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Editorial

I counted them all out, and I counted them all back in

There is an effect that judges of the Arthur C. Clarke Award commonly describe as “*sf burnout*”. Reading anywhere from fifty to eighty novels in the few short months before the shortlist selection deadline can leave a residual numbing effect on the sense of wonder. Too much, too quickly. It’s similar to working unsupervised in a chocolate factory. After a while (for *sf* fans, it may be a longer while than most) you think you’ll never want to see another hazelnut praline ever again.

A few desert the field completely, and run screaming to the high ground of ‘literary’ mainstream novels, others slide sideways into other genres (crime, mystery, romance...), some even cry off fiction altogether for history, biography or science books, but most feel the need for some sort of sabbatical to recoup their energies and enthusiasm.

And so it is with *Vector* reviews editors. After four years and 24 issues (neatly bracketed at either end by the Best of the Year polls for 1999 and 2002), I have decided it’s time to hand over the reins and the blue pencil to someone else, and the current issue will see my last reviews column (and my first and last Editorial) for *Vector*. Although it likely won’t be last you’ll see of me in these pages, and I hope to carry on, as I started, as an occasional reviewer.

I’m not so burned-out that I can’t face the idea of *sf* anymore, and there are still authors who can intrigue, amaze, entertain and even thrill me (see my own ‘Best of 2002’ selection), both older and established writers and rising stars of the genre. In fact I think I took over the editorial chair at just the right time, just as the resurgence (or ‘Renaissance’) of British science fiction (and fantasy) was getting started, with new writers like China Miéville, Alastair Reynolds, Roger Levy and Jon Courtenay Grimwood, while more established writers including Gwyneth Jones, Brian Stableford, Christopher Priest and, perhaps particularly, M. John Harrison, have not been content to rest on their laurels, but have demonstrated that they can still show the Young Turks a thing or two. It’s been fascinating to watch.

Standing down from, and finding people to step into, the various committee and editorial roles within the BSFA is a bit like the Mad Hatter’s Tea Party, or one of those square puzzle blocks which you have to arrange in numerical order (but with the added complication of not having a vacant square to let you do the shuffling). Unlike the Mad Hatter’s Tea Party, though, no-one cries “No Room! No Room!” The BSFA are always open for, and desperately in need of, new blood and volunteers. (Go on. You know you want to.)

From the next issue, Paul Billinger will be taking over as the new reviews editor. Paul will hopefully have new ideas of his own about the direction and shape of *Vector*’s reviewing policy, as I did when I took over, in some trepidation, from Paul Kincaid, who edited the column for an astonishing 12 years. One thing I do hope Paul keeps is the wide coverage of all aspects of science fiction, fantasy and horror that *Vector* has maintained to date. Indeed, *Vector* is arguably the only UK *sf* magazine which gives a comprehensive coverage of the genre in terms of the number of

reviews it carries each issue. Looking back over the last four years, I note we have carried something over 1200 reviews over those 24 issues.

There are things I would also have liked to do – duplicate or multiple reviews of particular books (like *Locus*), longer ‘feature’ reviews – but weren’t always possible given the constraints of space, budget and resources.

One thing I have always held is that reviewing is different from criticism. Proper criticism is an art. It requires, apart from the ability to talk about books as ‘texts’ and narrative tropes without blushing, a wide range of reading, detailed knowledge of the subject and a good grounding in literary and critical theory. (And, I suggest, more than one school of critical theory – we have seen several books that attempt to shoehorn works uncomfortably into the critic’s pet theory: ‘when all you have is a hammer’, the saying goes, ‘everything starts to look like a nail’.) It is a high-wire act that requires skill and (when it is particularly successful) some daring. At its best it can be invigorating and exciting. In less skilled hands, an equally spectacular disaster.

Reviewing, on the other hand, is something any reasonably perceptive, well-read and articulate reader should be able to have a go at. (Go on. You know you want to). Reviewing is, at heart, a consumer guide. It treads a fine line between opinion and promotion. Publishers send us review copies of their books in the hope that we will say positive things about them and encourage people to buy more copies. (To be honest, their selection of blurb quotes is sometimes so selective that this doesn’t appear to matter as much as you might think, as long as we get the title and purchasing details right.)

To my mind the only constraint on a reviewer is that they should be honest in their own opinions of the work being reviewed. We have never followed Thumper’s mother’s dictum (“if you can’t say nuthin’ nice, then don’t say nuthin’”) as a policy for printing only positive reviews, and I have never encountered any hint from any source that we could or should do so.

Given those 1200 books mentioned above, not even the most obsessive *sf* fan could be expected to read them all (though some of us will have a damn good try). A review is as much about what type of thing a particular book is, allowing you to filter for your particular tastes, as how well done it is of its kind in the eyes of the reviewer. That last is important. A review should be approached from a position of *caveat reader* or ‘know your reviewer’. Which is one reason we include an annual reviewers’ poll – see later in this issue – partly as a round-up of the year, partly as a list of recommendations, but also so you can gain an idea of each reviewer’s tastes and preferences and how they coincide with your own. (I know one fanzine reviewer who I treat as an almost perfect negative barometer of my own tastes. In five years I think we have only ever agreed on one book – *Pavane*.)

Before I hand over to Paul, I’d just like to say thank you to all the reviewers, editors and BSFA people I’ve traded books and words with and who have helped make the last four years an interesting and enjoyable gig. I’m now off to marvel at all the empty carpet space in the spare room. Take care.

 Steve Jeffery, Spring 2003



LETTERS TO VECTOR

In V225 Syd Foster reviewed Linda Nagata's *Vast*.

From Peter Stenlake via email:

I will certainly have to check out Linda Nagata's *Vast* on Mr Foster's recommendation. However, can I please log a small objection? His review goes on to say the following: "and all kinds of *Dr Who* which never gets a good review, and yet the clones keep buying it... aaargh!"

I would very much like Mr Foster to know that I'm not a clone,

and if he thinks that current *Dr Who* publications never get a good review, then he is reading the wrong publications! If he wants to see just how adult and thoughtful current *Dr Who* fiction is, he could do worse than peruse Lance Parkin's recent *Who* novel *Father Time* – a mature novel that can happily compete with any non-tie fiction you care to name.

Please remember, Mr Foster, just because it's a tie-in novel, doesn't make it worthless!

Readers with long memories might recall the interchange between Gary S. Dalkin and myself in 'Watered-Down Worlds: 'Wookie Books': The Case for the Prosecution' and Daniel O'Mahony and 'Dances with Wookies: The Case For the Defence' over the issue of Wookie books (V200), and the later response from Kevin J. Anderson (V202). Back issues are available... Daniel O'Mahoney wrote a pretty damn good *Who* novel himself.

Letters to Vector should be sent to Andrew M Butler, D28, Dept 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.

Books of the Year – 2002

compiled by Steve Jeffery

"Remind me, audience. What do points mean?"

– Humphrey Lyttleton, *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue*

Each year we ask our editors and reviewers to recommend their five 'best' books read in the past year. The reviewers poll is intended to have a different and wider scope than the BSFA Best Novel Award and the Clarke Award, both limited to sf/fantasy novels first published in the UK in the year of eligibility. The reviewers' selections do not necessarily have to be works published in the sf/fantasy genre, or novels, UK publications or works that have been published in the last year. The results, as the Birmingham Science Fiction group stress of their own annual and fannish 'Nova' Awards, are "not intended to be of any great cosmic significance", but they will, hopefully give you a view of the different tastes, interests and enthusiasms of the contributors to *Vector* and its sister magazines in the BSFA.

There was an encouraging response again this year. We had 30 returns, with a total of 145 votes between them.

Last year three books tied with the same number of votes (Iain M. Banks's *Look to Windward*, Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* and China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*, and closely followed by books by John Clute, Gwyneth Jones, Guy Gavriel Kay and Connie Willis) evenly splitting the top place between (and, arguably, across) both sf and fantasy genres. For much of the voting period while this year's list was being compiled a similar situation developed, with three, sometimes four, books jostling for position. For a long while it looked like China might do the double in an intriguing head-to-head race between student and master. (China has never been reticent about his debt to, and admiration for, the writing of M. John Harrison – see his reprinted introduction to Harrison's collection *Things That Never Happen* in *Vector* 226.) To my mind, the most interesting and encouraging aspect of the final results is the way both established and newer writers are up there mixing it up, trading licks. And, as before, the poll for this year shows a both healthy balance between sf and fantasy, between 'adult' and 'children's' books (particularly Gaiman's wonderful and spooky *Coraline*), and overlap with both the Clarke and BSFA Award shortlists. It's a bit of a shame that votes for Gwyneth Jones were split between two parts of her evocative countercultural alternate future trilogy, *Bold As Love* and

Castles Made of Sand, robbing her of a higher placing.

But that's enough of me wittering on. This is, after all, "the people's poll" (fixed grin, beady forehead, BSFA underpants), so over to our reviewers.

ANDREW ADAMS

Best Books of last year also got bumped off by overwork, I'm afraid. Here's a couple of quick thoughts.

One that definitely comes to mind is the sequence 'The Dresden Files' by Jim Butcher. I discovered the series and picked up Number 4 hot-off-the-presses in the summer. Excellent stuff.

The Assassin's Edge (Orbit, 2002), The final book of Juliet McKenna's Tales of Einarinn didn't disappoint. Book five finished off a nice fantasy series that's definitely not sub-Tolkien or even influenced by Tolkien particularly. More of a Moorcock feel to it in some ways, though without the weirdness factor.

