew for their rations by Carruthers; and the perceived vindictiveness of Van Heusen. Although *The Thing* endorsed collectivist action by a military flight crew and civilians to defeat an alien invader, 41 *It!* endorsed collective action by the rocketship's military-technical crew – including the two Finelli brothers and a married couple, Eric and Mary Royce – to defeat an alien intruder. Collectivity and conformity had become givens of affluent post-war America, whether in corporate work or at neighbourhood socials.42

Eric Royce speculates as to the origins of the monster:

'Perhaps there was once a civilization on Mars. It ended. Disease. War. Something terrible. The Martians – what was left of them – went back to barbarism. Savage. Murderous.'

One science fiction film critic, Bill Warren, comments that: 'It's obscure as to why this is more likely than it being a member of a race rising for the first time from savagery.'⁴³ However, Royce's speculation recalls a theme common to van Vogt's early stories: the dissolution of civilisations and their survivors' descent into savagery. Van Vogt's black destroyer recalls its civilization as 'an age of glory that dissolved in a single century before flaming guns' in a war waged due to over-population;⁴⁴ and his scarlet devil recalls its planet, 'ancient Glor', before its destruction by a cosmic explosion.⁴⁵ Moreover, the monster in *It!* recalls both of van Vogt's aliens: the black destroyer which drains its victims of phosphorus;⁴⁶ and the scarlet devil which conceals its victims in an 'air conditioning pipe'.⁴⁷

It! also traced contemporary events when depicting – as prologue and epilogue to the film – press conferences held by a Science Advisory Committee. President Eisenhower, on 15th November 1957, had appointed Dr James R. Killian, President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as the first official presidential science adviser

and chair of the newly-convened President's Science Advisory Committee, elevating the role of scientists and science to a prominent position in American society.⁴⁸ This appointment was a response to the 'deeply felt sense of national crisis'⁴⁹ in the aftermath of the Russian launch of *Sputnik I*, often compared with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor which had brought America into the Second World War.⁵⁰ Eisenhower had been told, in a meeting with leading scientists in the aftermath of *Sputnik I*, by the physicist Edwin Land that 'at the present time scientists feel themselves isolated and alone'.⁵¹

Sputnik I, which had been launched on 4th October 1957, was: 'a sphere about twenty-two inches in diameter, weighing 184 pounds... [travelling] at a speed of up to eighteen thousand miles per hour in an orbit some 550 miles above the earth'.52 Russia subsequently, on 3rd November 1957, launched Sputnik II, an earth satellite weighing 1,121 pounds and carrying a dog, Laika. These events contributed to a Sputnik panic which was compared, by one commentator, to the Red Scare fomented by Senator McCarthy:53 'the cry went up that something was badly wrong with American society, American science, American education'.54 These selfrecriminations seemed confirmed when, on 6th December, 1957, an American attempt to launch a Vanguard rocket ended in fiasco: the craft rose three feet above its launch platform, fell back and disintegrated in a spectacular explosion.55

The New York Times Magazine (1st December, 1957) had demanded 'Are we Americans going soft?' and the New Republic (9th December, 1957) foresaw 'The decline of America'. Time magazine nominated the Russian premier, Nikita Krushchev, as 'Man of the Year' on its cover (6th January, 1958), justifying the choice by contrasting the success of the two Russian *Sputniks* with the failure of the American Vanguard.⁵⁶

The *Sputnik* panic – which Eisenhower speculated 'could be turned to a constructive result'⁵⁷ – provided 'the chief stimulus for reviving the American cult of science and invention'⁵⁸ and led to the foundation, on Killian's recommendation, of the National Aeronautics and Space Agency [NASA], on 29th July 1958.

It! could have been propaganda for American science and invention. An American rocket may have been shown to crash – whether the Challenger 1-4-1 or the Vanguard – but this would be succeeded by another rocket. The Russians may have launched a dog into space, but America would launch a man into space. America would have a USCC, or a NASA.

Unfortunately, while It! may have innovated a repetitive story pattern by reference to contemporary events, these events were 'a certain source of disillusion':59 the Sputnik panic contributed to 'a sharp decline in popularity'60 for science fiction films: 'When artificial satellites and spaceships were still in the realm of imagination, movies could do anything and be anything; space was a weird, mysterious realm. But [after Sputnik]... rather expanded.'61 contracted than filmed SF Subsequently, science fiction films were supplanted in public popularity by gangster and western films.⁶² Science fiction cinema was to languish for two decades - 'critics, science-fiction fans and many movie-goers in general... no longer [had] any respect for the term 'science-fiction' when applied to cinema⁶³ – until the release of Alien (1979): 'many would maintain that Alien' - the film that bore correspondences with It! - 'was in the vanguard of a renaissance in the [science fiction cinema] genre'. ⁶⁴ Effectively, *Alien* was a pastiche of a *passé* story pattern which achieved topical cultural resonance.

The 1979 film opens in space through which fares a commercial spacecraft, Nostromo, towing a refinery processing mineral ore. The seven crew members are roused from suspended animation by the craft's computer, Mother, and directed to investigate a signal – whether a distress beacon or an alarm – emitting from a desolate planet. Bound contractually – by the 'Company' – to comply with Mother's directive, the crew descend by a shuttlecraft, Narcissus, to the planet where a wrecked

spacecraft is discovered. While exploring the wreck, one crewman peers into a large egg from which bursts an alien organism: it affixes itself to the crewman's face. The crew return with the stricken crewman to the spacecraft where he is confined to the infirmary. Later, the crewman is released by the organism and seems to have recovered. However, while eating in the canteen, the crewman collapses and from his chest bursts an alien creature implanted by the organism. The stunned survivors seek the alien which - prowling like Grendel⁶⁵

through the airshafts – stalks and kills the crew in turn.

When two further crewmen have been killed, Mother is consulted: the computer discloses that the 'Company' diverted the Nostromo in order to collect a specimen and considers the crew to be expendable. The science officer, Ash, charged with this collection is revealed, during an assault on other crew, to be an android: it is destroyed. The survivors resolve to destroy the Nostromo and refinery – and the alien – and escape in the Narcissus. Two crew are killed while readying the shuttle, but the last survivor escapes. However, the alien has boarded the shuttlecraft and has to be ejected.⁶⁶

Correspondences with both *It!* and 'Discord in Scarlet' are apparent: the 'rescue' mission and the alien predation upon the rescuers recall the 1958 film; the mode of alien reproduction – after the digger wasp – recalls the 1939 story; and the stalking and caching of victims – in airshafts or air generation and moisture recovery ducts or an air conditioning pipe – is common to all three plots. Moreover, there is a correspondence with *The Thing* insofar as the scientist, Dr Carrington, admires the Thing as 'superior in every way', 'not handicapped by emotional or sexual factors', with 'no emotions [or] heart', while Ash, the science officer, admires the alien as 'a perfect organism' possessing 'structural perfection', 'a survivor unclouded by conscience, remorse or delusions of morality'.⁶⁷

However, this interpretation privileges antecedent science fiction: *Alien* also has correspondences with more contemporary science fiction texts. Ash's assault on the crew recalls the film *Westworld* (1973) in which 'robots run amok in [a] nightmarish extension of Disneyland' – with 'malevolence which goes beyond mere malfunction'⁶⁸ – and 'slaughter the hapless guests'.⁶⁹ Reviewers have remarked particularly the resemblance to *Dark Star* (1974), a film featuring an astronaut who has smuggled an alien creature – shaped like a beach-ball – on board the spaceship on which he serves: the film was scripted – and

the astronaut played – by Dan O'Bannon, the original scriptwriter of *Alien*. The onboard computer 'Mother' and the android Ash – which 'slots into "Mother" like a bullet going into the breach' – recall those 'humanlike computers [which had] become commonplace' in science fiction films: from "Alpha 60" in Godard's *Alphaville* (1965) and "HAL" of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1969) through to "Colossus" of *The Forbin Project* (1969) and the 'Phase IV' of *The Demon Seed* (1977)'. Ash and Mother are the hidden agents of the 'Company' 'prepared to sacrifice the human crew in order to retrieve an alien' and interpreted as 'a fairly transparent metaphor for the

corporate priorities of capitalism'.74 Alien evokes an 'uneasy recognition that now everyone is forced to be a company man or company woman... someone who is finally expendable in the name of profit'.75 The crew are skilled technicians who 'address each other by last names only, work efficiently like anonymous cogs'76 and whose 'feelings and bonds are so severely truncated that a quite literal dehumanization has become perhaps the gravest danger'. 77 Notably, the conflict in Alien 'comes down to a oneto-one battle between the [protagonist] and the alien... as opposed to the

community struggle for existence'.78

The astronauts

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but to no avail.

Here, Alien drew for direction on an anterior erudite text, Joseph Conrad's novel Nostromo (1904).79 The central concern of Nostromo was those material interests that effect material changes or progress which, in turn, 'bring about mental and emotional changes in individuals':80 Conrad described these changes which, 'more subtle, outwardly unremarked, affected the minds and hearts of the workers'. 81 The advocate of material interests. Charles Gould, believes that such interests would impose 'law, good faith, order and security'82 but the critic of these interests, Dr Monygham, reflected that: 'There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and it is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle.'83

The underlying conflict of *Alien* is not between humans and alien - or between humans and computer and/or android - but between 'the human crew... and the exploitative multinational company for which they work':84 the 'authentic moral monstrosity of the piece is the Company, and its fellow corporate predators'.85 This was not merely 'throwaway anticorporatism'.86 During the 1950s and 1960s, America had enjoyed unprecedented prosperity - 'the American dream, a good job, a car or two, and college for their children seemed within the grasp of most people'87 - and many of America's top corporations. had transformed into multinational corporations. But, during the early 1970s, the American economy began to cool - due to 'rising interest rates and inflation, trade deficits, unbalanced budgets, and a growing deficit'89 - and 1973 saw corporations, confronted by declining profits and rising overseas competition, 'demanding contract concessions and productivity gains, and accelerating the shift... [of] manufacturing jobs to lowwage areas of the United States and overseas'.90 One commentator noted a 'revival of 'sweatshop' forms of

production in cities such as New York and Los Angeles... [which] became a matter of commentary in the mid 1970s'. Americans became conscious of being besieged by 'inflation, unemployment, and loss of control in the workplace' and 'seemed to face a future that contained little basis for optimism or faith'. 92

Advances in science and technology were received with caution, 93 due in part to the increasing replacement of

skilled workers by robots and computers as corporations modernised:94 corporationism, automation computerisation and were realistic contemporary cultural concerns. Alien afforded American audiences the vicarious pleasure of witnessing the destruction of the android, the destruction of the computer aboard the Nostromo and the confounding of the machinations of 'the Company' by the destruction of the alien. But the sole surviving

crew member is left in a predicament, in suspended animation aboard the shuttlecraft, dependent for recovery upon 'the Company' which previously had deemed the entire crew expendable.⁹⁵

Alien was not merely 'an old-fashioned scary movie': 96 the film's pastiche of 1930s stories and 1950s films – an expedition menaced by a predatory alien being – evoked nostalgia for the 'mesmerizing lost reality' of the 1950s, 97 the impression of collectivity in an affluent post-war America. 98 But Alien undercut audience expectations by substituting alienation for collectivity.

Three further Alien films have been released, constituting a series within which each film works, as defined by Eco, upon 'a fixed situation and a restricted number of fixed pivotal characters, around whom the secondary and changing ones turn... [to] give the impression that the new story is different from the preceding ones'.99 The four Alien films are 'united by two central characters, Ripley [the sole survivor of the Nostromo] and the [alien] in all its forms', 100 and by the material interest which the alien and/or Ripley provide for the 'Company' or other corporation. While 'to serialize means, in some way, to repeat', 101 each Alien film tracing attempted innovations by anterior

contemporary texts – plundering 'other genres, other modes of story organisation'¹⁰² – and by evoking contemporary cultural concerns and discussions. *Aliens* (1986) drew on 'all the conventions of the 1980s Vietnam film'¹⁰³ become 'a war film about Vietnam (including a discussion of friendly and unfriendly technology)'. ¹⁰⁴ *Alien*³ (1992) concerns the crash-landing of Ripley and the alien on a penal colony/monastic community which has been

taken as a metaphor for infection by AIDS, 'a mysterious deadly organism attacking an all-male community'. The film traces the trials, the temptation and the self-sacrifice/suicide of Ripley which, for some critics, bear correspondences with the martyrdom of Saint Joan in *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928). 106 *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) has a new corporation, United Systems Military, which manifests its material interests by cloning Ripley and the alien. Cloning had been a recurrent

motif in debates of the powers and ethics of biological technology since the late 1960s¹⁰⁷ – and a staple of science fiction texts from Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World* (1932) to Steven Spielberg's film *Jurassic Park* (1993) – but had become a reality with an announcement in *Nature*, in February 1997, that a team at the Roslin Institute, Edinburgh, had developed a technique for cloning a sheep.¹⁰⁸

However, despite the attempted innovations of *Aliens*, *Alien*³ and *Alien: Resurrection*, each successive film fundamentally repeated the formula of *Alien*: a story pattern – a predatory alien countered by rational action – combined with a pessimistic world vision of alienation, dehumanisation, exploitation and rampant material interests. The provocative vision – an extrapolation from contemporary West-European/American cultural concerns – contributed to *'Alien's* boffo box office' which undoubtedly assuaged those 'minor indignities... [due to] vague cries of plagiarism'. ¹⁰⁹ But repetition has rendered the provocative vision of *Alien* banal in the subsequent *Alien* series: old material – with only slight twists – with which familiarity has bred, if not contempt, then disinterest.

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Carl Dreyer (dir.) La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc (Société Générale des Films/Gaumont, France, 1928).

Lesley Selander (dir.) Flight to Mars (Monogram, US, 1951).

Christian Nyby (dir.) The Thing (from Another World) (US, RKO, 1951)

Fred McLeod Wilcox (dir.), Forbidden Planet (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, US, 1956).

Edward L. Cahn (dir.) *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* [also known as *It! The Vampire from Beyond Space*] (Vogue Pictures/United Artists, US, 1958).

Edward L. Cahn (dir.) *Curse of the Faceless Man* (Vogue Pictures/United Artists, US, 1958).

Michael Crichton (dir.) Westworld (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer,

US, 1973).

the 'authentic

moral monstrosity

of the piece is the

Company, and its

fellow corporate

predators'.

John Carpenter (dir.) Dark Star (Bryanston Pictures, US, 1974).

Ridley Scott (dir.), *Alien* (Twentieth Century Fox, US/GB, 1979).

James Cameron (dir.) *Aliens* (Twentieth Century Fox, US/GB, 1986).

David Fincher (dir.) *Alien*³ (Twentieth Century Fox, US/GB, 1992).

Jean-Pierre Jeunet (dir.) *Alien: Resurrection* (Twentieth Century Fox, US, 1997).

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The author wishes to express his gratitude to Dan Clayton and

colleagues on Scarlet Street.

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WRINKLES IN OUR MINDS: THE RELEVANCE OF *REMNANT POPULATION*by Mark Greener

he quest for longevity, the consequences of immortality and the societal murder of the elderly are sf staples. Indeed, some of the greatest sf books explore these themes. However, these books aren't really about ageing. They're about avoiding our inevitable decline into senility. So, for example, those immortals who live forever while ageing terribly reinforce the value of youth.

In many ways, sf is youth-obsessed. For example, numerous sf stories belong to the literary tradition of *Bildungsroman*; stories about growing up. Indeed, *Bildungsroman* is a central theme in fantasy and sf from *Frankenstein* (1818), to *Star Wars* (1979), to the *Roderick* books (1980, 1983). In contrast, few sf and fantasy books deal with the consequences of 'real' old age. That's why Elizabeth Moon's *Remnant Population* (1996) makes a refreshing change and could even prove a landmark novel.

Remnant Population taps into an important societal trend. As I pointed out (if the editor will allow a blatant plug) in a recent book, attitudes towards ageing underwent a marked sea change in the latter half of the last century. Jung noted in the 1930s that many people found their lives

increasingly devoid of meaning or purpose as they got older. However, as we increasingly tackle the diseases of old age, the time we spend in the autumns of our lives increases. So, armed with their greater affluence, older people increasingly seek out meaning and purpose in later life.

As a result, old age could be something to look forward to. As Thomas R. Cole notes in his seminal book *The Journey of Life* (1992), the elderly often experience 'higher peaks and greater depths' in life than younger people. Moreover, these peaks and troughs 'enrich reality in later life'. And our need as individuals and society to recognise and benefit from this enriched reality seems to be the core message in *Remnant Population*.

Remnant Population focuses on Ofelia. She's had a hard life. Now, with her children grown and married, and her husband dead, Ofelia simply wants to tend her garden in peace. But the Company loses the franchise on the planet she's colonising. Ofelia isn't about to leave forty years of her life behind and transfer to a new home. So, after helping the rest of the village prepare to leave, she hides from the Company. And as Ofelia's old, the company makes little attempt to track her down. (This simply underscores the low value society places on the elderly, especially once they are past their economic prime.)

They'll tell her family that she died in transit.

Soon another group of colonists lands on a different part of the planet – only to be slaughtered by seemingly primitive indigenous creatures that Ofelia's colony was unaware existed. Ofelia hears the massacre over the radio. Then the indigenous creatures arrive in Ofelia's village, inquisitive about human culture and technology. Increasingly, Ofelia engages and communicates with the creatures. Meanwhile, Earth dispatches a mission to discover what massacred the colonists...

Ofelia is one of the most rounded, one of the most real characters in any sf book. Moon takes you inside Ofelia's mind; you come to understand how older women feel once their offspring leave the nest, their partner dies and they face their declining years alone. (Which, considering I'm a male in my thirties with two young kids, is a remarkable feat.) Moon succeeds because she takes the time to draw Ofelia's motivations, emotions and psychology in considerable depth and detail. The plot moves little for fifty or so pages, as Ofelia explores the abandoned village – which trigger memories and feelings. It's this slow pace, which mainstream literary novels often

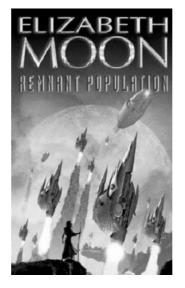
use, but which is rare in sf, that allows this powerful characterisation.

However, Remnant Population also explores some important socio-political issues. One of sf's great strengths is its ability to step back, isolate and comment on current issues facing society. As Thomas Disch notes in The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of (1998) much sf 'is not about predicting the future but examining the present'. And, Remnant Population deals with several important a contemporary themes surrounding prejudice.

Firstly, Ofelia is a fount of pragmatic wisdom and experience. Yet, this lifetime of experience and the old women herself are often disregarded and ignored – even by her children. *Remnant Population* is a powerful and poignant look at the

wisdom that comes with age - and the way younger people misjudge and misinterpret that wisdom and the elderly themselves. The Earth mission, for example, often dismiss Ofelia's take on their situation as the signs of encroaching dementia, simply and only because it doesn't fit easily with their preconceptions.

Secondly, the mission from Earth sent to investigate the massacre exudes a dangerous mix of ignorance and arrogance: the main ingredients behind prejudice. Indeed, you can read parts of *Remnant Population* as a post-colonialist view of the hubris and racism of more



technologically advanced civilisations towards economically deprived nations on Earth. However, Moon offers some hope for the human race: empire building isn't on the future Earth's agenda. Nevertheless, Remnant Population offers several insights into contemporary racial and ethnic problems. Indeed, the book seems a passionate, extended plea against prejudice in every part of society in all its myriad forms.

Finally, Ofelia is accepted as part of the alien society as an 'aunt' to the newborn brood. This suggests, perhaps,

that certain biological imperatives are universal. Moreover, the idea fits in well with current thinking on the role of the menopause.

Postmenopausal woman pose an evolutionary conundrum. According to strict Darwinian theory, a relatively early end to reproduction should compromise a woman's chances to spread her genes. Therefore, the menopause should be selected out during evolution. So why did the menopause arise early in human evolution - more than one and a half million years ago? And why as lifespan increased, didn't reproductive life lengthen?

The menopause seems to be almost

unique to humans. Fertility declines in many non-human primates and other animals with advancing age. Yet, humans are almost unique in undergoing a menopause per se. Only the pilot whale also experiences a menopause and this suckles its young for up to fourteen years. In other words, both humans and pilot whales need to invest considerable time and energy bringing up their young before they are independent.

So, over the last fifty years or so, researchers have proposed several theoretical solutions to the menopause conundrum. None is universally accepted, many are hotly debated and there are some variations on each theme. For instance, according to one theory, the menopause is simply a by-product of ageing: women outlive their ovaries. However, older women's experience may mean that they are better able to locate and process difficult foods, which extends their lifespan. In other words, the menopause might be an epiphenomenona arising from the type of wisdom Moon describes so eloquently in Remnant

According to another theory, the menopause forces women to invest in their existing offspring, rather than spreading their gene pool more widely, at an age when childbirth becomes more risky. Even today, women in their forties are some five times more likely to die in childbirth than women aged between twenty and twenty-four years. If the mother died, the chances that the children would survive would be considerably reduced. Thus, as Shanley remarks: 'it appears to make sense to cease having more children when the risks outweigh the benefits.'

The final theory holds that postmenopausal women exist because childbirth is inherently hazardous and bringing up children is difficult. So, grandmothers evolved to share childcare. This would increase their daughters' fertility: the young women would need to devote less energy to childcare, there would be a reduced risk of mortality in childbirth and an increased chance that orphaned children would survive. Again, Remnant Population picks up on this theme.

The jury is still out considering which of these theories is the most likely. Nevertheless, by exploring the role of the elderly, by highlighting their wisdom and value to society Remnant Population helps inform the debate about the role of older people in society. It's a telling point that the technologically advanced humans sent to investigate the massacre don't recognise Ofelia's value, while the

> supposedly primitive indigenous creatures embrace her.

The sixteenth century French been neglected. Remnant

age might be something worth looking forward to.

essayist de Montaigne once noted that that 'old age puts more wrinkles in our minds than on our faces'. That's no longer the case, provided we avoid the devastation of dementia. The elderly play an important role throughout human history - it's just that in the youth culture of the last few decades, Population reminds us of the value of older people; the wisdom and freedoms that age can bring. And Remnant Population suggests that some of the peaks and troughs that come with old

All this makes Remnant Population an important book. It is one of the first in the sf genre to tackle the pressing contemporary issues surrounding ageing - not by advocating youth, but by highlighting the elderly's potential to develop an enriched reality. As the proportion of elderly people in the population grows, exploring the nature of old age could be a fertile ground for sf (especially as the writers themselves age). And I hope that we'll look back in a few years and see that Remnant Population was among the first books in a new trend in sf.

Notes and further reading

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Parts of this article previously appeared as part of Mark Greener's review of Remnant Population for the March issue of SF Crowsnest (http://www.computercrowsnest.com/index.html).

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Mark Greener's appreciation of Barrington J. Bayley appeared in Vector 223 — Eds.



First Impressions

Book Reviews edited by Steve Jeffery

All novels marked: 🕮 are eligible for the 2002 BSFA Award for Best Novel.

All collections and anthologies marked: 🥒 contain stories that are eligible for the 2002 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

Poul Anderson – Going for Infinity

Tor, New York, 2002, 416pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-765-30359-0

Reviewed by Mark Greener

Perhaps it's a sign of age, but increasing numbers of the authors that stimulated my interest in sf and my career as, a scientist and then a writer, seem to be passing away. Poul Anderson passed across the true final frontier in 2001. However, Anderson bequeathed us a remarkable body of work and the new anthology *Going for Infinity* offers a fitting testament to this master of sf.

I'm probably preaching to the converted, but Anderson helped define the genre and anyone with even a passing acquaintance with sf and fantasy should be familiar with his work. Going for Infinity isn't a bad place to start. Anderson offers a brief biographical sketch, which explains his first fascination with the genre, his family background and the odd spelling of his first name. He supports each selection with a brief note, which are sometimes anecdotal, sometimes insightful but never dull. If you have the stories in your collection, it's worth reading Going for Infinity for these alone. However, for me they underscored how little we understand about the personal influences and antecedents that shaped the genre's early development.

In general, *Going for Infinity* is a strong collection. Almost inevitably some of the stories have a quaint period charm. For example, 'Journey's End', first published in 1957, is, Anderson admits, a story he could write better 40 years later. It seems dated in style, intellectual content and execution. But, as Anderson comments, the 1950s were

another country.

On the other hand, some stories seem, if anything, more relevant today than when they first appeared. 'The Saturn Game', for example, explores how fantasy can shape reality. Anderson's tackles the subject with panache and considerable psychological insight. As society moves increasingly towards a virtual world, it makes compelling reading. Yet Anderson published 'The Saturn Game' twenty years ago.

Going for Infinity also includes some timeless classics that I suspect our grandchildren will read, such as 'The Shrine for Lost Children', a genuinely touching tale, the marvellous 'The Queen of Air and Darkness' or the 'Problem of Pain', which verges on the philosophical. These are close to being masterpieces.

All anthologies are subjective and, given the wealth of gems on offer, it seems churlish to criticise the book for not including this-or-that favourite story of mine. So I won't, especially as *Going for Infinity* is a fitting testament to a remarkable author who made an enormous contribution to the genre. Nevertheless, *Going for Infinity* is also a book tinged with a profound sense of sadness. It shows, all too vividly, just how large a talent sf and fantasy lost when Anderson passed away.

Clark Ashton Smith – *The Emperor of Dreams* Gollancz Fantasy Masterworks, London, 2002, 580pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-575-07373-X Reviewed by Jon Wallace

Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961) was one of the classic writers of fantastic fiction of the 1920s and '30s. When I

was beginning to read horror, Smith and Lovecraft were the boys! But nostalgia alone isn't what makes it a pleasure to have received this book for review.