CHRIS AMIES

Pashazade by Jon Courtney Grimwood (Earthlight, 2001) is a very assured novel and a murder mystery set in a future Alexandria; but not only that. Grimwood's detailed world is not our world, but follows a different path from early in the 20th century.

Bold As Love, by Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz, 2001), a worthy 2002 ACCA winner, is a kind and humorous retelling of the Arthur myth in another – possibly alternative – future, one of a Britain either descending into anarchy or becoming nations once again, depending on your viewpoint.

The Sterkarm Handshake by Susan Price (Scholastic, 1998) is a time-travel story seen predominantly from the viewpoint of those colonised by time-travellers, a warlike Border people whose very existence has been ignored by 'official' history as taught in schools.

My Name is Red by Orhan Pamuk (Faber and Faber, 2001) is ostensibly another murder mystery, though the mystery is secondary to Pamuk's description of an alien world – in this case, 16th century Turkey, at a time when it was forced to open up to European influence. The debate between painting styles symbolises the clash of cultures.

woods. On the surface a well-constructed crime novel but at heart a stunning portrayal of an emotionally devastated character. Writing does not get better than this.

Jon Courtenay Grimwood: *Effendi* (Earthlight, 2002) Ashraf Bey has been promoted and is now the Chief of Detectives but that's the only good news; his past is catching up with him, his relationship with his ex-fiancée is complex and her father is accused of mass murder. A brilliantly constructed multi-layered story with the character of the city of El Iskandryia as vivid and evocative as its people.

David Mitchell: *Ghostwritten* (Sceptre, 1999) Starting from the nerve-gas attack in the Tokyo subway and moving through a series of tales spanning the globe via Mongolia, Moscow and Bat Segundo's radio show we discover... a brilliantly constructed novel which you must read for yourself. Written with a real sf sensibility – truly a masterpiece.

Garth Nix: *Sabriel* (Collins, 2002) Two countries, Ancelstierre and the Old Kingdom, the first similar to but not our own, the other a place where the dead walk free. Sabriel must cross into the Old Kingdom to search for her missing father. Fully realised characters, both human and otherwise, evocative settings and skilful plotting, done with such skill and lightness of touch make the familiar fantasy elements fresh and new.

COLIN BIRD

I seemed to concentrate on the many excellent reissues of classics and so got even further behind in my reading of new stuff but here goes:

Zeitgeist by Bruce Sterling. Aptly titled near-future effort which is hilariously prescient and worldly wise.

The Chronoliths by Robert Charles Wilson. A startlingly neat idea which is poorly developed (not an unusual failing of this author). But good to see somebody coming up with such weirdly memorable ideas in a book set on near-future Earth.

Perdido Street Station by China Miéville. The mother of all sprawling fantasy epics – impressive on every level. A genuine masterpiece.

The Collected Stories by Arthur C. Clarke. Some of the most influential sf short fiction ever published. Essential stuff.

Tales Of The Dying Earth by Jack Vance. A treasure trove of invention. All of Vance's Dying Earth series in one volume. Bliss!

LYNNE BISPHAM

In first place has to be Gwyneth Jones's *Bold As Love* (Gollancz, 2002), an exhilarating and at times terrifying depiction of a near-future Britain. If I had to pick out the aspects of the book that made it the 'best' work I read this year, it would have to be the depiction of the three main characters – Ax, Sage and Fiorinda – combined with an extraordinarily believable scenario. Encapsulates the ramifications of the proverbial "may you live in interesting times."

A close second is Tim Power's *The Drawing of the Dark* (Gollancz Fantasy Masterworks, 2002), a dryly humorous and clever blend of historical fact, myth and fantasy – and very readable.

An even closer third is Ursula Le Guin's *The Other Wind* (Orion, 2002), a wonderful culmination to the Earthsea sequence of novels, which redefines the earlier books and takes fantasy to another level.

Fourth, Juliet E McKenna's *The Assassin's Edge* (Orbit, 2002) The Fifth Tale Of Einarinn. Again, it is the portrayal of characters that simply leap off the page that makes this stand out from other fantasies. I'd recommend reading the other books in the series.

Fifth, Ian Irvine's *The Way Between The Worlds* (Orbit, 2001), volume four in The View From The Mirror series – pure escapism, but, hey, what's wrong with a bit of escapism!

CLAIRE BRIALEY

The summary of a year's good reading has to start with Jon Courtenay Grimwood. *Effendi* (Earthlight, 2002) is a novel of terrible imagination. And it's a novel with vision, although the visions offered, of both the past that could have been and elements of the future which might still not be too far away, can make you want to

wince and shade your eyes.

Blue Silence by Michelle Marquardt (Bantam, 2002) is an excellent first novel by an Australian sf author and a thoroughly enjoyable book. It's a book about people – politicians and other aliens – and what they want from each other. And it's very, very good.

Peter Crowther's collection of short stories, *Mars Probes* (Daw Books, 2002), has been cited by Jonathan Strahan as demonstrating that the death of the sf short story has been greatly exaggerated. The volume contains 17 stories, all of them connected to Mars and all of them impressively different in their approach to the subject.

Orhan Pamuk is a genre-spanning writer. *My Name is Red* (Faber & Faber, 2001 – first published in Turkey in 1998), encompassing crime, history, and magic realism, is immediately notable for its narrative structure but more enduringly memorable for the world it conveys and the lives it depicts.

And any mention of narrative complexity and memorable story-telling leads inevitably to Chris Priest's *The Separation* (Scribner, 2002), a compelling novel of alternatives set mainly in the Second World War which does for historical narrative what Maurits Escher did for architecture.

NICKY BROWNE

This year I've read fewer books than ever before but have been that little bit more selective, with the result that I have five books that I could happily recommend to anyone, even my non-genre reading friends. Most of them even have respectable looking cover designs too. They are also such obvious choices that readers will undoubtedly tut, toss their heads and complain that of course everybody rates them. (Sorry!) I can't rank them in any kind of meaningful order either, they are all too different and too good. They are: *Light* by M John Harrison (Gollancz 2002) because of the taut brilliance of his writing, the startling strangeness of the story and the reckless, damaged alienated characters who struggle through it. I'm still haunted by this one – it's one of those books. *Pashazade* and *Effendi* by Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Simon and Schuster 2001/2) because of his genre-bending, Chanderlesque style, his ingenious alternative milieu and deadpan humour. *Orthe* by Mary Gentle (Gollancz reprinted 2002) because she's brave enough to see the logic of a multi-faceted alien world through to the (very) bitter end and make you believe in it. *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman (Headline 2001) because of its great dialogue, Gaiman's gift for the absurd and his audacious plotting. *The Scar* by China Miéville (Macmillan 2002) because of his gothic imagination, baroque world building and all-round weird intelligence. If you've not got round to any of these yet you're really missing something.

ANDREW M. BUTLER

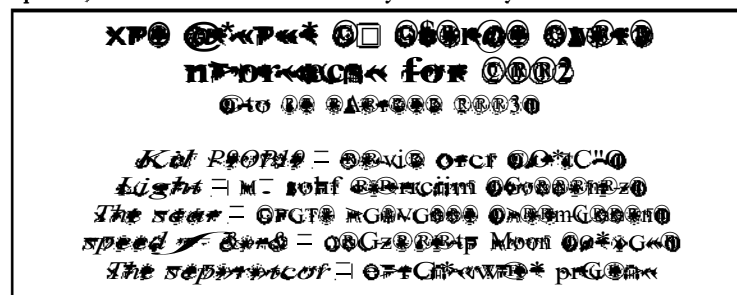
In the vain hope of being listed in *Private Eye* two of my picks of the year are by friends and one is by someone I've met (but which is which?).

I actually read China Miéville's *The Scar* (Macmillan, 2002) in manuscript and, whilst I wasn't as blown away as I was by *Perdido*

Street Station, it's a pretty impressive volume

me, wrong-footing the reader delightfully.

M. John Harrison's *Light* (Gollancz, 2002) I think is a book to reread; a shame the cover artwork in the trade paperback a) has so much silver foil on top of it, b) thus gets covered in finger marks and c) blinds you if you look at it from the wrong angle. I think that last might be instructive, somehow.



Rob Latham's *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002) is a Marxian reading of vampires, cyborgs, generation X and post-cyberpunk, stuffed full with insights and references to follow up.

I'm been reading a lot of kiddylit and a volume which stood out was Robert Westall's *Gullf* (London: Methuen, 1992) which has just come out in a new edition. It's a tale of a boy who identifies rather too much with an Iraqi soldier, and it remains rather too relevant a decade on.

Number five is hard to pin down but Gillian Rubinstein, *Beyond the Labyrinth* (South Yarra: Hyland House, 1988) surprised me by being much better than I anticipated. Her Space Demons trilogy involves children going into various computer games – they're better than that sounds, too – and I assumed that this was going to be a story about a teenager in a fantasy role-playing book. In fact we have a much more subtle first contact novel, and when we do get to choose our own ending, it's anything but escapist.

STUART CARTER

Altered Carbon – Richard Morgan (Gollancz, 2002). Nothing else even came close for me this year. A corporate future awash with blood, guns and exotic technology all packaged in prose like a waterslide made of Teflon with razors set in the walls halfway down. Br.

Redemption Ark – Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz, 2002) Reynold's dark universe keeps on getting darker and Redemption Ark was a return to form, I thought, after the (slight) disappointment of Chasm City. More massive cathedral-like spaceships, soul-chilling aliens, and this time they've brought some big guns too. Nurse, my pills!

The Scar – China Miéville (Macmillan, 2002). Could he do it again? Was Perdido Street Station a fluke? No, no and thrice no! With New Crobuzon left far behind over the horizon we were adrift on sinister stormy seas of Miéville's making. Tragically beautiful story-telling on an awesome scale.