These stories were among the first. Their dark pages are the spawning ground for images that stalk through horror today. The Necronomicon was born here (and in the works of Lovecraft), gods and demons with jaw-twisting names (such as Hzuilquoigmnzhah) ooze, slither and deliquesce through these pages.

The imagery in these stories has become clichéd through imitation and lampoonery, but it would be poor work that relied solely on imagery. These tales have another important component. They

have structure, and it is in the building of this structure that Ashton Smith excels. His first love was poetry and language, and this shows in such places as the opening sentences of each piece. Take this from 'The Dark Eidolon':

On Zothique, the last continent of Earth, the sun no longer shone with the whiteness of its prime, but was dim and tarnished as if with a vapor of blood...

An excellent, poetic scene-setter, atmosphere rolling out of each word. In a short story, a good opening is worth a page

of description, and Clark knew a good opening.

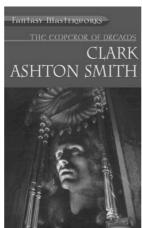
His love of language too, garnered reputedly by his

reading and learning an unabridged dictionary as a boy, illumes these pages with archaic usages and turns of phrase that serve to emphasise that the events unfolding within the stories are eldritch and beyond the ken of normal folk. Sorry about that, it seems to be catching.

The book is rounded off nicely by a 25-page literary history of Clark Ashton Smith (The Lost Worlds of Klarkash-Ton) by Stephen Jones, which serves to put the stories in the perspective of when they were written and lets us see the place of Smith, H.P. Lovecraft, August Derleth and *Weird Tales* in the evolution of Smith's output.

This Fantasy Masterworks collection brought back all those *Pan Books of Horror*

that sustained me through secondary school. The experience of reading them all together, though, was a bit harrowing. There is only so much awful death that you can take before you get jaded. A general flaw with short story collections is the tendency to flip from story to story until they all blend together, when really the reader should dip in and read them as isolated pieces. This is more so in the case of *The Emperor of Dreams*. An enjoyable collection, but one to be dipped into rather than eaten whole like the hapless Avoosl Wuthoqquan...



Chris Bunch – *Dragonmaster Book 1: Storm of Wings*Reviewed by Andrew A. Adams

Orbit, London, 2002, 409pp, £9.99 ISBN 1-84149-104-7

Keviewed by Andrew A. Adams

Chris Bunch is an American ex-serviceman, and this shows quite heavily in his writing. *Storm of Wings* is part of the small but growing sub-genre of military fantasy. While military sf has been around for quite a while, military fantasy has been much more scarce. While wars feature very often in fantasy stories, it's far more common for

fantasy novels to focus on the royalty or the magic users involved rather than on the military types.

This book, the first of a new series called Dragonmaster, is about a young lad, Hal Kailas, who goes from the son of a tavern keeper to a knight by being damned good at what he does, which is ride dragons. The dragons here aren't intelligent and telepathic like McCaffrey's. They're more like horses which can fly.

The basic storyline, once you get down to it after a bunch of scene-setting and character creation, is something of an analogue of the First World War, when the development of aircraft gradually became an apparently important aspect of warfare. Starting from

simply an observer corps supporting infantry and marine operations, the dragon riders build up to air aces, with military blunders, personal tragedies, treachery and scheming along the way.

Bunch's writing is workmanlike; not brilliant, but fairly engaging. The characters are generally likeable. Kailas has

good depth of character, going through various personal development stages and different viewpoints. By the end he's come through various fires and ended up as the senior air ace working for the 'good guys' side in the war. Attempts to introduce plot twists and intrigue differ in their success, with some being so obvious that you wonder the

characters can be so blind. Despite these flaws, though, the story hangs together well enough to maintain interest.

There are some interesting insights into the development of warfare from medieval to modern styles within this text. One noble character even explains to Kailas the major difference: quartermasters and logistics.

This doesn't glorify war. People die, for both noble and ignoble reasons. Kailas' side isn't altogether perfect. The opposition is not a dark lord, but simply a powerhungry monarch. The stage is set for further developments in the war, and particularly in the personal feud between Kailas and his

'Red Baron' adversary, Bayle Yasin.

A refreshing change from dark lords and quests. Intelligent usage of resources, physical, magical and informational. Worth a look for those who don't mind a military viewpoint.



Terry Bisson. - The Pickup Artist

Tor, New York, 2002, 240pp, \$13.95 ISBN 0-312-87421-9

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

It's easy to sympathise with the dilemma Terry Bisson suggests in *The Pickup Artist*, that of the mass of cultural artefacts steadily accumulating in museums, libraries,

galleries, shops, etc, etc. You see, there's quite enough of the stuff floating about out there already – where's all the new stuff supposed to go? I have trouble enough keeping up with the new books that need to be read, without simultaneously absorbing the 'classics' and rereading my favourites.

Luckily Bisson has an answer, of sorts. So that we don't drown in our own culture and so that future Piranesis, Prousts or Presleys are not crushed by the weight of their predecessors' work, it has been agreed that space must be made for the new. Thus, a monthly lottery takes place to decide which artists will be consigned to the dustbin of history and a random selection of films, books, art and music are regularly deleted – every single example of them tracked down, brought in and destroyed.

Within these simple rules there are no exceptions, and fame or 'relevance' is not a recognised defence.

Hank Shapiro works for the Bureau of Arts and Entertainment. Each day he follows a list of artworks scheduled for deletion, e.g. *The Fugitive* (Harrison Ford version), John Grisham's novels, paintings by Rockwell Kent, etc. It's a mundane job but Hank is a mundane guy leading a mundane life. Things start to slip a little when he

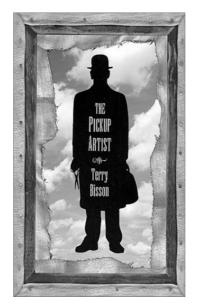
picks up a Hank Williams LP that catches his eye – and then slip a lot when he tries to listen to it.

The Pickup Artist is written in deadpan crystal-clear

prose that perfectly suits Hank. As we progress steadily from order to chaos following the collapse of his empty life around him, Hank's narrative voice remains the same – it is his surroundings that change as the story gradually moves from an account of a perfectly normal life to a desperately self-deceiving and blackly humorous road-trip apocalypse. In between slices of this descent into the maelstrom are meticulous alternate chapters dealing, textbook-fashion, with the history of Hank's world which serve as interesting philosophical counterpoints to Hank's narrowly focused narration.

However, much as I enjoyed this book – and I really did enjoy it a great deal – I have to admit that I'm not sure what it was I was supposed to learn from *The Pickup Artist*. There are lots of sharp (and funny) satirical points made, and the

question 'when does the accumulated wisdom of so much art become a burden?' is a good one. However, at the end of the day *The Pickup Artist* was, for me, a funny and interesting read, nothing more, nothing less – a summation that, given the issues Bisson looks to engage with, seems rather damning with (slightly too) faint praise.



Steve Cockayne – Wanderers and Islanders Reviewed by John Newsinger

Orbit, London, 2002, 278pp, £9.99 ISBN 1-84149-120-0

Once upon a time, the Great Being that had created the land placed humankind upon a secluded island, away from the dangers that roamed abroad in the world. The island was not large enough, however, and so humankind was divided into two clans, the Clan of the Wanderers and the

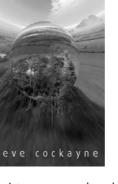
Clan of the Islanders. The Wanderers would go into the world, while the Islanders were to remain at home, preserving the sacred place, in daily communion with the Great Being. But over time, the covenant between the two Clans broke down, they came to look upon each other with envy and resentment, all contact came to an end and eventually the Wanderers forgot about the island. At this time, the Wounded Ones arrived in the Land, building their towns and cities and roads, managing the World with 'grey efficiency'. The Great Being wept as the Wanderers travelled the Land in ignorance of the their destination whilst the Islanders lived in isolation, without contact with or knowledge of the World.

This myth, told to Rusty Brown, one of the protagonists of this tale, by his schoolmaster, provides the foundation for Peter Cockayne's first novel, *Wanderers and Islanders*, Book One of the 'Legends of the Land'. According to the

blurb, the book signals "the arrival of a major new fantasy writer". Quite possibly. Although I must confess that while the book left me impressed, it did not leave me altogether convinced.

Wanderers and Islanders follows three main characters,

all male, Victor Lazarus, Rusty Brown and Leonardo Pegasus, as they confront life's challenges. Victor is the appointed custodian of the great house of mysterious provenance, Rusty is a youth with scholarly ambitions whose world is overturned when he goes feral, and Leonardo is a court magician, decidedly short on magic. The novel interweaves their respective journeys with considerable skill, they are engaging characters, the writing is accomplished, the story compelling. And yet the end is somewhat inconclusive. Who or what is Lee? What is in store for our three characters in the next volume? The book offered this reader absolutely no clues at all



wanderers and islanders

as to what the next instalment will contain. It seemed to lose momentum, peter out. So well worth a read, but as to the question of whether or not Peter Cockayne is a major new fantasy writer, this, I am afraid, still has to be proven.

H. L. Drake – A. E. Van Vogt: Science Fantasy's Icon H. L. Drake, Lancaster PA, 2001, 116pp, \$12.95 ISBN 1-59113-054-9 Reviewed by Andrew Sawyer

Drake's slim, self-published book (also available as a downloadable e-book at \$6.95) is a fan's labour of love rather than the scholarly work it would be interesting to see on this writer. Its faults, including a rather gushing style and some rather dodgy layout, are those of the self-publishing fan, but its virtues, that it is based on a deep regard for the writer and personal contact with him, are also based on its origins. In particular, fans of Van Vogt will find interesting material on his non-fiction and involvement with General Semantics.

Van Vogt, who died at the beginning of the year 2000, was one of the most extraordinary writers of the field, less for his writing itself as for the impact of that writing on fans and his colleagues, and the inability of critics to identify

seriously the nature of that impact. Yes, we know about the effect on Slan on fandom ("Fans are slans!") and Van Vogt's episodic, cliffhanging style which had such an effect on Philip K. Dick. We also have Damon Knight's equally influential hatchet-job on The World of Null-A. What I'm more thinking about is the interestingly divided nature of people's opinions of Van Vogt's novels. Some, for instance, find Slan or Null-A novels of vital importance to the developing story of science fiction. Others find them unreadable. For me, I find The Voyage of the Space Beagle a novel which speaks of the heart of sf's exploration of the physical universe and human knowledge and the sense of the unknown which drives

this. A friend considers *The Weapon Shops of Isher* an extraordinary novel: yet I have tried and failed several times to read it.

This is beyond the simple like/dislike of novels by a writer whose ambitions outweigh his skills. Van Vogt is a genuinely *puzzling* writer both as wordsmith and ideasman. Drake's subtitle, 'Science Fantasy's Icon' offers a suggestion as to an approach. Van Vogt is certainly an iconic figure in the field, but is he, perhaps, a figure who deals with fantasia rather than the scientific method? If so, his relationship to anything like hard sf, but also to the

mainstream of sociological or political thought, is bound to be problematic. Drake discusses aspects of what makes Van Vogt puzzling, including his involvement with Korzybski's General Semantics (on which he is interesting but perhaps himself too close to the doctrine) and the "pulp music" of his style, in which he mentions the way in which Van Vogt repeats and sometimes modulates words or concepts to trigger emotional reactions after Korzybski's model. His single use of the word "sevagram" has become one of sf's catch-phrases. Drake also notes modulating uses of words like "drab" or "gray". Drake's own language triggers interesting trains of thought; he talks about Van Vogt's "almost secular Gnosticism" and offers an explanation of Van Vogt's enigma: how his formulaic

writing was designed so that "readers were to fill-in some sentences or scenes based on individual perceptions experiences. Therefore, what was the best or worst story for one reader could be different for another." But although this fits with what various people have said about Van Vogt we're still waiting for the close analysis which will tell us how and why. He is, perhaps, the sf writer whose work could be most usefully the subject of modern computer-based linguistic analysis. Was he an autodidact of almost genius level or did he weave a clumsy tapestry of a number of oddball theories? Was he, in the last analysis, any good? I think he was, but I confess: I've no real idea why. Very little

I've read, apart from the hatchet-jobs and some typically idiosyncratic stuff from Colin Wilson, has ever been particularly illuminating. Drake's analysis only goes so far, and he himself points out that it is neither detailed biography nor scholarly discussion, but it reminds us that an attempt to place this remarkable writer in context would be well worth the effort.

(Available from: Booklocker.com, and from H.L. Drake, 1384 New Danville Pike, Lancaster, PA, 17603, USA)



Jude Fisher – Sorcery Rising

Earthlight, London, 2002, 502pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-7432-2091-9 (tpb £10.99 ISBN 0-7432-2092-7)

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Sorcery Rising is a first novel, seen as an uncorrected proof copy and due for publication in June 2002, by new author Jude Fisher (whom the accompanying letter from the publisher explains is a first solo novel for one half of Gabriel King).

Heading for the annual Allfair are three basic groups of people. From the north come the Eyrans, hardy seafaring folk who have lost much of their lands to the southern Istrians; the Istrians themselves; and the nomadic 'Footloose' - the equivalent of our modern day gypsies.

The Allfair is the annual trade gathering between the peoples of the north and south, and although peace has reigned for twenty years or so, there is still an undercurrent of mistrust and enmity, felt perhaps more by the youngsters who are not veterans of the wars. The story centres around

three main groups. Katla Aransen is making her first ever trip with her family, taking with her a selection of knives and swords she has crafted. The Vingo clan, slave-owning Istrians, are seeking to purchase a bride for their insufferable eldest son Tanto, and the Istrian Lord Tyso is seeking to sell his daughter to the highest bidder and most advantageous alliance.

Throw into the mix the newly crowned King Ravn Asharson, 'Stallion of the North' who is seeking a bride (for royal duty) and the best political alliance, and you have all the ingredients for a rollicking good yarn.

The headstrong young Katla, albeit inadvertently, is the catalyst for the degeneration of the Allfair into a war-zone. When Katla climbs a sacred Istrian rock (which before the wars was a sacred Eyran rock) the Istrians seek the

'unidentified' female blasphemer so that they can burn her at the stake. Not surprisingly, Katla's family would much rather the Istrians didn't find out it was her, but inevitably they do, and things go rapidly downhill like a huge stone determined to break with tradition and gather every available bit of moss.

I have to say, like all fantasies today, it would take forever to say too much about the plot and all the individual characters involved, but suffice it to say it is

convoluted and *they* are myriad. Fisher's characterisation is a joy, and the whole novel is beautifully paced with each new twist adding to that feeling of something spiralling out of control that can only end in tragedy. It's not especially groundbreaking or bursting at the seams with new ideas, just a damn good story that makes the reader want to know and read more. I highly recommend this book and look forward to future titles in the series.

David Gemmell – Stormrider 🕮

Bantam, London, 2002, 446pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-593-04441-X

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

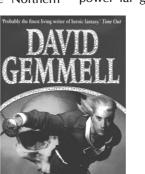
Stormrider is the latest offering from David Gemmell in his Rigante Series, and picks up a few years after the events in Ravenheart.

The last free Rigante are corralled in the Northern

Druagh mountains, and Ravenheart awaits the invasion from the south which must surely come. But all in the south is not as straight-forward as it appears. The Varlish King continues to conquer and subdue, whilst between him and the mountains in the former seat of Rigante power at Eldacre, sits The Moidart and his armies.

The power of The Redeemers, led by Winter Kay (Lord Winterbourne), is growing, mainly through the aid of a magical artefact. As with all things magical, however, there will be a price to pay. The Moidart's only son, Gaise Macon (Stormrider), is a General in the Varlish army, and when Kay takes to trying to

eliminate him, he makes a very powerful enemy in The Moidart. As a result of extreme and cold-blooded cunning, The Moidart manages to more than double the size of his own army, thus effectively placing a formidable barrier between the Varlish and their total conquest of the north.



STORMRIDER

All will come to a head at Eldacre, and enemies must work together for the greater good. Ravenheart and Stormrider have a destiny to fulfil, but their destiny is to defeat a power far greater than anything the legendary Connovar

could have imagined.

Once again Gemmell has produced an enthralling novel of almost unrelenting action. His knack of producing heroes from even the seediest and unlikeliest of people is given full rein in this novel where even the bad guys turn out to have centres like the most exquisite of Belgian chocolates. My only criticism, and I'm going to be daring and criticise the 'British Master of Heroic Fantasy', is that I believe that dead people should stay just that, dead! Obviously, I can't go into to detail without spoiling the plot, but the end of this novel didn't work for me personally. Maybe I just prefer to be sad when a character I really like dies.

Once again, I don't need to encourage Gemmell fans to read this book, but if you've not tried his books before, then do yourself a favour and read this one. As always, it is heroic fantasy at its very best.

Mary Gentle – Orthe: Chronicles of Carrick V Reviewed by Chris Hill

Gollancz, London, 2002, 987pp, £9.99 ISBN 0575072873

Orthe is a new collected edition of Mary Gentle's novels Golden Witchbreed (1983) and its sequel Ancient Light (1987) together with a related short story.

In Golden Witchbreed, Lynne de Lisle Christie is the

new envoy to the world of Orthe. She is based in the city of Tathcaer in the Hundred Thousand – a group of communities (telestres) that appears to be the largest political entity on the planet. A scientific research team from Earth has been kept in the city for a year, denied permission to explore. Christie, however, manages to impress the Crown and is allowed to visit other settlements. But it quickly becomes clear that the humans' presence is not appreciated by all the natives. Christie discovers that Orthe is actually a post-holocaust society, with great areas of the planet devastated by some unknown

weapon. Many Ortheans see the humans as the return of the Golden, or Witchbreed – the technological race that ruled the planet until wiped out thousands of years earlier. After surviving several assassination attempts, Christie is



falsely accused of murder and goes on the run. Eventually she ends up at the Brown Tower, where the serially-immortal Hexenmeister transplants into her brain memories of the past to help her understand Orthe's

GW is one of that particular type of 'Planetary Romance' that puts someone down on an alien world and lets you discover the world with the protagonist. But this is not a novel that relies on big shocks; you are lulled into a false sense of security, forgetting that the people of Orthe are aliens until a new fact emerges to jolt you out of your complacency. But even so, as Christie starts to fall in love with the world and its people, so does the reader. At heart, *GW* is a political novel and as Christie becomes involved in the intrigues of the court and finds out more about the legacy of the Golden, it becomes clear that

the people who oppose contact with Earth may have a point.

It is hard for me to be entirely objectives about *Golden Witchbreed*. I read it when it was first published and a

number of times since (but not for a while) and returning to it for review was like greeting an old friend. Comparisons with Ursula Le Guin's The Left Hand of Darkness are inevitable but I think that it holds its own extremely well.

Ancient Light is set ten years after GW. The discovery of working Witchbreed technology by archaeologists has attracted the attention of one of Earth's megacorporations and so an investigation team is sent to Orthe. Included is Christie, now working as their advisor. She is a changed woman. Her Brown Tower-deposited memories have disintegrated into fragments and she no longer recalls the incident clearly. The arrival of the investigation team precipitates a conflict between the half-Golden remnants in the city of Kel Harantish and the Hundred Thousand. Christie finally discovers the cause of the devastation of parts of the planet and the vital purpose of the Brown Tower

Ancient Light is a harsher, angrier novel than Golden Witchbreed. At the end of the first book one of the characters claims that Orthe is safe as long as Earth does not find anything it wants. Ancient Light shows what happens when it does. It is, frankly, a singularly depressing novel. Once Christie discovers the destruction being held in check by the Brown Tower, the ending seems inevitable, if still shocking.

Somehow, interesting as it is, I have never been able to warm to Ancient Light as much as I did Golden Witchbreed. Partly I suspect it is because it wears its antiimperialist heart on its sleeve a bit too much. The team leader is too obviously only interested in Witchbreed technology at whatever the price. There is a sense of impending doom throughout the novel.

There are some niggles. The high-tech substance that seems to be key to much Witchbreed technology and buildings, chiruzeth, is not mentioned in GW despite its prevalence. Also Christie's reasons for joining a megacorporation that she so clearly disapproves of are never entirely convincing.

But I think the discomfort is generated deliberately. As I mentioned above, GW makes you fall in love with the planet and its people. In AL the author takes it all away from you. It is a mark of her strength as a writer that she makes you hurt so much when she does.

Reservations aside, it is a pleasure to see these early novels re-released in such a handsome new edition. The questions they ask about how a high-tech society deals with one less technologically advanced have not grown less relevant in the years since first published.

Jon Courtenay Grimwood – Pashazade Jon Courtenay Grimwood – Effendi 🕮

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

I confess I was surprised (and a little chagrined) to discover we hadn't reviewed Jon Courtenay Grimwood's Pashazade previously, especially as it was shortlisted for both this

year's Arthur C. Clarke and BSFA Awards. However, the publication of the paperback edition (which contains an 11 page 'teaser' for the sequel Effendi: The Second Arabesk) to coincide with the hardback publication of the latter, is a chance to remedy that unfortunate oversight.

In an ideal world, all of the authors on the Clarke and BSFA shortlists would carry away prizes and plaudits. Certainly Grimwood deserves recognition for an almost meteoric rise from some indifferent (if not outright hostile) reviews of his first few novels, neoAddix (1997),

Lucifer's Dragon (1998) and reMix (1999) - and struggling under an unfortunate "William Gibson meets Quentin Tarantino" byline - before hitting the upward curve with

redRobe (2000). At this point a social and moral indignation for the damaged victims of the streets appears amongst the violence and mayhem

Which brings us to The Arabesk, which combines both those elements with a subtly altered alternate history in which Germany won the First World War, the Second never took place, the Ottoman Empire never faded and Islam ousted European imperialism in the Middle East and North Africa. (Although brand names like Versace, Nokia, Calvin Klein still hold sway, which argues either for a convergent model of history, or a reflexive nod to the cyberpunk tic of tagging 'cool' consumer labels.)

charge for murder (and with a head full of barely legal AI

Pashazade introduces us to Ashraf Bey al Mansur, formerly Zee Zee, sprung from an American prison on a

Earthlight, London, 2002, 326+11pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-671-77368-2

Earthlight, London, 2002, 376pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-7432-0285-6

enhancements) with a one-way ticket to the city of El Iskandryia (Alexandria) as one half of an arranged marriage. As the supposed son of the Emir of Tunis (giving him carte blanche pashazade status, diplomatic immunity for everything but murder) he is the bait to be dangled before social climbing millionaire industrialist Hamzah Effendi, as a prospect for his daughter Zara. Within hours, Ashraf has fucked up completely, by killing a mugger in a street fight, and then by rejecting Zara, for reasons that seem good at the time (not least

Zara's obvious resentment of the arrangement) but ends up offending everyone, from Raf's aunt Nafisa, to Hamzah, to Zara herself. About the only thing Raf does right from the

> outset (and which forms one of the central and best threads of both books) is to gain the trust and complicity of his nine-year-old cousin Hani. Things get worse when Nafisa is murdered several days later. Raf (despite being an immediate suspect) forms an unlikely friendship with Iskandryia's Chief of Police, Felix Abrinsky, until the latter is blown up by a bomb probably intended for Raf, and Raf (to complicate matters further) out of mercy administers a coup de grace.

As I said, it is the superbly realised relationship between Raf and Hani (in whom Raf sees an echo of his own damaged childhood) which elevates Pashazade to something more than a cyberpunk-flavoured



crime thriller in an exotic setting. Those threads are wound even tighter in *Effendi*, which is, if anything, a stronger and even more assured novel than *Pashazade*, and by the end of which almost everybody's past has unravelled in spectacularly unexpected directions. Raf is now, to his surprise as much as everyone else's, the new Chief of Police; in which new capacity he is expected to act as prosecutor to Zara's father, Hamzah, on a charge of mass murder.

Raf has his own troubles: his AI implant, the Fox, is dying; his relationship with Zara is more strained than ever, and that with Hani is undergoing a phase of emotional turmoil on the part of his nine-year-old cousin. Hamzah's trial becomes the focus of a political power struggle over jurisdiction between Iskandryia, Berlin and the Hague. None of this is helped when a revolutionary group calling

themselves *Sword of God* set off a number of electromagnetic bombs that cripple Iskandryia's communications network and sever all communication with the outside world.

Interspersed through these events is an unfolding backstory in italicised chapters headed 'Sudan' of a murderous revolutionary war fought by children, the significance of which only becomes shockingly clear towards the end.

Effendi is a more assured and deeper novel than its predecessor, which can be seen as setting up much of the complex tangle of loyalties and rivalries necessary to carry it off. It is a promise more than amply fulfilled, and (we hope) of more yet to come.

Robin Hobb - Fool's Errand: Book One of The Tawny Man

Voyager, London, 2002, 584pp, £11.99 ISBN 0-00-711056-1

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

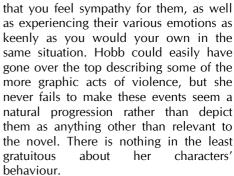
This novel begins with Tom Badgerlock, otherwise known as FitzChivalry Farseer, receiving visitors at his remote

cottage. The visitors bring unwelcome news that the Witted (people who have magical bonds with animals) are being persecuted; the heir to the throne of the Six Duchies has also gone missing. The timing of this disappearance could not have been worse, coming at it does just before his diplomatic wedding to a princess he has never met. Much against his will, Tom gets assigned to find the young Prince and return him home before the ceremony, and so his latest adventure begins, an adventure that forces him to face his past and use his own magical talents to locate the Prince.

On the surface, the assignment is simple enough, but it does not take long for things to become more complicated. For Tom, it means having to act the part of

a nobleman's servant and becoming involved in life at the royal palace once more, while keeping his true identity a secret – which is not easy, given the number of people he knew in his former life.