Full Moon – Michael Light. A heavyweight coffee table edition of high-quality reprints of photos from the Apollo moon landings. Jaded old me thought I knew what Apollo was like from the grainy, overexposed black and white images we see all the time – then I saw these babies. The moon is one hell of a beautiful place. And some of the Apollo craft look like a garden shed – how did that work?

Stone – Adam Roberts (Gollancz, 2002) A very UK-centric list for me this year, and Roberts was just another outstanding reason why I shall be continuing to buy British in 2003. Roberts almost always comes through with his smart, thoughtful and old-fashioned sense-of-wonder sf. *Stone* was an alternately enchanting and horrifying tour (de force) of a unique galactic empire.

GARY DALKIN

The Separation – Christopher Priest (Scribner 2002) Shifts of perception and reality, the consequences of violence, twins, mistaken identity, narrative sleight-of-hand. The familiar Priest themes are present and correct, this time wrapped in an ingeniously constructed story of World Wars II. A fine book, cleverly packaged to sell as little as possible: fans of this sort of thing (whatever this sort of thing is) may leave *The Separation* on the shelf supposing it is a mainstream, if upmarket, war novel, while anyone expecting a literary war drama may be alienated, confused and angered by the book they find within the covers.

Fast Food Nation – Eric Schlosser The first book I read on my return from my first visit to the USA and a three-week confrontation with more fast food 'restaurants' than I could possibly imagine. *Fast Food Nation* begins in deceptively comfortable style with an engrossing history of the development of the USA beefburger chains, but gradually becomes a horrifying catalogue of a nightmare world which sacrifices the welfare (and sometimes lives) of its customers and employees for another cent in the dollar profit. A compelling high-tech tale of corporate greed, corruption and sheer black-hearted evil; this book presents the sort of subject which should be at the heart

of radical modern SF but conspicuously isn't. The sheep don't look up, they just eat at McDonalds.

The Lighthouse Stevensons – Bella Bathurst Filled with more imagination, ingenuity, daring and adventure than any recent sf I read last year, this is the true story of Robert Louis Stevenson's ancestors and their generations-long involvement in the building of Scotland's lighthouses. An inspiring epic of determination, courage and scientific breakthrough, not to mention sense-of-wonder at the feats involved, this is as engrossing a tale as any hard SF engineering saga.

Clint Eastwood – Patrick McGilligan Patrick McGilligan conducted a huge number of interviews for this book, which is exhaustively researched and documented. Clint Eastwood is suing McGilligan for \$10million as I write, and suing is one of the things McGilligan suggests Eastwood is very good at; the actor emerges as a deeply flawed man almost entirely at odds with his media image. A very well written and gripping examination of the way it seems eminently possible to fool most of the people most of the time.

Mission off Gravity – Hal Clement (Gollancz Collectors Edition, 2002) A great example of old school sf world building, and what a world Clement built! More travelogue than story, the book is nevertheless filled with memorable incident and some of the most imaginatively devised aliens to grace the page. Not only that, but unlike virtually all modern SF novels, *Mission off Gravity* tells its tale in 200 pages and doesn't outstay its welcome or come back for unnecessary sequels. One genre classic that really has stood the test of time.

ALAN FRASER

One book I re-read last year and loved yet again was Jack Finney's *Time And Again*, in the Gollancz Fantasy Masterworks series, but it was a 2001 reprint of the original 1970 book. A friend of mine who isn't into SF but who is fascinated by New York first showed me the book in the 1970s. As the Dakota apartment block played such an important role in the book, it was especially poignant for us when John Lennon was shot outside there in 1980.

MARK GREENER

Two sf-related biographies stood out for me this year: Nicholas Murray's *Aldous Huxley: An English Intellectual* (Little Brown 2002) and Miranda Seymour's *Mary Shelley* (John Murray 2000). Murray's book is, remarkably, the first biography of Huxley – for me one of the greatest British writers – for some 30 years. With *Brave New World* and *Frankenstein*, Huxley and Shelley bequeathed the world myths, images and stories that remain relevant today.

On the fiction front, Umberto Eco's *Baudolino* (Secker & Warburg 2002) was probably my favourite. Eco's masterful story of a knight seeking the magical kingdom of Prester John is full of his trademark intellectual games, philosophical speculation and often-beautiful prose. However, its intellectual and philosophical layers are built on a foundation established by an extraordinary fantasy novel. For me, *Baudolino* is a return to form after *The Island off the Day Before*, which I found somewhat disappointing.

As I write, a wholesale slaughter of the innocents in Iraq seems inevitable. So Moorcock's *Firing the Cathedral* (PS Publishing 2002) – a response to 9/11 – is timely. Prosaically, it's a worthy addition to the Jerry Cornelius myth. But give the current political climate, *Firing the Cathedral*, along with Michael Moore's *Stupid White Men*, become almost essential reading. (Huxley was, of course, a pacifist, another reason why his biography is especially relevant.)

Finally, I found Gwyneth Jones's *Bold as Love* (Gollancz 2001) a remarkable, compelling fantasy. OK, I seem to be recommending this book a year after everyone else, but better late than never ...

LESLEY HATCH

First is Geoff Ryman's *Lust* (Flamingo, 2001) which is basically the story of a young scientist who discovers, entirely by accident, that he can imagine anyone he feels a sexual attraction for and they will appear before him. It is not just a catalogue of casual sexual encounters, however, it is also a modern morality tale.

My second choice is Katherine Kurtz's *King Kelson's Bride*, the

latest novel in the Deryni canon, and it's a worthy addition to the series. She has managed to convey the dilemmas facing all young rulers when it comes to finding a consort, regardless of their heritage.

Next is Simon Clark's *The Night of the Triffids* (NEL, 2001) set twenty-five years after John Wyndham's classic, and told in the first person by the son of Wyndham's narrator. Beginning with the triffids' completely unexpected resurgence, it's a worthy successor to the original novel, with an unexpected twist to conclude.

Sherri Tepper's *The Fresco* is a delight, despite her preaching a little, but it's easy to disregard this habit of hers. An alien race offers the Earth membership of a galactic confederation, but the aliens are not all they seem, and this seemingly straightforward tale soon gets complicated.

Finally, in *Take A Thief*, Mercedes Lackey returns to her most convincing universe Valdemar, with its Heralds and Companions – and it's a welcome return. Although it follows the tried and tested format of hardship being rewarded by privilege, the novel contains fascinating characters, and I really enjoyed reading this tale.

CHRIS HILL

From Hell – Alan Moore (Knockabout, 2001) Forget the risible film version, this is a stunning examination of the Ripper legend, especially in the way it looks at the significance of the first well-known serial killer. Alan Moore has never been better.

Coraline – Neil Gaiman (Bloomsbury, 2002) Genuinely creepy childrens' story in the 'be careful what you wish for' mode. The US edition with the Dave McKean illustrations is the version to have – the UK edition looks designed to discourage people from picking it up.

The Years of Rice and Salt – Kim Stanley Robinson (Voyager, 2002) Complex alternative history which proves that there is no correct solution to history. Possibly the most important sf novel to be published in 2002.

The Dream of Scipio – Iain Pears (Jonathan Cape, 2002) A complex and layered tale of three men linked by the manuscript of the title. In part a cautionary tale of how historical documents only give part of the truth about their subjects. Also a discourse on the importance of Art. This book's absence from the major literary award lists is a crime.

Mappa Mundi – Justina Robson (Macmillan 2001) The best 'straight' sf novel I read in 2002. One of those that takes modern scientific ideas and follows them through to their ultimate end. The sort of book that Greg Egan would write if he was better at portraying normal, emotional people.

PENNY HILL

From Hell – Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell (Knockabout 2001) This graphic novel sets up and explores an interesting hypothesis, with wonderfully interesting annotations/ appendices. There is no crusading element here.

The Dream of Scipio – Iain Pears (Jonathan Cape, 2002). Absolutely excellent. This book has three interweaving sections, describing three phases of fading civilisation – the collapse of the Roman Empire, the terrible effects of the plague in the Middle Ages and the destruction of French and Jewish culture in the Second World War, all set in the same town in Provence.

The Years of Rice and Salt – Kim Stanley Robinson (Voyager, 2002). I enjoyed watching the familiar characters re-appear in each cycle – B the faithful/loving one, K the fighter, I the scientist, A the ruler, P the servant and S the untrustworthy one. I also enjoyed the theories of life as tragic or comic or tragi-comic.

Maus I: My Father Bleeds History & Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began – A Survivor's Tale – Art Spiegelman (Penguin, editions not dated – first published 1986 & 1991). Seminal works in the field of comics, as Art Spiegelman narrates his father's experiences as a Polish Jew surviving the Nazis.

This is an excellent and moving book. Not only does it give the rest of us an impression of what those years were like, it also movingly captures their enduring after-effects on people and their relationships with others.

Adventures in the Dream Trade – Neil Gaiman. This was a wonderful description of what happens to a writer on tour. This is the sort of compilation that makes me want to go and do more, read more and discuss more.

STEVE JEFFERY

It's a rare book that inspires me to go back to immediately read almost the whole output of its author before returning to re-read it with whole different host of questions. M. John Harrison's *Light* (Gollancz, 2002) is both a rare and brilliant book, one that almost underscores the recent 'renaissance' of British space-opera sf with the comment, "top that". A tough job, but I hope someone is tempted to take up the challenge and carry it off with as much style, invention, humour and humanity as Harrison brings to *Light*.