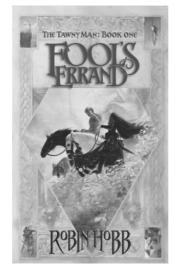
In this novel, set in the same world as her Farseer and Liveship Traders trilogies, Hobb has maintained the high standard she set with her previous novels. She has also brought her characters, old and new, to life and ensured



I would also say that the animals which feature in the novel are not there for the sake of decoration: they each have their uses and their individual characters, and the parts they play are essential to the action, both in terms of taking an active role in events and for providing light

relief.

Hobb has taken a single event and task to be accomplished and turned them into a masterpiece of high adventure. I thoroughly enjoyed this novel, and I eagerly await the next volume of this new imaginative, entertaining series.



Gary Kilworth – Spiggot's Quest Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Atom Books, London, 2002, 303pp, £5.00 ISBN 1 904233 01 5

Spiggot of the title is a boggart, and boggarts in Gary Kilworth's version of Faerie are dedicated to bashing iron; there's no room for a boggart to have finer feelings or heroic ambitions. Yet Spiggot, as we learn in the first chapter, has a romantic heart and yearns for the kind of life that a boggart can never achieve. As he sets out to deliver a suit of magic armour to a fairy king, readers will assume that his experiences will lead him to his heart's desire.

This initial premise captured my interest and made me want to read on, but unfortunately it isn't really fulfilled in the story as it unfolds. True, Spiggot and his companions run into danger so that Spiggot has to wear the armour and fight for their lives or freedom, but the conflict between his boggart heritage and his inner self somehow seems to get

lost, or at least isn't developed. Part of the problem, in my view, is that soon after the start of Spiggot's journey, Kilworth introduces Jack, a human teenager who has been translated into Faerie as the result of an accident on his motorbike. Jack's presence gives Kilworth the opportunity to show Faerie to his readers as Jack learns about it, and to create comedy through Jack's misinterpretation of people or events, but his presence weakens the thrust of the story. It's no longer clear whether this is a story about Spiggot's ambitions, or about Jack's efforts to get home.

To be fair, the book is presented as 'Book One of the Knights of Liöfwende', so there's evidently much more to come. However, readers will expect a complete story arc in this individual book. As it is, the characters journey,

have adventures, and eventually come to the court of the king who ordered the armour, at which point Spiggot is given the quest of the title. Nothing fundamental has been achieved or changed.

There's a lot in this book for the children it's aimed at

to enjoy, and I certainly wouldn't want to have missed Kling, the boggarts' water rat, who is quite wonderful. With the current interest in children's fantasy, the book will certainly have an audience, but – adult expectations aside – I didn't find it satisfying.

J. Robert King – Lancelot du Lethe

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Possibly the best-known element of Arthurian legend is the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere, and their conflict between love for each other and loyalty to Arthur. This is the story which King tells here, and as it is so well-

known he had better have something new to say about it.

His original concept is that he presents Lancelot and Guinevere as not human at all, but a king and queen of faerie, with commitments in the Otherworld which cut across their commitment to Arthur. Interesting, but King doesn't pull it off successfully.

One problem, in my view, is that he hasn't thought enough about how his new ideas flow into and relate to the familiar legends. For example, it's established that Lancelot and Guinevere can use water to

travel between this world and the Otherworld; even such a tiny amount as a drop of dew is enough. So why, in the famous sequence where Agravain and Mordred surprise them together, does Lancelot need to massacre a dozen knights before he can escape, and how is Guinevere trapped so that she goes to the stake in time for Lancelot's spectacular rescue?

Another area that needs more thought is the thematic

Tor, New York, 2001, 461pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-765-30118-0

material. In the scene where Lancelot confronts Christ in the Grail, recognises His healing power but rejects it, there's a genuine understanding of what Lancelot's choices have entailed. Yet a page later we're back to the familiar

> 'pagans good Christians bad' scenario, where Lancelot is seeing the need to save Camelot from 'this rapacious God'.

There are also anachronisms. It's not the mixture of fifth century and the High Middle Ages which is part of the Arthurian flavour, or a witty post-modern mingling of periods. Instead, I feel that King just got it wrong, and that he really does think that tea and cakes was the snack of choice for Knights of the Round Table.

But what really irritated me was the style. Everything is described remotely, so there's no real engagement with the characters or any real sense of the dangers or horrors. The sentences

are short and choppy, and King is far too fond of lists. His vocabulary veers from the esoteric medieval to business-speak ('resource management') or modern slang ('kid' for 'boy', or 'stomped', which is a favourite).

Sadly, I don't think I would have finished this if I hadn't had to review it. I'm an Arthurian completist, but I truly feel I can do without it.



Ursula Le Guin - The Other Wind

Orion, London, 2002, 246pp, £10.99 ISBN 1-84255-205-8

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

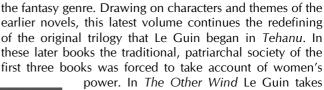
The Other Wind begins some fifteen years after the events of Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea novel *Tehanu*, when a village sorcerer named Alder comes to the island of Gont seeking the counsel of the man who was once the Archmage Ged. Having lost his power, Ged has chosen to live in obscurity,

keeping house when his wife, Tenar, and adopted daughter, Tehanu, are summoned to the court of King Lebannen at Havnor.

Every night, Alder's sleep is disturbed by dreams of the land of the dead, and the dead themselves calling to him from beyond the wall that no living man, unless a wizard, can cross, and begging him to set them free. Ged sends Alder to Havnor, where there are those, including Tehanu, who may be able to listen to his tale and discover what it means. Alder's dreams appear to warn of great changes coming to the world of Earthsea, and may also hold the solution to why dragons are harrying and burning the western isles, seeking to reclaim a land that they say men took from them long ago. Also at Havnor is the High

Princess of the Kargad lands, whose presence awakens Tenar's memories of her youth as a Kargish priestess and causes much consternation to the young king.

The Earthsea books are rightfully regarded as classics of



power. In *The Other Wind* Le Guin takes her extraordinary work of the imagination to a whole new level.

Gradually about the truth the relationship between dragons and men and the land of the dead is revealed, and the way forward becomes clear. The author assembles her characters: a farm woman who was once a priestess, women who are also dragons, mages who must change their view of the world, a princess and a king, on the Isle of Roke where all powers meet, and through them the "world is broken to make it whole," and what began as a fantasy novel takes on the resonance of myth. I hope that the author will revisit the world of Earthsea, but if The Other Wind is the final

Earthsea novel, then it is an amazing culmination to a wonderful sequence of books.



Paul Levinson – The Consciousness Plague

Tor, New York, 2002, 316pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0765300982

Reviewed by Chris Hill

Phil D'Amato is a forensic scientist working for the New York Police Department, specialising in the odder cases. While a 'flu epidemic sweeps through the country, Phil helps investigate a series of brutal murders. But then a number of people who have had the 'flu start to suffer from strange memory lapses, including D'Amato himself, which hampers the investigation. Looking into it, Phil finds a link between the memory losses and a new antibiotic. As he tries to find the evidence he needs to get the FDA to stop production of the drug he also starts to have the suspicion that the murderer is using the amnesia to cover their guilt.

How successful you consider The Consciousness Plague to be depends on whether you view it as an sf novel with a detective story plot or a detective story with some sf ideas. The sf elements are in the line of the medical thrillers of writers like Robin Cook. There are some fairly nice ideas on bacteria-like objects being involved in the biology of consciousness but I do not feel that it really leads anywhere. The final solution to the problem of the antibiotic feels like a deus ex machina and

the fact that the company that produces the drug does not attend the discussions with the FDA feels wrong. In fact at this stage the FDA probably would not have to get involved at all; at the first sign of side effects this extreme the pharmaceutical company would likely pull it off the market anyway (I was working for such a company when something like this happened).

As a detective novel it works rather better. The amnesia serves to complicate the case and distract attention from it. However it does fizzle out a bit rather than coming to a strong dramatic end.

The writing is competent rather than inspired and the characterisation is a bit thin; I didn't really feel that I got to know D'Amato as a person at all.

Though the above may seem like faint praise I do have to say that I thoroughly enjoyed the book as a 'good read', but the central genre identity crisis stops it being anything more than that. I suspect that sf fans will not find it strong enough as an sf novel and detective novel fans may be disappointed with the conclusions.

Laurie Marks – Fire Logic

Tor, New York, 2002, 335pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-312-87887-7

Reviewed by Jan A. Malique

If I had to describe Fire Logic it would be as an ornate, vividly hued rug. Many hands went into its creation, their lives being as varied and as colourful as the threads being used. This rug has not been woven on a loom but handknotted. Each knot tells a story - of an age and peoples relatively untouched by the brutalities of conflict and all that it entails. Where there was once hope and welcome, they have been is replaced by suspicion of all that is strange and unknown. Shaftal is thrown into disarray by the death of Harald G'deon, earth witch, protector of the land and its people. No successor has been named (or so we think) and the warlike Sainnites use this to their advantage. Shaftal is attacked and the scene is set for a long and drawn-out war, lasting for many years, leaving people and land devastated. Guerrilla resistance is organised; the Shaftalis are not about to surrender, not whilst they can still walk and breathe.

Subtly working its way through this weft and weave is the raw 'stuff' of elemental magic. Air, fire, water and earth take shape in beings who walk on two legs - the main protagonists of our story. Zanja, Emil, Medric lead the way for the fire elementals, Norina for air, and Karis for earth. Water appears in the shape of the Otter people, who briefly appear late in the tale. These people are deeply embedded in their culture and land, none more so than Karis the master metalsmith, who carries a great secret and

power within her which is hinted at and then revealed piece by piece throughout the book. This earth witch is a pivotal character in the book, as is her relationship with Zanja, last of her tribe, the Ashwala'i, slaughtered by the Sainnites. That is not to say that Emil Paladin, Medric the Sainnite Seer, Norina Truthken, Councilor Mabin and others are of any less importance. The eye is drawn to Karis, scarred both physically and emotionally by a hard life, drug-addicted, but displaying much beauty within her soul in spite of all this. She holds within her the power to transmute and shape both metal and flesh. Healer and artist in one, living proof that all is not what it appears and that the gods can choose the unlikeliest of receptacles to pour their power into.

You may ask yourself why you should concern yourself with this at all. What draws a reader into a book? What captures their imagination? The characters, of course. If the writer is skilful they breathe life into their creations, and the four elements come together to form something special in this offering from Laurie Marks. Fire Logic is as much about the complexities of war, betrayal and honour as it is about the players taking part in its drama. The reader picks up a thread that interests them and follows it through and I am only doing the same. This story can be read on many levels, it all depends upon which world you choose to start off from...

L.E. Modesitt Jr. – Scion of Cyador

Orbit, 2002, 822pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-84149-101-2

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Scion Of Cyador is another 800-plus page epic in the Saga of Recluce "starships 'n' sorcery" series in a world where White (chaos) magic is bad and Black (order) magic is good. It's a direct sequel to Magi'i Of Cyador, continuing the story of lancer officer Lorn in the White realm of Cyador (which is later destroyed by shipwrecked Black starship-engineer-turned-sorcerer Nylan at the end of The

Chaos Balance). The first, chronologically, in the Recluce series, Magi'i (one of Modesitt's many 'rite of passage' tales) introduced Lorn, the talented son of a family of Magi'i in Cyador. Too independent to become a magus, Lorn was packed off into the army and sent to the frontier. Now promoted to 'over-captain', his success in battle and against corruption has made him dangerous enemies in the army and the capital. Lorn's wife is the first female head of

a major trading house, and is gathering enemies of her own, while the Emperor's ill-health and lack of a named heir means that the factions in Cyador are fighting for position in the event of his death, and eliminating the competition. Also, the chaos technology the Cyadorans brought with them to the planet is failing, and with it their superiority over the other nations of the world.

Other reviews of this book have focused on the size of the book, saying it's affected with 'Doorstopper Syndrome'. This has often been true of Modesitt in the past, in that he's been fond of spreading the plot over far too many pages. However, to give him his due, this book is long because he's telling a long

story, and there are no stretches of languor that I noticed.

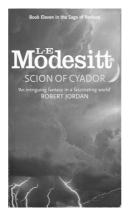
Lorn is a good hero – he's scrupulously honest, unswervingly loyal to Cyador and the Lancers, and

completely devoted to his wife and family. He is also

totally ruthless at dealing with threats to himself, his family or Cyador, and not averse to making attack his best form of defence. My only criticism would be that Lorn's apparent invincibility means that you don't have to do much guesswork to predict the outcome of the book; there are no surprises here.

These two books follow closely the pattern set by *The White Order/Colours Of Chaos*, also set in the White world, in the city of Fairhaven far in this book's future: the first book details a young man's (here Lorn, there Cerryl) journey to adulthood whilst training for a profession; the second tells how he survives and succeeds in an atmosphere of intrigue and malice. So, time for Modesitt to move on

maybe? There must be many a tale to tell (succinctly) of the Recluce universe that doesn't have to fit into this straitjacket.



Caiseal Mór – Carolan's Concerto

Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

Subtitled "A toast to the three sacred pastimes of old Ireland: Music, Storytelling and Whiskey", Caiseal Mór's novel about the great Turlough O'Carolan certainly captures the essence of all three.