China Miéville may only have two novels so far to his credit, but you sensed a similar challenge being thrown down in his debut, *Perdido Street Station*. *The Scar* (Macmillan, 2002), although equally inventive, perhaps wisely does not attempt to outdo the flamboyant fireworks of its predecessor. It is a more restrained, controlled and assured novel, brilliantly structured, that both challenges and comments on the genre.

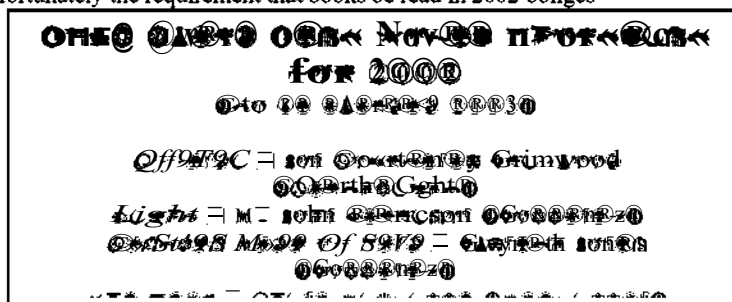
Ted Chiang has not written a novel. But the eight stories in *Stories of Your Life and Others* (Tor, 2002) have garnered a slew of awards. An excellent collection.

Robert Holstock's *The Iron Grail* (Earthlight, 2002), the second book in his Merlin Codex, and sequel to *Celtika*, develops the strained relationships between Merlin/Antiokus, the obsessed Argonaut Jason, the Celtic chieftan Urtha and the headstrong sorceress Niiw as the story brings them to Alba, the Isle of Ghosts.

Effendi, by Jon Courtenay Grimwood, is also the second in a series, here the Arabesk, and another in which the relationships between characters take central place. It is, if anything, even better than *Pashazade*, and underscored by a brilliant, and shockingly revealed, back story.

Unfortunately the requirement that books be read in 2002 obliges

me to omit Chris toph er Priest's challenge ng



and thought-provoking *The Separation* (Scribner, 2002) and I feel I ought to similarly disallow Colin Greenland's *Finding Helen* (Black Swan, 2003) seen only in proof and quite possibly his best novel yet. So for my last book, I'm torn between Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (HarperCollins US, 2002) and Gwyneth Jones's *Castles Made of Sand* (Gollancz, 2002).

PAUL KINCAID

I've been reading a lot of good non-fiction this year, but one book stood out dramatically from the rest. *The Metaphysical Club* by Louis Menand (Flamingo) starts out as a joint biography of the four people who shaped American Pragmatism, but it expands to become an extraordinary account of American learning, particularly in the sciences, from the late 18th century to the middle years of the 20th century. It is dense and difficult at times, but it is as intellectually exciting as any book I can remember reading for many years.

In science fiction it's been a year for established names to stretch themselves and show what they can do. Easily the two best examples of this are *The Separation* by Christopher Priest (Scribners), an audacious alternate history that casts doubt on every interpretation you try to bring to the story, and *Light* by M. John Harrison (Gollancz), his most playful work for years that still manages to twist the clichés of space opera into something dark, mysterious and wonderful.

Another established writer, who seems to be easing up a little and writing at shorter length than usual, is John Crowley, whose *The Translator* (Morrow) is considerably less dense than his recent Aegypt sequence. Yet this tale of a Russian poet and guardian angel at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis is subtle, delicate, allusive, and one of the loveliest fantasies you're likely to encounter. (And if you value modern fantasy check out Crowley's story and the others in The New Wave Fabulists, the latest issue of the American literary journal *Conjunctions*, Guest Editor Peter Straub.)

It was the year I caught up with *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* by Michael Chabon (Picador, 2000), set in the world of American comic books before and after the Second World War, with elements of magic realism thrown in, it just gathers you up in its story and keeps you inescapably engaged from first page to last.

DAVID LANGFORD

M. John Harrison: *Light* (Gollancz 2002). A seemingly impossible yet triumphantly successful fusion of Harrison's unforgettably creepy vein of urban horror with whizz-bang interstellar action that's equally assured and lyrical. Cyborg warships, incomprehensible artifacts, and battles fought in nanoseconds alternate with a contemporary timeline of quantum strangeness, grubby rituals of propitiation, and a haunting by that dread horse-skull so often met in Viriconium. Splendid 'slingshot' ending.

China Miéville: *The Scar* (Macmillan 2002). A huge, ambitious nautical science-fantasy which alludes to a million other seagoing sagas, from *Moby Dick* to *The Hunting of the Snark*. From my *New York Review of SF* review: "It's a crammed, ingenious, exuberant novel, written with the same unnerving confidence and sure eye for the grotesque as *Perdido Street Station*. On the whole, *The Scar* is better constructed, with closer attention paid to the architecture of plot as well as lavish incidental ornament."

Alastair Reynolds: *Redemption Ark* (Gollancz 2002). His third and most polished contribution to what some people call the space opera renaissance. Planet-busting action on the largest scale, which despite some slightly wobbly plot logic leads to an effectively Baxterian sense of deep time and forward planning for a catastrophe (and incidental tiny homage to Doc Smith) three billion years in the future.

Christopher Priest: *The Separation* (Scribner 2002). A compelling, intensively researched story which gives the sf theme of alternate history the unique Priest spin that he's previously applied to invisibility, matter transmission, virtual reality, etc. His fascination with twins, doubles and doppelgangers feeds fruitfully into an evocation of World War II which sways hypnotically between two incompatible outcomes. Up there with his best.

Hard to decide on a fifth choice. The finest pure fantasy I read in 2002 was Kenneth Morris's *The Book of the Three Dragons* (Longmans, Green & Co 1930), an exuberant reworking of the Mabinogion's Celtic fantasy themes with a properly Welsh enthusiasm for language – lovely prose rhythms and a touch of bardic *hwyl*. In hard sf, I also liked Neal Asher's *The Line of Polity* (Tor UK 2003, read in proof). For children's fiction, Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (Bloomsbury 2002) is the clear winner; as a fan of 'A Series of Unfortunate Events'. I also enjoyed the non-fiction or at any rate non-fact *Lemony Snicket: The Unauthorized Autobiography* (Egmont 2002). Graphic novels: how to choose between Alan Moore's *Promethea* Book 2 (America's Best 2001) and Top 10 Book 2 (ditto 2002)? As for collections, I suppose that being its editor debars me from so much as mentioning *Maps: The Uncollected John Sladek* (Big Engine 2002)....[but you did anyway –ed.]

VIKKI LEE

A mixed bag of fantasy read throughout the year produced no *really* outstanding novels at all. Several, however, were excellent reads for one reason or another. Of two David Gemmell titles read, *Talon of the Silver Hawk* (Voyager, 2002) is worthy of note. A standalone story set back during the Riftwar tells the tale of a young man's life before he becomes important in the King's court in later novels. Thoroughly entertaining, and nice to have further insight into an old

favourite character.

I'd like to include *Inquisition* (Earthlight, 2002) by Anselm Audley. I was critical last year of the mess the publishers made of publishing his first novel and the first in this series, and was pleased to see them get their act together on this second book in a promising series. Not a great book at all, but a fast-moving story peopled with likeable characters and the continuation of an intriguing story. It's a page-turner and entertaining read – one ideal for a long journey.

James Barclay's *Elfsorrow* (Gollancz, 2002) is the latest tale involving The Raven – a bunch of 'ne'er give up' mercenaries whose fate seems to be to continually save the world, even when the threat is a result of them saving it in the previous book. *Elfsorrow* is an in-depth look at the life of the Elves, little mentioned in previous books, and is a thoroughly engrossing read. It's a stand-alone book, so a good starting place for anyone who's not read Barclay before.

The Visitor by Sheri S. Tepper (Gollancz, 2002) is another book worthy of note, bearing in mind the pitfalls of this author's well-known capacity for tub-thumping on issues she holds dear to her heart. It's 'visitors from another planet' with Tepper's own unique blend of fantasy and damn good characterisation and story-telling thrown in. It's not her best book, but in some ways is Tepper at her best. Well worth a read if you're prepared to suspend belief.

And finally, I should mention Maggie Furey's latest, *The Eye of Eternity* (Orbit, 2002), which rounds off the Myrial Trilogy nicely. Again, storytelling is the key for me, and Furey is one of the best for involving the reader and pacing a story well. I like a good yarn well told, with people I like or intrigue me, and this one fits the bill in every aspect. Another of those books ideal for whiling away long journeys.

JAN MALIQUE

I could cite numerous examples of books which have touched, perplexed or otherwise thrilled me but have narrowed down my choices to the following five. These works have engaged my imagination because the authors have created strong, flawed characters (in my opinion anyway). The individuals remind me of beautifully fashioned ceramics, at first sight perfect in every way but upon closer inspection riddled with fine cracks. There is perfection in their imperfection. I'm interested in knowing what makes them tick and how they interact with the Universe. The roads these characters travel along are long and dusty, littered with shards of lost civilisations and peoples; I have faithfully accompanied them on every journey. The last book in my selection is a monumental reference tome by a remarkable individual, a scholar whose ideas have deeply impacted upon western occultism, the renaissance, neoplatonism and western kabbalah. In truth it is a wormhole leading into multiple universes. The past is brought alive by the vast knowledge contained within its pages, indeed it does as that beautiful inscription over an unknown Theban tomb states, "To speak the name of the dead is to make them live again, it restoreth the Breath of Life to he who hath vanished".

Brian Bates – *The Way of the Wyrd* (Arrow Books, 1996).

Storm Constantine – *Burying the Shadow* (Headline, 1992).

Anne Rice – *Servant of the Bones* (Arrow Books, 1997).

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro – *A Feast in Exile: A Novel of Saint-Germain* (Tor, 2001).

Henry Cornelius Agrippa – *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, tr. James Freake, edited & annotated by Donald Tyson (Llewellyn Publications, 1998).

FARAH MENDLESOHN

Top honours must go to M. John Harrison's *Light* (Gollancz, 2002). It is impossible to do justice to the book here, but *Light* is both a summation of all that is sf, and a stick of dynamite in the granite of genre. Similarly explosive is a book that is not a book, issue 39 of a US literary journal called *Conjunctions*. Guest edited by Peter Straub, the volume contains stories by John Crowley, Neil Gaiman, Nalo Hopkinson, Kelly Link, M. John Harrison—the list goes on and is positively stellar. It rebuilds an alternative fantasy rooted in Peake

and Carroll and Mirrlees, rather than Tolkien.

China Miéville's *The Scar* (Macmillan, 2002) is as stylistically brilliant as we would expect, but most of the other books which I loved (and this is not an exclusive list), struck me for content rather than style (although all are very well written).

Jon Courtenay Grimwood's *Effendi* (Earthlight, 2002), couldn't be better timed with its coruscating attack on the Jesuitical ethics of international politics; Ted Chiang's *Stories of My Life* (Tor, 2002), is another collection, quirky and thoughtful: 'Hell is the Absence of God' has already won a Hugo.

In the slipstream, Larisa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (Thomas Allen) offers a reminder that not all fantasy is western, and that class remains a vitally important division in the world. Which more than exhausts my choices, except that for once there is a short story I want to mention. Gregory Frost's 'Madonna of the Maquiladora', (Asimov's May 2002) is extremely impressive, a story of dispossession and class politics in Latin America. It's told very coolly, almost coldly at first: a story in which the structure and direction is fairly obvious but *how we get there* is its real core.

And if I could have two more, Noon's *Falling out of Cars* takes us back to a fragmented looking glass world, while MacLeod's *Engine City* is a fine conclusion to the Engines of Light trilogy.

ANDREW SEAMAN

Several of my 'must reads' in 2002 (Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Years of Rice and Salt*, Chris Priest's *The Separation* and Jeff Vandermeer's *City of Saints and Madmen*) are still languishing on the shelves waiting to be read, but...

Light by M. John Harrison (Gollancz, 2002) *The Centauri Device* collides with *The Course of the Heart*. Harrison returns to the sf fold with a breathtaking space opera that simultaneously celebrates and undermines the form.

Maelstrom by Peter Watts (Tor, 2002) Sequel to his equally wonderful debut novel *Starfish*, *Maelstrom* impresses with its depth of detail and breadth of vision. There hasn't been as plausible or as exhilarating an apocalypse since John Barnes's *Mother of Storms*.

A Year in the Linear City by Paul di Filippo (PS Publishing, 2002) Small, but perfectly formed, di Filippo's novella, set in the wonderfully realised closed environment of a literally endless city, has enough wild invention to fill the pages of a whole novel.

Radiance by Carter Scholz (St Martin's Press, 2002) Scholz's acidic black comedy about a US weapons lab trying to justify its existence in a post-Cold War world. Not sf, but a fiction about science and politics that will amuse and horrify in equal measure.

A Pound of Paper by John Baxter (Doubleday, 2002) The story of Australian bibliomaniac and sf fan Baxter's lifelong love affair with books and the madness of collecting them. Bound to strike a chord with anyone with even the slightest passion for the subject.

Biggest disappointment of the year: *Dead Air* by Iain Banks.

ANDY SAWYER

Daren King's *Boxy an Star* (Abacus). I actually bought this (first published, 1999) a couple of years ago and got to read it in the dying days of 2002. It's tangentially sf, in that it's set in an undetermined but not too distant future among an underclass ravaged by a new drug. Bole, the narrator, tells the story of his love for Star in a fractured street-argot. The novel is full of that heartbreakingly sympathetic picture of a debased future which marks Thomas M. Disch's *334*.

M. John Harrison - *Light* (Gollancz, 2002). Long-awaited new sf from Harrison, a book which brings ideas and images from his earlier fiction to bear on humanity's fascination with and fear of the unknown (but - question mark - knowable?) which is the hallmark of science fiction. A stunning, rich tapestry of a novel, space opera, speculative quest and urban horror.

Terry Pratchett - *The Night Watch* (Doubleday, 2002). Forget all about Pratchett's reputation and the farcical background of Discworld. Then read this story of a lone lawman against a corrupt totalitarian system, and why we need to believe in concepts like 'law' and 'justice'. Are we still rolling about? Pratchett's still funny, but who said 'funny' had to mean 'comforting'? There's more concern for

humanity here than in almost anything I've read this year.

Christopher Priest - *The Separation* (Scribner, 2002). Twin brothers are involved in the build-up to the Second World War and Hess's peace mission in 1941 and twin realities result. Unlike most alternate histories, this leaves us guessing which is the 'baseline'. Like most novels by Priest, this is a novel which leaves you stunned at the end with his ability to subtly misdirect.

John Hemming - *The Conquest of the Incas* (Papermac, 1993). This was my holiday reading in the middle of the country where it happened. A fascinating, scholarly account of the fall of an empire in which corruption and heroism is so mixed it reads like a mythic adventure tale.

MAUREEN KINCAID SPELLER

Much of my reading in 2002 involved revisiting old favourites, wondering if the magic had faded with the passing of years. Happily, with Mark Helprin's *A Winter's Tale* (Arena, 1984, pb), the feeling seems to have only intensified. Whereas before I relished Helprin's fascination with winter, the way he played with time, and the extraordinary character, Peter Lake, this time I also appreciated how he charted the history of New York itself, as exemplified by the newspaper business, and was more aware of his own preoccupation with the changes wrought by technology.

Change is also at the heart of Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (Ballantine, 1969, pb). My memory of the story focused on the unhappiness between Lirazel, the King of Elfland's daughter, and Alveric, and on his search for her once she deserts him. Now, I'm more aware of the elegiac quality of the writing now, and also of the way in which Dunsany explores the gulf between the practical and the inspirational. It's a beautiful story and has stood the passage of time.

But there were new titles too. Ian McDonald's eagerly awaited *Ares Express* (Earthlight, 2001, Hb) is superficially a different kettle of fish, but scratch the surface and the same preoccupation with the broad sweep of history and the passing of old ways seems to emerge. I love McDonald's writing, and *Desolation Road* is one of my favourites; *Ares Express* recaptures the exhilaration of that first novel, especially with the reappearance of Doctor Alimentando, but there's also a sense of greater control in the writing, which concentrates the effect of McDonald's story-telling superbly.

Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (HarperCollins, 2002, Hb) is a small, miraculous masterpiece, cleverly written, multi-layered, resonant with meaning, interrogating the whole notion of the fairy story and the fantasy story as it goes, conscious of its roots but not bound by them. Definitely my book of the year.

For non-fiction, I'm pressed to choose between Oliver Sacks's memoir, *Uncle Tungsten* (Picador, 2001), describing his early encounters with science, and Jenny Uglow's *The Lunar Men* (Faber, 2002, Hb), describing the activities of the late eighteenth-century Lunar Society, whose membership included Josiah Wedgwood, Joseph Priestly and Erasmus Darwin. It's a marvellous story of friendship and heroic deeds in the early days of modern science.

SUE THOMASON

Jill Paton Walsh - *Knowledge of Angels* (Black Swan, 1995) Historico-theological fantasy; compassionate and unsparing examination of a Big Idea (can the existence or non-existence of God be proved - and if so, *should* it be proved, as Big Ideas only exist in relation to real people and their everyday lives, and Big Ideas have Big Impacts...). An interesting counterpoint to Philip Pullman.

Peter Hoeg - *Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow* (Harvill Press, 1996) I had a trip to East Greenland in July 2002, and this was the only work of serious Greenland-related fiction I could find before the trip. Well worth reading for Smilla's alien point-of-view; she is both one of the sanest, clearest-sighted characters I've ever met, as well as being a sociopath and killer. The plot's pretty weird, too...

Chris McManus - *Right Hand, Left Hand: The Origins of Asymmetry in Brains, Bodies, Atoms and Cultures* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002) [which also gets this year's Samuel R. Delany Award for the longest title - ed.] Everything - and I mean

everything – you always wanted to know about handedness, including why the heart is (usually) on the left side of the body, why one-third of the world drives on the left and the other two-thirds on the right, why European writing goes from left to right while Arabic scripts go from right to left, why identical twins don't always have the same dominant hand, and how to explain to a Martian over the radio just what the difference between 'right' and 'left' really is...

Terry Pratchett, Ian Stewart & Jack Cohen – *The Science Of Discworld II: The Globe* (Ebury Press, 2002) Does for the evolution of Mind what *Science Of Discworld I* did for Matter... Amazingly thought-provoking and fun!

Fifth place is a tie between Iain M. Banks – *Feersum Endjinn* (Orbit, 1994) – okay, I'm a sucker for naive heroes with an idiosyncratic sense of spelling and a world-wrecking devotion to their pet ant, and John McWhorter – *The Power Of Babel: A Natural History Of Language* (sorry, no publication details) – which shows why attempting to reconstruct the vocabulary of the First Human Language is a bold but daft idea, and how our current knowledge of the way languages evolve, split, recombine, and mutate can illuminate the probable structure of very early human language(s) (think "creole").

GARY WILKINSON

The Complete Ballard of Halo Jones – Alan Moore & Ian Gibson. I read a lot of graphic novels this year; one of the first, one of the oldest,

and still of the best was this one from the earlier years of *2000AD* (still going strong). Moore may have become more sophisticated over the years but this story of a woman's journey of self-discovery still has the power to move.