Young Dublin-born Edward Sutler is a rebel with a cause – to rid Ireland of her English oppressors. In his quest to do so, he shoots an army captain and goes on the run. It is as he is trying to evade his pursuers that he comes upon Daniel McHugh, son of Hugh O'Connor, who rescues Edward and takes him home to his father. Daniel's motive is mercenary, for maybe Edward's father will pay for his son's return.

Thus Edward is introduced to Hugh O'Connor, who once led the blind harper Turlough O'Carolan round Ireland. Now blind himself, Hugh and his friend, the harper Denis Hampson, spend their days telling stories and drinking Hugh's homemade whiskey. Edward is drawn into this circle against his will and begins to hear the tale of

Earthlight, London, 2002, 491pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-7434-2901-X

Carolan's life. How his prowess as a harpist was a gift from the Faerie King and Queen, for which he lost his eyesight; how he traveled Ireland playing for the rich and mighty. As the story progresses Edward finds himself drawn into the lives of Hugh and his family and begins to understand that shooting the army captain was not perhaps the best way of ridding Ireland of its oppressors.

The stories of O'Carolan and Hugh reach their crescendo as Hugh tells of Carolan's prowess, Denis plays some of his tunes, only he keeps putting off playing the one Hugh really wants to hear, Carolan's Concerto, his greatest work.

The interweaving of both stories kept me turning the pages, I was intrigued by the presence of faeries in this tale, alongside the harsh realities of life for the poor in the Ireland of the 18th century. Mór has written an excellent tale of music, storytelling and whiskey, which kept this reader well entertained.

Garth Nix – Sabriel

Collins Children's Books, London, 2002, 367pp £12.99 ISBN 0-00-7137303

Reviewed by Penny Hill

This is a reasonably competent Young Adult fantasy novel. Although it contains a standard quest plot it feels more interesting than a generic fantasy work. Part of this is because it is a self-contained story – although I wouldn't be surprised if Garth Nix decides to revisit this world later. The other part may be because Sabriel, our heroine, is fairly isolated with just two people to help her – a cat/spirit guide and Touchstone, a mysterious young man she has rescued. There is also a strong emphasis on the increasing power of Kerrigor and his minions. In some places the tension of trying to escape the opposition is almost as great as that of the quest.

At the start of the story, it would be easy to think this is a Harry Potter spin-off; our heroine is at a boarding school where she and other pupils are able to study magic, but we quickly enter a much more serious world where magic has consequences and a price and visits to the realm of the dead are a necessary part of the quest.

Sabriel herself is an accurate and well-visualised

character. Starting with a teenager's belief that she knows everything, the novel charts her dawning awareness of how little she knows and how much she needs her guide and companion.

Unfortunately Touchstone is only a little more than a useful fighter and a love interest. He remains a little wooden even after Sabriel has turned him back into a real boy. Mogget, the cat/spirit guide, is rather more interesting as his dual nature becomes apparent and we wonder about his own reasons for assisting Sabriel.

Although no concrete details are given I found myself visualising Ancelstierre as England and the Old Kingdom as Wales in an alternate version of now, rather than as a new creation. I also found the state of the Old Kingdom echoed that of Narnia under the wicked witch, caused by the combination of the loss of the monarchy together with the unseasonal winter.

The Young Adult nature of the novel does show up in the single-stranded plotting, but this novel is free of the worst pitfalls of novels for teenagers such as "as you know" info-dumping and a tendency for the narrator to over-explain things. The final resolution is also well-handled with the nature of Mogget remaining unexplained and the

realisation that overcoming Kerrigor may not mean the status quo can be restored. The final conflict was satisfying with a vivid sense of the danger posed and the gravity of what would happen should our heroes fail.

Patrick O'Leary – The Impossible Bird

Tor, New York, 2002, 356pp \$25.95 ISBN 0-765-30337-X

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

One summer day in 1962 two brothers, Danny and Mike Glynn, are lying side by side in a cornfield in Michigan looking up into the sky and discussing favourite sf stories and movies ("Klatu", "Barada", "Nikto!") when something passes above them. In that moment they both experience a

dizzying change of perspective, seeing themselves as small stick-like figures from far above, the world stops, and although they don't know it at the time, nothing is ever the same again.

Their lives diverge in adulthood, as chalk and cheese. Danny for the security of an academic post, marriage and fatherhood, Mike as a successful, but rootless and ever-moving, advertising director. They grow increasingly apart – until armed agents claiming to be members of a government security services visit them both at the same time, questioning each about the whereabouts of the other, and a missing 'code' which one of them is supposed to possess.

For both Mike and Danny, the raid and interrogation and threat turns their lives (or deaths, for as we are told within the first three chapters, both Mike and Danny are dead, but never having been dead before have still to come to terms with the fact) inside out, and spills each into a nightmare of conspiracy and violence. Something happened on that day in their childhood, something that has been hidden from them (but whose blocked memories

can still inspire unaccountable fear), and whose effects are now starting to unravel the fabric of the world. Gradually it transpires that there are two warring groups, the Correctors and the Crossovers, both of which are after whatever it is they believe the brothers possess, but for entirely different

ends. For the members of both the Crossovers and Correctors are also dead (but know it), their memories preserved in an immortal virtual afterlife in a neural net moderated by alien 'hummingbirds' (the "impossible bird" of both the book's title and also, as Danny discovers, a treatise by his and Mike's former teacher Joel A. Kindler). Where the Crossovers seek to preserve their new gift of (albeit virtual) immortality, the Correctors reject it, and have discovered they can be erased by three acts of 'murder': of a stranger, a friend and someone you love.

The Impossible Bird is an odd-crossgenre blend (which sometimes teeters

dangerously , but never quite falls apart into a mish-mash of styles). It starts as a conspiracy thriller, then moves into something resembling the dark fantasy territory of Jonathan Carroll, and finally resolves though a sfnal solipsistic nightmare out of Philip K. Dick or Patricia Anthony, while never losing, through its often sudden and disconcerting turns, its central uniting thread as an exploration of family relationships lost, and then regained.



Charles Sheffield - Dark As Day

Tor, New York, 2002, 479pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0 312 87634 3

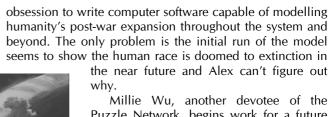
Reviewed by Colin Bird

Charles Sheffield specialises in near-future hard sf and this book is a sequel to *Cold As Ice*, although it's not necessary to have read the previous volume to enjoy this book. Mankind has expanded to colonise the solar system,

narrowly escaping disaster in a brutal interplanetary Great War which occurred thirty years before events in *Dark As Day*. The novel follows several characters whose individual stories converge in the finale.

Rustum Battachariya operates from inside Pandora, a small moon orbiting Saturn, from where he tackles fiendishly difficult problems on the Puzzle Network, solving them with consummate ease. 'Bat' also seeks out derelict weapons; the detritus from the Great War. Some of the trophies he seeks turn out more dangerous than others, including the rumoured superweapon, said to be capable of wiping out the solar system.

Alex Ligon is the unfavoured son of a dynastic industrial corporation, choosing to eschew his birthright of a seat on the Board to pursue a personal



Puzzle Network, begins work for a future version of SETI, and soon traces a signal which appears to originate outside the system. Further analysis of the transmission confirms it appears to be of alien origin.

Sebastian Birch and Janeen Jannex were displaced from the outer system by the Great War and eventually picked up together as wandering orphans on the devastated post-war Earth. Janeen wants to become an outer system colonist and Sebastian wants to join her, seeing an opportunity to practise his amazing ability to predict cloud formations in the chaotic atmospheres of the gas giant planets.

The beginning of this book struggles with some unoriginal plotlines which appear to be heading in



painfully obvious directions. But Sheffield has introduced some neat twists and turns and skilfully interleaves the multiple viewpoints into a satisfying whole. His version of a futuristic, system-wide, <u>very</u> broadband internet, is particularly convincing and well used in the narrative. Even

the frequent scientific info-dumps are adroitly handled and often damned interesting!

Breezily readable hard sf in the Michael Flynn vein with gorgeous Vincent Di Fate cover art. Highly recommended.

Brian Stableford – Dark Ararat

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

If fantasy's first cousins are the ghost story and horror, then that of sf must be the crime/murder mystery. This is possibly because the crime story, like the sf story, naturally arises out of short fiction, which underpins the genre. This is certainly the case with Brian Stableford's current six book 'Emortality' series (of which *Dark Ararat* is the fifth) and which has been crossing and re-crossing that line for

much of his series, particularly in *Architects* of *Emortality* (a murder mystery based on the short story 'Les Fleurs De Mal') and *The Cassandra Complex* (a crime thriller based on 'The Magic Bullet'). Between these two came perhaps the high point so far of the series, *The Fountains of Youth*, and in which at one point, news is received of humanity's discovery of a potentially Earthlike planet by the slower-than-light exploration ship *Hope*, at the end of a 700 year journey.

Dark Ararat is the story of Hope's arrival at a planet, variously called Ararat (as a nod to Noah's ark) or Tyre (for its almost unrelievedly purple flora and fauna). What hasn't been transmitted back to Earth is that

expedition and putative colony is in almost a complete shambles, with a shipboard revolution of the crew (now almost totally adapted to a low gravity environment) and deep divisions between the crew and between different scientific groups on the surface as to whether Ararat/Tyre counts as (a) sufficiently Earth-like to justify settlement and (b) still inhabited by the remnants of a tool-making civilisation.

And now, as genomicist Matthew Fleury and policeman

Tor, New York, 2002, 352pp, £25.95 ISBN 0-765-30168-7

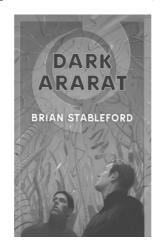
Vincent Solari are grudgingly unfrozen from suspended animation three years after arrival, the colony's first murder, that of the planetside genomicist.

The murder turns out to be something of a red herring, at least as far as the plot goes. Solari solves it almost off-hand and off-stage, but no-one seems either surprised or to care much, apart from its inconvenient interruption of a

planned trip downriver.

The real hero of the story, for Stableford, is not Fleury or Solari, but the biological mystery of Ararat/Tyre itself (something that shouldn't come as too much surprise), and which allows Stableford to indulge in some extravagant speculation on an alien biology that eschews sex and DNA for chimerical transformation. This is most apparent in the second half of the book, on the trip downriver, where the team holds off the depredations of thousands of chimerical slugs with chainsaws and flame-throwers (Fleury meanwhile stranded with a useless rifle in a basket halfway up a cliff) - a scene which could have come straight out of sf pulp adventures of the 50s. Even the final

First Contact with the alien humanoids has a curiously dated feel, although more perhaps from the 70s (when we were more likely to greet indigenous aliens than slaughter them out of hand), although even this momentous event is almost subsumed into Fleury's victory in a long and ongoing political and rhetorical argument with his opponents (principally *Hope's* captain) over the future of humanity on Ararat.



Dave Stone – Doctor Who: Citadel of Dreams

Telos, Tolworth, 2001, 106pp £10.00 hb ISBN 1-903889-04-9 (deluxe, illus. £25.00 ISBN 1-903889-05-7

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

Oh dear. I was under the impression that this series of novellas (of which *Citadel of Dreams* is the second instalment, following on from Kim Newman's rather splendid *Time and Relative* (reviewed in V222) was going to bring established writers into the world of *Dr Who* – with names like Grant Morrison and Neil Gaiman being banded about. So it's sad to see them bringing in a writer best (and pretty much only) know for *Who* fandom, Dave Stone, for only the second novella.

However, I still had hope; although I did not see much of them when they were first broadcast I've since been much taken with Sylvester McCoy's version of the Doctor and especially Sophie Aldred's Ace. Unfortunately they are hardly in it. The Doctor only skulks around in the background (it's no surprise that he's planning something). Instead of whacking monsters with her baseball bat, all Ace gets to do is cook up some eggs and ten minutes of exposition. This keeps with one strangely contradictory

trend of *Who* fan-fiction that keeps the Doctor out of it and focuses on a new character. Okay, Newman did that as well but at least his viewpoint character was a companion and was done in an interesting way. This time around it's Joey Quine, a young down-and-out living a grim life in the City on the planet Hokesh. This is a strange city where noone eats anything, spitting out their chewed food into special 'spitting bowls' and time runs at a variable rate, which is confusing to say the least. Quine is haunted by strange dreams (and dreams within dreams full of bizarre symbolism). He discovers he has weird powers that allows him to control people... or is something controlling him? As a secondary character we have Magnus Solaris, king of the City... or is he trying to become king, or has he already been deposed? The 'time thing' is *really* confusing here.

There is actually no story, no plot development, at all – its all delay, delay, delay, until we are finally given an (inadequate) explanation to what we have seen. Add to

that the time changes, the unsympathetic lead character, the fact it's not a *Doctor Who* story, and what we're left with is a muddy, confusing mess. It's style over substance time – and not very good style at that.

Perhaps this would read better a second time around now I've got some idea what's going on – but frankly, I can't summon enough enthusiasm. And not a lot of book for a lot of money either.