Bold as Love – Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz) Hard to pin down just exactly why I like this one so much it as it's not my normal cup of tea. What I can say is this deserving winner of the Clarke award, this fantasy rock and roll love story, is something really special, a new ballad for a new England.

The Scar – China Miéville (Macmillan). A gnarly seascape filled with the expected fantasy tropes of monsters and pirates and mutants and sea battles and vampires and treasure islands and magic swords. But in Miéville's hands these clichés are all warped and twisted into an amazing construction with a slippery eel of plot and a bitter toughness rarely seen in either fantasy, sf or horror or the amalgam of all three that his 'weird' fiction is. Miéville just keeps improving.

Altered Carbon – Richard Morgan (Gollancz). Morgan fires a bullet into your forebrain. Hard-core cyberpunk with a literate sensibility that combines the darkest noir with lashings of the old ultra-violence.

Light – M. John Harrison (Gollancz). Post-everything Space Opera. Three stories, one contemporary, two far future, that all revolve round an astronomical conundrum. The inner bleakness of the characters makes this a hard book to like, but the dazzling prose and startling vision make it so very easy to admire.

Science Fiction Films of the Year – 2002

by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc, with a postscript by Andrew M. Butler

With cinema audiences reaching their highest levels since the 1950s, sf seems to be as popular as ever. And why not, Hollywood budgets are larger than ever and the technology to put fantastic images on the screen is improving all the time. This year has seen many combinations of genres – the sf-fantasy, sf-horror, fantastic horror, horrific sf – it's hard to place many of these films into neat categories, so we've arranged them alphabetically, just to be awkward.

Avalon

Here's a curio – a Japanese live-action anime filmed in Polish. An illegal VR game bestows rich rewards or possible insanity on its players as they complete mission levels for fame and fortune. The result is quite unlike anything you've ever seen - breathtaking but deliberately false CG, retro equipment and cyberpunk grime rub shoulders with existential ponderings, politics and mythological intrigue. The Eastern European setting is no mere gimmick (xXx, *Rollerball* etc. take note) as Oshii has steeped his film in the worlds of Kieslowski and Svankmajer (for the most part the film is desaturated almost to the point of being monochrome)... as well as throwing his anime book of tricks in the ring with gleeful abandon. Hard to see where this film was aimed (other than us!) or how it was supposed to make any money, but made it was – if only there was more sf that was this imaginative, thoughtful and enjoyable.

Blade II

Oh, the omens were good. *Blade* (1998) was one of the more successful of recent comic adaptations – good gory vampire fun. Guillermo del Toro made the excellent vampire film *Cronos* (1993). Mix the two, then add shedloads more violence, stunts and action. Remove the need for a time-wasting story (you got that in part one), bring in Donnie Yen for the fight choreography and voila! A surprisingly pale shadow of its former self. Nice shots of disintegrating vampires in the dawn can't disguise a plot that has a high initial concept but no teeth.

Clockstoppers

Hey, your kooky dad's gone and got a super-watch that makes time stop when you want (or at least go very slowly) so you can do loads of neat stuff to impress the hot new chick in town. But sinister forces want their timepiece back for weapons research and dad goes missing, presumed incarcerated in a secret government test laboratory. What could have been a good fun adventure sadly falls for the "seen the trailer, seen the film" problem (see *Men In Black II*) and then proceeds to fail to ignite anything outside of these moments.

Dog Soldiers

How this one got a 15 certificate is anyone's guess but *Dog Soldiers* is a cracking little British horror film filled with the usual clichés of the genre, but without the familiar 'knowing' teenage commentators. Mercifully the earnest tone of the characters makes the black humour work particularly well amongst the jumps and occasionally graphic gore. The story concerns an army training patrol who seek sanctuary in a lone farmhouse when it becomes clear that something or somethings are baying for their blood. A jolly decent British werewolf film.

Donnie Darko

Donnie is a troubled lad with a history of psychological problems that require some serious medication. It doesn't help that he is urged to commit sociopathic acts by a grisly six foot bipedal rabbit. Richard Kelly's astonishing and assured debut, *Donnie Darko* plays its American independent card with pride – surreal, laid back and occasionally shocking. Throw in a geriatric author whose Philosophy of Time Travel helps to explain the simple but effective CGI temporal tentacles that emerge from characters at key points, as events escalate to an apocalyptic Halloween, you have one of the year's more strangely compelling films.

Eight Legged Freaks

In true B-movie fashion a barrel of bubbly green toxic waste finds its way into the local ecosystem resulting in a gigantic increase in the size and viciousness of a plethora of spider species. Knowingly crossing its love of '50s cold war sf morality tales with a pile of CGI,

Eight Legged Freaks does its best to entertain and, for the most part, it succeeds. Dumb fun which never takes itself seriously, it sadly falls apart on the tension front – there is never any surprise as to who is going to make it.

The Eye

Excellent creepy Korean/Hong Kong horror with top-notch visuals and incredible use of sound. Our heroine has received an eye transplant and is struggling to see through the blur of her new eyes. What she seems to see along with the real world are the dying, being led away by a murky black figure. Yes, the links to *Hands off Orlac* (1924) and *The Sixth Sense* (1999) may be obvious, but the use of stylistic camerawork and a gradual increase in the unease, including a line of revelatory dialogue that'll leave you chilled, make this a real winner. Don't miss.

E.T. – The Extra Terrestrial 20th Anniversary Re-issue Special Edition

One of the most loved, cherished and successful films of all time. Adored by critics and audiences alike for its wonder and enchantment. And who are we to argue? Well we will: *E.T.* is not only saccharine, manipulative and mean-spirited, but is over-long, plastic and lifeless. *E.T.* epitomises the cynical corporate manufacturing of false emotion to produce knee-jerk audience reactions. It couldn't get worse than this. Or could it? In another piece of revisionism Spielberg has actually managed to make his ghastly film even more hideous. Now, the FBI don't carry guns (in America!), their weapons CGI'd into safe walkie-talkies to show that they are caring, sharing authorities. Nasty, disgraceful film-making packaged for a stupid, ignorant market. And if you disagree we'll see you outside...

From Hell

So it wasn't like the comic then. Get a life! Wake up! It couldn't be like the comic. It's a *fillm*. It ain't twenty odd hours long. Shhheesh. Visually one of the most sumptuous films of the year and, for a Hollywood blockbuster, it even had a strong political subtext. In bringing Jack the Ripper to the screen the Hughes Brothers have done a remarkable job in adapting Alan Moore's multi-layered masterpiece, pushing the source material as far as it could, without resorting to being either gratuitous or coy (a very fine balance). Depp is as great as ever, his character's strong deviation from the minor role in the comic helps bind the film together and provides a context for the viewer. Mix with some stunning cinematography and exceptional set pieces and you have one of the year's most under-rated blockbusters.

The Happiness of the Katakuris

Miike Takashi. Not a man to shirk controversy but he's managed to confound everyone with this 116 minutes of barking utter madness. Our hero family have a guest-house in the mountains but hardly anyone shows up and when they do they have an unfortunate tendency to pop their clogs. To prevent it affecting the business the family simply bury the corpses. But there's a new highway being built soon... right where those unfortunate ex-guests are interred. And everyone keeps bursting into song because this is a musical, with all the (von) trappings of families skipping across the mountains or cutting to kitsch studio shoots. That's when they don't all suddenly turn into animated Plasticine figures for the dangerous scenes or gross ones. The most unusual (and funny) fantasy horror of this year, by a long way.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

Chris Columbus once again plays it safe in the second Harry Potter film – slavishly following Rowling's book to the point of cinematic incoherence. That said, it looks the part, most of the acting is spot on (Branagh is great) and it certainly doesn't balk on the scary stuff either. Harry's second year at Hogwarts is plagued by the opening of the mysterious Chamber of Secrets and the worrying trend for fellow classmates to become paralysed. Incidents come thick and fast and the tone gets significantly darker as the film progresses. Sadly this pace leaves little room for character development or all-important

fleshing out of details. Think of it as a talking illustration.

Jason X

Pitch: *Friday the Thirteenth's* Jason comes back again. In the future. In space. And kills people. Again. And there's CGI blood. How novel. And it was toned to get an R rating. Stop this madness. We've had twenty years of this rubbish.

Jeepers Creepers

What's this? Another American teen horror? But wait! No post-post-modern reflexivity. No "shagging = death", "drugs = bad" clichés. Just creepy supernatural chills mixed with a road movie. It's filmed with enough confidence not to just pump up the body/gore quota, yet it remains nasty when needed. By no means essential viewing, at least it tries to break the current teen-scream mould. Bonus point for keeping the soundtrack down.

Lilo and Stitch

Pretty much ignoring the last ten years of Disney animation that has pushed the studio headlong into CGI spectacle to keep the kids watching, *Lilo and Stitch* looks to more traditional methods to tell its story (with the added advantage of being cheaper). Little Hawaiian Lilo befriends the irascible and occasionally destructive extra-terrestrial Stitch. Madcap adventures occur, mercifully far from *E.T.* territory and saccharine sentimentalities. The result is one of Disney's most enjoyable flicks of the last decade.

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

Peter Jackson returns with advertising that tells you Gandalf didn't snuff it in part one and a much publicised CGI Gollum. Mercifully the script plays some liberties with the text in the name of cinematic coherence (Potter, are you listening?) but Jackson's real gift lies in making crystal clear sense of the book's numerous battles and political shenanigans in a way that doesn't stop everything stone dead in its tracks (Mr Lucas step forward). The canvas is wide, the battles epic, violent and mythical – as they should be. The sense of dread and impending doom are not toned down, this is the *Empire Strikes Back* (1980) of the trilogy, with no real resolution. This is perhaps its fault – while *The Two Towers* equals (and in the battle at Helm's Deep surpasses) its predecessor in terms of spectacle, it cannot hope to maintain the same attachment to its central characters. Like the hobbits, we are shown the bigger world from that of the isolated microcosmic Shire as the implications of the quest (and its possible failure) become more apparent in relationship to the whole of Middle Earth. And in this turmoil creepy Elrond hustles his aristocratic folk off somewhere safe (bar a couple of token lower class archers) leaving everyone else to face the music of the lidless eye, the bands of marauding orcs and the treacherous wizards. This is a nice touch in two ways – at once it politicises the struggle between bourgeois and proletariat in a way that subverts Tolkien's slant on the matter but it also allows the romance between Aragorn and Eowyn to be more tragically romantic. Jackson attempts to flesh out (ever so slightly) at least one female character from Tolkien's phallogocentric tome. This is assured, commercial film-making at its very best – from the Ents storming Isengard to the dead in the marshes; anyone expecting much better might as well never enter a cinema again.

Men In Black II

Here come the men in black (again) they won't let you remember (you wish). When *MiB* (1997) hit the scene it was gloppy fun, family entertainment with a good line in attitude and great one-liners. Most of all it was fresh. Second time around and the promise is bigger budget, bigger effects and bigger paycheques all around. It also seems so suddenly stale and laboured as the same plot of part one is recycled for our scant amusement. Watchable but no more, *MiBII* feels worse than it probably is because it is so relentlessly average and safe as a franchise product – exactly what the first film tried so hard to avoid. C'est la vie.

Minority Report

Here's something to fill you with dread – Spielberg directs Cruise in a P.K. Dick adaptation. Shudder. Fortunately though (and against all expectations) *Minority Report* proves to be an enjoyable and intelligent sf film which actually requires its audience to think once in a while. And despite the trailer-friendly special effects, this isn't a film that feels the need to wallow in effects for the sake of them – indeed there's probably more big buck effects potential in Dick's original. It's not perfect and they've simplified some elements of the story to allow a human-precog interaction absent from Dick's work, but overall the modern-retro future designs combined with the confidence to play it with subtlety works.

The Mothman Prophecies

Richard Gere ditches the smoothy persona and becomes an angst-ridden journo on the trail of the Mothman in Mark Pellington's understated supernatural thriller, based on the "True Story" yawn-a-page by John A. Keel. Influences include Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1996), *The Sixth Sense* and Nakata's *The Ring* (1998), and full marks should be given to lack of sensationalism within the material. Wisely ditching the tone and most of the extraneous conspiratorial UFO-logy of the book, Pellington has created a mature, if imperfect, film. If anyone condescendingly informs you that books are always better than the film, you need do no more than to point them in the direction of *The Mothman Prophecies* and be quietly smug.

My Little Eye

Heralded by some commentators as the future of British horror, *My Little Eye* can't fail to disappoint. Another Big Brother-style "teens in a house" horror, the conceit is all very well but it leads nowhere and there is far too little tension. It may deserve top marks for using the limitations of the budget to the film's advantage, but the mise-en-scene is inconsistent and ultimately, if you want scares, you'd be far better off watching *Dog Soldiers*.

The One

Across the various quantum dimensions, variations of Jet Li are being bumped off. The result? The remaining ones become increasingly powerful until only two remain. Who will become the One? As Li's Hong Kong work begins to seem like a thing of the past, his latest Hollywood offering injects trendy CGI into the deliberately over-the-top wirework that has become his trademark. Yes, *The One* is unashamedly trash and treats its ludicrous premise with more respect than it probably deserves, but it never outlives its welcome. The two Lis (one good, one bad – you got that?) slug it out by hitting each other with motorbikes and other heavy metal machinery while leaping about like possessed frogs. Those expecting depth and plausibility would do well to avoid this one, but Wong's hysterical direction makes this a daft but enjoyable romp. Best served with a few beers.

The Powerpuff Girls

Blossom, Buttercup and Bubbles – sugar, spice, all things nice and secret ingredient Chemical X. So post-modern it hurts, the combination of knowing references, vaguely hip music, bodily fluids gags and 50s B-movie trappings merge with 60s US and anime influenced designs to make something you either 'get' or don't. Frenetic and lurid as ever, the trio's occasionally impetuous over-exuberance is as infectious as it is fun. Suitable for small kids and open-minded adults only – boring people can suffer under Blossom's withering laser-eyed stare.

Queen of the Damned

A belated (and far more low key) sequel to *Interview With A Vampire* (1994) sees a new Lestat and a safer 15 rating for the Anne Rice franchise. Set in the amusingly unscary goth-rock world the stakes (so to speak) are raised (so to speak) when the Queen of the Damned is reincarnated to decimate the earth, burn everyone's souls and do all that other gloomy nihilistic despair stuff. The titular queen electrifies the screen with her vicious, wordless presence, but for the most part

this is designer fluff for morbid teens with a soon-to-be-dated contemporary soundtrack.

Reign of Fire

Dragon films are to fantasy fans what cannibal films are to horror fans – you always have high hopes but somehow it never quite works. Enter *Reign of Fire*. Christian Bale is present at the release of an ancient dragon from deep beneath London. Fast forward. Dragons have decimated the world and the few survivors have to decide whether to hide or fight – a decision "helped along" by the arrival of dragon hunter Matthew McConaughey and his band of sky diving renegades. *Reign of Fire* is an amiable enough romp in the post-apocalyptic mould but therein lies its problem – it's billed as a dragon flick. Sure there are a few flying about and quite impressive they are too, but by relying on a budget-friendly plot that ignores the bits you want to see (hordes of dragons trashing major cities for example) there's a sense at feeling cheated. Not a disaster by any stretch, but a film that seems to have a beginning and an end, but no middle.

Resident Evil

Mercy me if we don't have Paul Anderson's best film ever! Sure it's still ropey but it's an improvement nonetheless. One of Film Four's last productions (sniff) at least it's a big budget multiplex job so the company can go out with a bang and not a wimpy British social comedy. Mira Sorvino spends most of the time trying to recall who she is whilst fighting zombies and pointlessly attempting to keep her clothes on. Not art, but you'll dig the zombie dogs, the odd "jumpy" bit and forget it quickly. People criticised this film for being disposable trash without subtext – they're right, but surely that's the point?

Rollerball

More studio/MPAA hassles dogged this long delayed remake of Norman Jewison's *Slap Shot* of the future. Use this as an excuse if you want, but *Rollerball*, despite a couple of nice ideas (that don't even begin to work), is an unmitigated total mess of a film. Huge chunks of the action have gone missing, the casual sexism feels like a cheap seventies exploitation flick and the acting is poor. The games themselves are rambling rubbish, make no sense and are frankly just plain stupid.

Scooby Doo

We may not know what "scooby" means but we sure know what "doo" is. Inexplicably popular summer no-brainer filled with lame gags and a crass oh-so-postmodern plot. At times you long for the crudely animated 2-D counterpart (early ones naturally, avoiding the Scrappy abomination) on the basis that at least it was shorter. The characters, bar Scooby, look the part though (mind you, they did in *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* (2001)) and the mise-en-scene is a pretty good approximation of the cartoon. Writer James Gunn has done better work in the past though – check out *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996), post-modern comedy at its best.

Signs

Mel Gibson stars as an ex-Reverend who has lost his faith and his wife in M. Night Shyamalan's crop circle creeper. Are the signs in the fields a hoax or indications of extra-terrestrial intelligence? As usual Shyamalan plays the low-key card to best effect (reunited with chilled out cinematographer Tak Fujimoto), often cranking up the tension with little more than a light bulb and some creaky sound effects. Seat-wetting events follow and if you look too hard the whole thing comes apart but hey, this is a sf horror film, you are here for the chills and *Signs* surely delivers. Even if Shyamalan's cameos are creeping into the realm of supporting roles...

Spider-Man

Bitten by a genetically modified arachnid, our hero Peter Parker finds he has developed spider powers, powers he'll need to fight crime and defeat the treacherous Green Goblin. And get the girl. Storming

through the box office Raimi manages to put behind that unfortunate trailer from Summer 2001 behind him. Even if the studio execs cut some of the effects budget there's no doubt that (Green Goblin's occasionally dodgy look aside) this is an impressive and occasionally exhilarating experience. Raimi's focusing on the human side of the Spiderman story makes the character more engrossing and believable, so that the whole piece works like a drama rather than a clotheshorse for all the whizz-bang stuff.

Spirited Away

Officially Japan's most successful film ever, Miyazaki's young heroine must survive a horrifying and surreal environment in an effort to save her parents, who have been transformed into gluttonous pigs by the town's magic and their own greed. Like a terrifying Alice in Wonderland this film has sent many a small Japanese child wailing out of the cinema, but it remains yet another masterpiece from Studio Ghibli; a combination of wonder and horror. The combination of predominantly cell animation and Miyazaki's eye for composition and characterisation put this head and shoulders above western competition who still seem set on the idea that animation is strictly for kids. Miyazaki's films are childlike not childish, a distinction Disney would do well to re-adapt.