[The third of the Telos Dr Who Novellas, *Nightdreamers* by Tom Arden, is recently published (format and prices as above) and will hopefully reviewed in a future issue.]

Liz Williams – Empire of Bones 🕮

Bantam Books, London, 2002, 336pp ISBN 0-553-58377-8

Reviewed by Penny Hill

Having thoroughly enjoyed *Ghost Sister* when I read it for review last year, I was delighted to have the chance to review Liz Williams' second novel *Empire of Bones*. I've been looking forward to this book and it did not disappoint me

Empire of Bones is very different in story and setting from Ghost Sister, although it does develop some of the same themes. The questions raised by colonisation are explored more directly in a plausible near-future setting: should a more advanced culture or species interfere with a less developed one, no matter how benevolent their intentions? What are the costs involved to both parties? How much responsibility and power should we have over others?

There are complex and interesting characters amongst both the humans and aliens. The different allegiances between and within the groups make it clear that the driving forces for most of the characters are their different personal

agendas, which lead them into uncomfortable alliances with one another.

Liz Williams has managed the difficult trick of having aliens who are simultaneously convincingly alien and also comprehensible. The only alien we fail to understand is Nowhere One, whose motives are never really made clear. As an outsider from his own society, it is understandable that he is convincingly enigmatic. On the human side, Jaya, the revolutionary leader, is more than just a "Bandit

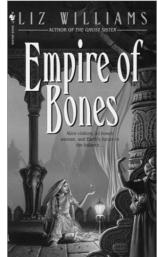
Queen" character, and struggles to understand what the aliens are offering and from what motives.

The split narrative works well, giving us insights into the different viewpoints of the situation. This is particularly true of the sections where Jaya and Sirru the alien are misunderstanding each other's actions and motivations. The one downside of this is that the sections based on the Rasasatran system, the aliens' homeworld, make it clear which of the aliens can and can't be trusted. It might have been more interesting to have left that ambiguous.

It was refreshing to read an alien first contact story that does not rely on the Western powers. I enjoyed seeing the US and the UN side-lined rather than taking centre stage as so often happens. I don't

have the experience to comment on whether the influence of the caste system is probable or accurate – as an outsider all I can say is that it felt plausible to me.

Anyone who enjoyed *Ghost Sister* will be excited by and appreciative of this novel, and like me, will be eagerly waiting to see what Liz Williams does next.



Douglas E. Winter – Clive Barker: The Dark Fantastic Harper Collins, London, 2001, 671pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-00-255041-5 Reviewed by Iain Emsley

Clive Barker has travelled across the fantastic and the media, creating his unique and unforgettable corpus of work and imagery. Douglas Winter, as well as having written and edited some horror, is a long time fan, critic and sometime confidant. As Winter recalls, Barker was acting in his own rendition of *Salome*, having created the head of John the Baptist. Rather than merely show the audience the head, he came to the front of the stage and brandished the head, so that its entrails came down. In a fashion, Barker has continued to be unafraid of showing us our fears and hopes, to explore boundaries and push them

Winter's book fittingly starts in Liverpool. One evening in the early 1980s, whilst researching another book, he was talking with Ramsey Campbell who gave him a series of plays written by the young Barker and told him that Barker was going to be important. From this slightly adulatory starting point, Winter takes the reader upon a Cooks tour through the family history and school years before talking about the formation of the group of friends who would become the Dog Company. The company outgrew Liverpool's fringe and moved to London,

gradually gaining literary appreciation before splitting. At this point, the biography becomes strangely silent about Barker's life. We are treated to some of his relationships but the book is coy about delving into his life from here on until his fateful meeting with his husband, David Armstrong.

The real strength of this book is the lavish detail and thought placed upon each stage of Barker's career. Winter painstakingly traces the roots of each film and book, cross-referencing where necessary. He pays real attention to publication histories and also to precursors of each creation, especially the films. What comes through is a real attention to detail that seeks to explore and to demonstrate rather than cover in obscurantist detail. Where there is further detail Winter provides a set of notes (although this does run to over an hundred pages) rather than swamp the reader.

In many ways it is obvious that Winter is a lawyer. He carefully constructs a case for Barker as being one of the greats of current genre writing that he justifies admirably. However, his biography is very selective about Barker's life. One certainly wouldn't wish salacious details but it

can be confusing working out the larger details such as when he moved continents or the shifting meetings with the various parts of the Dog Company after the break up. This reticence breaks when David Armstrong enters his life and one cannot help having a feeling of being manipulated throughout.

Clive Barker: The Dark Fantastic is a wonderful overview of Barker's work to date, including the forthcoming Abarat quartet, including some of the art work. This is a wonderful literary biography which illuminates the work of a great writer.

Gene Wolfe – *Peace*

Gollancz, London, 2002, Fantasy Masterworks 28, 264pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07376-4

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Peace is one of Gene Wolfe's earliest novels, first appearing in 1975, and now reprinted in Gollancz's Fantasy Masterworks series. As it happened, I hadn't read it before I was given this edition to review, and now I find it's

a book which will repay subsequent rereadings.

It is ostensibly a memoir of Alden Dennis Weer, written in old age, in which he explores his life in small town America in the early part of the twentieth century. The society of the period is recreated in fascinating and vivid detail. However, as the novel progresses, the reader becomes aware that not everything is as it seems. As Weer's memory ranges back into the past he converses with the dead, sometimes as an old man, sometimes as the child he once was. Time becomes fluid. Narrative strands loop back on themselves. Some of the stories that Weer tells are obvious fantasy, others supposedly accounts of real

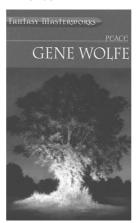
events, yet the reader can never be sure where the truth lies

Partly the novel is an examination of memory, given objective form in the description of Weer's house, in which he has created replicas of every room that was significant to him throughout his life. Weer's memory of events often clashes with the memories of other characters. and often the reader has the feeling that Weer is selecting or suppressing his own memories to slant the story that he tells. At several points there is a hiatus, as if Weer cannot

> face up to that particular memory, and none of the stories he tells ever come to a clear conclusion. The reader is left to form various hypotheses: perhaps Weer is dead; perhaps he is a murderer; perhaps some of the people or events he presents as objectively real have no existence outside his imagination.

> The style, as always with Wolfe, is lucid precise. The narrative drive compelling; the transitions between one level of reality and another are subtly handled. In a sense the novel is an intellectual game where the reader must be alert for clues in the unravelling of truth; I found it exhilarating.

This is a book I was very pleased to discover. It fully deserves its place in the Fantasy Masterworks series. I imagine that many of the people reading this review will be more fully aware of its excellence than I am myself, but for anyone who isn't familiar with it, I'd suggest buying a copy right away; it's unmissable.



John C. Wright – *The Golden Age*

Tor Books, New York, 2002, 336pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-84870-6

Reviewed by Paul Billinger

"You are no longer men. Technology has made you gods. Some of you are gods who play at men, perhaps, but gods."

And so appear the remaining humans of this far-future Earth of near-immortal beings, very much gods within their

world. Technology has advanced, but only in certain directions; relativity theory still holds, effectively trapping humanity within our own solar system. Most humans now have their physical bodies in stasis, interacting with others only in a complex virtual environment, inhabited not only by human avatars but also sophisticated self-aware entities.

Although all seems well in this utopian society, humanity is moribund with a rigidly enforced caste system to eliminate change. The greatest threat comes from anyone who upsets this status quo. One such person is Phaethon, a well connected member of one

of the upper castes, who has a problem: most of his memory of the last few centuries has been removed. It is Phaethon's search to recover his memories that leads us though the exploration of the transformed solar system.



A promising set-up and intriguing premise, but like Phaethon's world, all is not well with this book. From the very first page the prose is intrusive and annoying, completely over-stylised. If you can get beyond the first chapter you find a thin plot surrounded with extensive deliberations on the nature of society, and by the end of

the book little of substance has occurred. There are a few points where the book comes alive but much of it is flat and lifeless. It is when Phaethon comes out of the virtual environment into the 'real world' that the book starts to grip. but alas, these moments are all too infrequent. Much of the text is dialogue, with little description, and many of the events occur offstage. Again, it is only in the 'real world' parts that there is any conviction.

The use of The Golden Age as a title is provocative, bringing with it much baggage and evoking the works of Pohl, Bester and Cordwainer Smith. But the works of writers such as these, for all the 'gosh/wow' and

'sensawunda' they created, all had a very human core. At their best it was the very humanity of the protagonists that created a believable future and was used to examine the good and evil of these new societies. It is this area in which The Golden Age fails most seriously. The character of Phaethon is vital, appearing in most scenes, but he never progresses beyond a petulant complaining child. At no point does any humanity (or even post-humanity) surface, preventing you from caring about his quest or the (not very surprising) revelation of his recovered memories.

Perhaps I'm being too harsh – it is a first novel and gathering some very good reviews – but I will not be reading the second, concluding volume. This is likely to be a book which produces strongly divided views in its readers.



These are some of the other books we have seen recently. A mention here does not necessarily prelude a full review in later issues of *vector*.

Anselm Audley - Heresy

Earthlight, 2002, 503pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-7434-1484-5

Anselm Audley - Inquisition 🚨

Earthlight, 2002, 400pp, £10.00 ISBN 0-7434-0965-6 Inquisition, Book Two of the Aquasilva Trilogy, is the sequel to Audley's debut novel Heresy (much commented at the time for the age of the author and the reported size of the advance) and which was reviewed by Vikki Lee in V219. The first book follows a traditional enough pattern, a young/inexperienced protagonist drawn against his will into events that challenge the order of the world – here the political/religious schemes of the dissident "Heretics" who are out to topple the religious fundamentalism of the elite ruling Domain. Its variety comes from its setting, the largely water-covered world of Aquasilva. The book's main problem, as Vikki Lee reported, was nothing to do with the story, but Earthlight's production, littered as it was (at least in the trade paperback) by typographical and copy editing errors. Check first. Nevertheless, our reviewer was impressed enough to look forward to the second volume, *Inquisition*, which we hope to review in a future issue.

Steve Aylett – Shamanspace

Codex, 2002, 121pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-899598-20-0

Steve Aylett – The Velocity Gospel

Gollancz, 2002, 131pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-57507-088-9 I have tried reading Aylett a couple of times, and on the basis of my perplexity and the frequently effusive opinions of others ("distressingly brilliant" says The Guardian), I have decided he may be the literary equivalent of anchovies, a very particular and personal taste. Aylett's prose is perhaps what cyberpunk would have become (compare to the opening sentences of Gibson's 'Burning Chrome') had it arisen out more closely out of the literary and stylistic experimentation of the British New Wave rather than being grounded in the pattern of the noir thriller: a dizzying rush of almost impressionistic images and a prose more grounded in poetry (or the textual equivalent of a graphic novel). This reviewer, at least, emerged out of end of the 120 short and generously spaced pages of Shamanspace with very little idea of what it was about apart from a plot between two rival organisations to assassinate God.

The Velocity Gospel is Book 2 of Accomplice ("a casual fairy tale"), following on from Only an Alligator ("a surrealist fever dream" or a "pulp nightmare with everything turned up to eleven" according to Gary

Wilkinson reviewing the latter in V223), set in a tropical city republic populated by demons.

Greg Bear - Eon

Gollancz, 2002 (®1985), SF Masterworks 50, 503pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07316-0 Eon, written in 1985, is a prime exemplar of that sub-genre of hard sf known as the Big Dumb Object story (from a phrase coined by Roz Kaveney), along with works like Clarke's Rendezvous with Rama, Shaw's Orbitsville and Niven's Ringworld. BDOs are designed to evoke that celebrated sfinal 'sense of wonder' at their vast scale, and, in the case of Rama and Eon, by their purpose, origin and great age. The Stone is a huge artifact, a hollowed out asteroid that has wandered from somewhere into the Solar System. Inside are a series of chambers, each more puzzling than the last. But the seventh chamber goes on literally forever and is filled with wonders. Eon was followed by a sequel, Eternity (1988).

Francesca Lia Block – Weetzie Bat 🛄

Atom, 2002, 100pp, £5.00 ISBN 1-904233-03-1 Seen in proof from Time Warner's new children's imprint Atom, this is a reprint (from 1989) of the first (of five) of Block's Dangerous Angels series. This is a very strange book. The style, especially the dialogue, is simplistic almost to the point of 'Janet and John' reading primers, but the characters and plot are more akin to those of Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City (though without the selfdeprecating humour that leavens some of the LA hippydippy silliness.) So that our heroine - the improbably named Weetzie Bat - is a stereotyped LA airhead Valley Girl, who believes in love and magic, puppies, Indian feathers and macrobiotic food. She initially falls for handsome hunk Dirk, until he admits he is gay, at which point she conjures (invokes?) boyfriends for them both, so they can all live together. Then, fearing her own boyfriend My Secret Agent Lover Man (honest) is having an affair, she gets herself (rather improbably) pregnant by going to bed with both Dirk and his boyfriend. The trouble starts when Secret Agent's by-blow, Witch Baby, turns up in a basket on the doorstep, and the four adopt her as a half-sister to Weetzie's baby, Cherokee. This a children's book? One of the strangest books I've read for a long time.

David Brin – Kil'n People 🛄

Orbit, 2002, 503pp, £10.99 ISBN 1-84149-138-1 Reviewed by Stuart Carter in the last issue, we unfortunately omitted publication details of the Orbit UK edition which Stuart referred to, and for which the review carried a cover shot. Brin steps into territory somewhere between Egan's *Permutation City* and *Diaspora* and the Golem of Prague legend which informs Ted Chiang's 'The Seventy Two Letters'. At the end of the 21st century technology allows memories to be downloaded into (and back up from) self-aware clay "dittoes" which have a 24 hour life span. Thought provoking and highly recommended.

Brown, Macleod, Reynolds, Roberts – *Infinities*

Gollancz, 2002, 358pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-575-07355-1 The third of the Foursight anthologies edited and introduced by Peter Crowther, *Infinities* collects four novellas (all © 2001), Eric Bown's *A Writer's Life*, Ken Macleod's *The Human Front*, Alastair Reynold's *Diamond Dogs* and Adam Roberts *Park Polar*. The previous anthology in the series, *Futures*, was reviewed by Gary Dalkin in V219.

Jacqueline Carey - Kushiel's Chosen

Tor, 2002, 700pp, £27.95 ISBN 0-312-87239-9 Sequel to *Kushiel's Dart*, reviewed by Steve Jeffery in V218, a fantasy with a very different heroine. Phèdre nó Delaunay is an "anguisette" (a masochist by both training and inclination and a spy by profession) who rises from indentured servitude through the Machievellian politics of court intrigues over the succession to the throne to become a trusted servant of the new queen (and, to her amused horror, leader of a motley and ribald band of soldiers who dub themselves Phèdre's Boys).

Ionathan Carroll - The Wooden Sea

Gollancz, 2002, 296pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07291-1 The third in a loosely linked trilogy comprising *Kissing the Beehive* (reviewed by Steve Jeffery V201) and *The Marriage of Sticks* (reviewed by Paul Kincaid in V207), this was reviewed in the Tor hardback edition by Cherith Baldry in V217. Carroll returns to the story of the central character of *Beehive*, Frannie McCabe (one-time delinquent teenage hoodlum) and now small town cop, in a complex plot that has McCabe moving backwards and forwards through his own life, meeting himself in both older and younger incarnations as he tries to make sense of a series of inexplicable events (including a dead dog that keeps reappearing, alive, in unexpected places). The sfnal premise behind the dénouement is, unfortunately, the weakest part of the story and it lets the book down,

Sara Douglass - Starman

Tor, 2002, 559pp, £27.95 ISBN 0-312-87888-5 Third book of Douglass's The Wayfarer Redemption. Previous volumes *Battleaxe* (retitled *The Wayfarer Redemption* in the US) and *Enchanter* were reviewed in UK editions by John Oram and Alan Fraser respectively in V203 and V205. In the UK, the six book series was split into two trilogies, the first three books as the Axis trilogy, and the second three books (*Sinner, Pilgrim, Crusader*) under the title The Wayfarer Redemption, which Tor have taken as both the overall title of the six book series and the title of the first book. Confused? And that's even without trying to summarise Douglass's complex plot (for which see the above two reviews and Particles, V219.)

Ted Chiang – The Stories of Your Life and Others

Tor, 2002, 335pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-765-30418-X Seen in proof but due July, this is one of the strongest single-author collections for a long time. The stories here have gained a brace of Nebula Awards, The Sturgeon Memorial Award, the Sidewise Award, the Asimov's readers' poll, and a John W. Campbell Award for best New Writer for Chiang in 1992. Every story here is a carefully crafted gem, from the fantasy sense of wonder of 'Tower of Babylon' to the tour de force of the title story, a subtle (and deeply moving) exploration on how language and perception are intimately bound, and one that places Chiang on a par with writers like Delany and Watson. I can't recommend this highly enough.

David Drake - Mistress of the Catacombs

Gollancz, 2002, 636pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07427-2 Volume four of Lord of the Isles, the first three of which have been previously reviewed here by Kathy Taylor (V205, 211, 215) "an epic heroic fantasy, with a similarity in style and structure to Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time series, albeit faster paced." According to Kathy, the first two books "were notable in their discussion of the moral consequences of magical and non-magical actions" which tended to slip in the third volume and make it something of a mid-series space filler, setting up the plot for the next book, here, and in which Garric's kingship over the Thousand Isles comes under threat.

Paul Fraser (ed.) – Spectrum SF 8 🕮 🖋

Spectrum Publishing, 2002, 192pp, £3.99 ISBN 1468-3903-08 Unfortunately, for reasons of space, this issue does not contain the whole second part of Charles Stross's serialised novel *The Atrocity Archive* (the first part of which appeared in *Spectrum SF 7*) which has been split so it now concludes in the next issue. Also in this issue, novelettes by Neal Asher and (in collaboration) Michael Coney and Eric Brown, and stories by Colin Davis and Josh Lacy, plus reviews, news and letters.

Robert A. Heinlein - The Fantasies of Robert A. Heinlein

TOR Books, 2002, 352pp, £16.95 ISBN 0-312-87557-6 First reviewed here by L. J. Hurst in V210 and now issued in trade paperback, *Fantasies* collects eight stories from the 1940s and '50s (some originally under the byline "Anson MacDonald"). *Fantasies...* is also a slightly misleading title for a collection which includes '–And He Built a Crooked House' and the mind-warping solipsistic timeloop story '–All You Zombies–'. Three long novellas make up the bulk of the collection, 'Waldo' 'Magic Inc.' and 'The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag' in which technology, magic and politics form sometimes uneasy bedmates. Also included are 'The Man Who Travelled in Elephants', 'Our Fair City' and the paranoid (although perhaps not if they really *are* out to get you) 'They–'.

Gwyneth Jones – Bold As Love

Gollancz, 2002, 406pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-575-07292-X Newly announced as a well-deserved winner of the 2002 Arthur C. Clarke Award, as well as being shortlisted for the BSFA Award and highly placed in our reviewers' poll in V222. Possibly Jones's most accessible sf story (outside her work as Ann Hallam) of recent years – but with none of the compromises that might imply. First reviewed in trade paperback by Tanya Brown in V221 (which issue also contains an interview with the author), and now reissued in mass market format so absolutely no excuse why this doesn't have a place on your shelves.

David Langford - The Wyrdest Link

Gollancz, 2002, 213pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07319-5 Graced (?) with the late Josh Kirby's cruelly accurate caricature of Ann Robinson as the Discworld's Librarian, Discworld®: The Franchise continues in the grand(?) tradition of *Unseen University Challenge* (1996) with *The Wyrdest Link: A Terry Pratchett Discworld® Quizbook*. A perfect chance to determine whether you do really need to Get Out More.

Paul McAuley - Whole Wide World

Tor, 2002, 399pp, £25.95 ISBN 0-765-30392-2 First reviewed in UK hardback edition by Steve Jeffery in V221. In a near-future UK where surveillance is everpresent, with a streetcam on every corner controlled by the "vast, cold and unsympathetic" Al network of ADESS, how does someone get away with the murder of a young woman, especially when it appears to have been staged and broadcast live over the Web? WWW is something of a transitional novel, with one foot firmly in mainstream crime thriller territory, but (as in the Wellsian quote above) a number of sfnal references.

K.J Parker - Shadow

Orbit, 2002, 572pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-105-5

K.J Parker – *Pattern*

Orbit, 2002, 568pp, £10.99 ISBN 1-84149-107-1 Shadow, Book One of The Scavenger Trilogy, was first reviewed in trade paperback edition by Tanya Brown in V219 ("fresh and innovative" and with "a rare gift for characterisation"). Reissued in mass market paperback to coincide with the trade paperback publication of the second volume, Pattern (noted, although not actually seen for review).

Martin Scott - Thraxas and the Dance of Death

Orbit, 2002, 252pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-84148-121-7 A sixth novel in Scott's humorous fantasy series about lazy and overweight sorcerer, private investigator and layabout (in no particular order) Thraxas, the first of which won the World Fantasy Award. The first three of these were enjoyed by our reviewers (Jon Wallace in V206 and Patrick Smith in V207) so if you aren't already a fan, this may be your chance to see what you might have missed.

Brian Stableford - Swan Songs

Big Engine, 2002, 647pp, £16.99 ISBN 1-903468-04-3 Omnibus edition under the subtitle *The Complete Hooded Swan Collection* of Stableford's six biological mystery sf novels from the seventies, *Halcyon Drift, Rhapsody in Black, Promised Land, The Paradise Game, The Fenris Device* and *Swan Song,* together with a new introduction by the author. (For a good retrospective on the early sf of Brian Stableford see 'The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Biologist' by Chris Hill in V211.)

James White - Alien Emergencies

Tor Orb, 2002, 606pp, £19.95 ISBN 0-312-87770-6 Another classic omnibus collection, this one consisting of three of White's celebrated 'Sector General' novels from the eighties; Ambulance Ship, Sector General and Star Healer. Given the current popularity of media sf (Farscape, Voyager), hospital dramas (Casualty, ER) and vet programs (Animal Hospital, Vets in Practice) why has nobody —

particularly Jim Henson Productions – optioned on what looks on the face of it a sure-fire TV hit?

VOYAGER CLASSICS

Stephen Donaldson – The Power That Preserves

Voyager, 2002, 573pp, £8.99 ISBN 0-00-712784-7 Third volume of the (first) Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, The Unbeliever, following Lord Foul's Bane and The Illearth War, both previously issued in this Voyager Classics series.

David Eddings - The Ruby Knight

Voyager, 2002, 444pp, £8.99 ISBN 0-00-712782-0 Second volume of The Ellenium, continuing the story of the knight Sparhawk and his quest to preserve the life of Ehlana, Queen of Elenia, magically imprisoned in a block of crystal. This is a sequel to *The Diamond Throne* and is followed by the concluding volume *The Sapphire Rose*, both of which are also included in the Voyager Classics series.

H. P. Lovecraft - At The Mountains of Madness

Voyager, 2002, 552pp, £8.99 ISBN 0-00-712777-4 Collects HPL's three short novels, At The Mountains of Madness, The Case of Charles Dexter Ward, The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath together with an introduction to those three novels by August Derleth, plus the short stories 'The Dreams in the Witch-House', 'The Statement of Randolph Carter', 'The Silver Key' and 'Through the Gates of the Silver Key'. Warning: may contain traces of blasphemous ichor.

Michael Marshal Smith - Only Forward

Voyager, 2002, 310pp, £8.99 ISBN 0-00-712775-8 Smith's hugely impressive debut, a genre-crossing sf/fantasy ghost thriller, appropriately rounds off the 36 titles of the Classics series. It starts with a young boy opening the door to a man without a head, and then just gets weirder and more surreal and chilling. Brilliant stuff, and a must-read.

Gollancz Collectors' Editions

Joe Haldeman - Worlds

Gollancz, 2002, 239pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07361-6 The Worlds of Haldeman's 1955 novel are a collection of forty-one orbiting satellites, home to half a million people, once the promise of cheap solar energy and raw materials (New New York, the largest of the Worlds, is a hollowed out nickel-iron asteroid) but now in a precarious political relationship with an Earth that has perfected cheap fusion power.

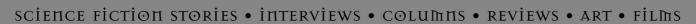
Ian Watson - The Jonah Kit

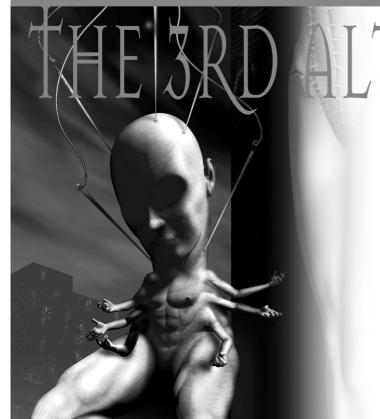
Gollancz, 2002 (©1975), 221pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07389-6 Watson's second novel, from 1975, follows his astonishing 1973 debut *The Embedding* with another exploration of the themes of how language and perception shape reality. A young Russian boy who turns up in Tokyo appears to have had the mind of a dead astronaut imprinted on his own. Furthermore, he claims the experiment has now been extended to other species, such as whales.

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Reviewers Key: AAA – Andrew A. Adams; AF – Alan Fraser; AS – Andrew Sawyer; CAKG – Carol Ann Kerry–Green; CH – Chris Hill; ChB – Cherith Baldry; CoB – Colin Bird; GW – Gary Wilkinson; IE – Iain Emsley; JAM – Jan A. Malique; JN – John Newsinger; JW – John Wallace; LB – Lynne Bispham; LH – Lesley Hatch; MG – Mark Greener; P – Particles; PB – Paul Billinger; PH – Penny Hill; SC – Stuart Carter; SJ – Steve Jeffery; VL – Vikki Lee.





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