Spy Kids 2: Island of Lost Dreams

Robert Rodriguez gives us a second helping of his diminutive spies (part of a proposed trilogy). It all rests on Rodriguez's shoulders (he writes, produces, shoots, directs, makes the tea etc.) to deliver the goods and fortunately he doesn't miss a beat. Yes, it's ludicrous but that's what we like! Fast, loud, innovative and fun – bizarre Harryhausen references abound, the design is fabulous and it's even got Steve Buscemi as a mad scientist. Our two heroes face the threat of another global takeover but their skills are further tested by two rival spy kids who have better gadgets than they do. Their long-suffering spy parents (and grandparents) prove as delightfully ineffectual as ever, as the action centres on the mysterious island – home to hybrid animals, bickering skeletons and flying horseshoe magnets. You know it makes sense!

Star Wars Episode 2: Attack of the Clones

The normal defensive response to this is: well, it's better than *The Phantom Menace* (1999). Viewed as an extension of silent cinema's use of film, *Attack of the Clones* works well, but the over-cramming of plot, sometimes disorientating parallel editing and plethora of silly names do much to dampen this one down. Rather like *The Empire Strikes Back* the tone is significantly darker as the tale recounts the rise of a clone army and portents of the war to come (presumably) in Episode Three. Visually and aurally arresting (and not just the effects – some of the details and composition are pure cinema) there's much to enjoy but also much to endure. Even if Yoda kick butt he does.

Thir13en Ghosts

The latest in the William "Tingler" Castle re-makes, *13 Ghosts* sadly misses the ghost glasses gimmick of its illustrious inspiration and goes straight for the mid-budget jugular. Another haunted house flick, this time an inheritance from a mad relative who has 13 ghosts trapped inside his building provides the impetus for a group being stuck in the midst of it all. Of course these can be released by a variety of retro-mechanics and arcane demonic gobbledegook. Ultimately it's all very samey and rather dull, but the set design of the house (and the tricky cinematographic challenge it must have caused) is among the most impressive of recent years – all glass, brass and mirrors. Sadly, like the inferior travesty *The Haunting* (1999), great sets do not a great film make.

The Time Machine

Simon Wells adapts H.G. Wells in this easy-to-watch but easy-to-forget telling of the classic novel(la). Updating George Pal's wonderful work on the 1960s version to the CGI age may not be to purists' tastes but it works more as homage than a rip-off as aeons

rush by in seconds, landscapes remould and the cycles of life and death are repeated at an ever-increasing pace. A darker and far more traditional film than could have reasonably been expected; even if some of the "blame it on war and government" stuff has been toned down, there's enough here to keep you engaged without resorting to needless eye-candy.

Vanilla Sky

The big question looms... Why? Spending millions of dollars on a remake of a foreign film is no excuse to compensate a viewing audience that refuses to read. In the case of *Vanilla Sky* (a re-make of *The Others*' (2001) director Amenábar's *Abre los ojos* (1997)) the occasional plot twists and reality moulding make it unsuitable for the short on brainpower anyway! Cruise is ideally cast as a narcissistic son of a multi-millionaire who, following a car crash after an altercation with a long-time girlfriend, undergoes extensive facial reconstruction... and possible charges for murder. Sadly, despite Cameron Crowe's deft handling of the film, it all descends into maudlin self-pity and ends with an explanation designed to hammer the 'meaning' into the heads of even the most inbred of preview audiences. Ultimately it stays so close to its source at times (Crowe refers to it as a remix, Cruz plays the same role and even Cruise looks exactly like his Spanish counterpart) you wonder why they bothered.

CGI Stuff – *Monsters Inc*, *Ice Age*, *Jimmy Neutron Boy Genius*

The all-CGI rollercoaster continues to gain momentum although after the sad financial returns from last year's *Final Fantasy* (2001) the emphasis is now firmly on the tried (and lucrative) family/kids market. *Monsters Inc* confirms Pixar's place as the CGI people to watch – forget the rendering (albeit delightful) and just enjoy the characters and story. Big monsters + cute kid = top film. Exciting, funny and genuine. With nowhere near the clout of Pixar, *Jimmy Neutron Boy Genius* plants its feet firmly in the kids mould – fun but not much for adults to enjoy, and some of the rendering looks surprisingly early-90's. *Ice Age* is, however, a bit different – basically reworking *Dinosaur* (there are even similarities to *Monsters Inc* in that two monsters befriend a defenceless human) with a hint of Chuck Jones anarchy, its problem lies with the shift in styles. Ultimately you care more about the unfortunate mute squirrel than the buddy-buddy tedium of the main characters. Another place to find CGI in the cinema is before the film you've paid your six quid to see. These are proving lucrative springboards for testing techniques, pad out the running time of the feature and more importantly see a long welcome return to the animated short. This year's highlight was *The Chubbchubs*, although *For The Birds* demonstrated that Pixar could be as amusing as ever. And you don't have to have kids to see them.

And the winners are (drumroll, please):

Best SF-Fantasy: *Spy Kids 2*

Best Fantasy: *Spirited Away*

Scariest SF-Horror: *Signs*

Scariest Horror: *The Eye*

Special Takashi Miike Award for Utter Bonkersness: *The Happiness of the Katakuris*

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Andrew M Butler adds...

Unfortunately I've had to cut the six thousand word rant about *Attack of the Clones*, which was to me rather like the Harry Potter books, not quite bad enough to actually be annoying. I think I prefer *The Phantom Menace* because it was less dull; Lucas has gone back to *The Searchers* (1956) for, er, inspiration, to Méliès for some of his set-ups and you'd really to have a heart of stone not to laugh at the death of L'il Orphan Annie's mother, not to mention Annie's retreat to a rural idyll, shot like a hill scene from *The*

Sound of Music (1965).

Austin Powers: Goldmember

Third movie in Mike Myers' series of Bond spoofs, this time with Michael Caine.

Die Another Day

Another Bond movie, another Pierce Brosnan outing. Much the same as the last forty years' worth.

Hable Con Ella

Or *Talk to Her* is the first film by Almodóvar since 1999's *Todo sobre mi madre* (*All About My Mother*) – in the mean time he went to Hollywood to make a film called *The Paperboy* which nobody seems to be talking about. Still it would not be the first time that a film-maker with a unique voice and talent had been lured across to take the Hollywood dollar only to be watered-down. *Talk to Her* is a series of two-handers, centred on a hospital where two women lie in comas. Will they survive? Might they even wake up? What should their lovers do whilst they wait? This is in the sombre mood Almodóvar has been in since the excesses of the early 1990s, and I'd like to get more kitsch back. But if you want bad taste you need to see the (fictional) film with the film: a silent sf film of the incredible shrinking lover. One, perhaps, for the open-minded.

Halloween Resurrection

Sequel to *Halloween H20* (1998), and guess what, Michael Myers is still not dead. Just heading for late middle age. No Josh Hartnett this time, mind; he's gone onto better things (or *Pearl Harbor* (2001) and *40 Days and 40 Nights* (2001)).

Impostor

Cynics might say that this got a cinema release in the UK merely to plug the video; others may note the publicity generated by *Minority Report* which might make another Philip K Dick film in a cinema around the corner from Leicester Square attractive. Expanded from a segment of the abandoned *Alien Love Triangle* (which gave us *Mimic* as far back as 1997), this is the old story about the bomb disguised as a man. Of course it depends on a twist ending – but to use Dick's ending would spoil the surprise. Not well liked.

K-Pax

Based on a book by Gene Brewer, this stars Kevin Spacey as an alien with marvellous healing powers, or perhaps a man traumatised by a terrible past. This is the sort of thing that Spacey can sleepwalk through, but it's still effective. Jeff Bridges is the doctor with the brother who conveniently works in a planetarium who is trying to get to the root of the psychosis. Iain Softley, who previously gave us the Stuart Sutcliffe/early Beatles biopic *Backbeat* (1993) and a version of *The Wings of the Dove* (1997) which helped us see how Henry James's original novel could be the inspiration for Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, keeps us guessing right to the end. In fact, as I saw this on a plane and they stopped the films five minutes before landing ... Gene Brewer has written two sequels, of course, which may answer the question. Or not.

Lost in La Mancha

From the team that brought us *The Hamster Factor* (1996), a documentary on the making of *Twelve Monkeys* (1995), *Lost in La Mancha* records the ill-fated Terry Gilliam movie *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* (aren't they all these days?). I wrote somewhere that I'd only believe that Gilliam would make a movie of *Good Omens* if I were in the cinema having bought a ticket. This is more

confirmation, as even with principal shooting begun, events can conspire against a Gilliam movie.

Offending Angels

British romantic comedy featuring two angels sent to help Sam (Andrew Lincoln from *This Life* and *Teachers*) and Baggy (Andrew Rajan, who wrote, directed and produced the film) only for one of the angels to fall in love with Baggy.

Red Dragon

Pointless remake of *Manhunter* (1986), still the best Hannibal Lector movie, which now give Hopkins a third outing as the serial killer. Thomas Harris must be due another book, presumably.

Revelation

Omen-esque British horror flick about the Anti-Christ and the Second Coming with neat CGI

The Royal Tannenbaums

The sort of surreal family saga that risks toppling into fantasy or magic realism. In fact it's John Irving territory: a complex narrative with an extended family with a past, plus a significant dog, a bear or bear suit, and even an allusion to Vienna. Not quite as fun as the critics made out.

The Scorpion King

Spin-off from *The Mummy Returns* (2001) giving The Rock (a wrestler, apparently) a movie of his own. War and family betrayals in the Middle East, five millennia ago.

Stuart Little 2

The mouse is back...

The Sum of All Fears

After Baldwin and Ford as Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan, now Ben Affleck is the Young Jack Ryan, lost in renewed Cold War conflict as a nuclear bomb is smuggled into the States to precipitate war between the US and the Russians. Desperate attempt to save a franchise by ignoring what went before.

Twenty Eight Days Later

The producer/director/writer team that gave us *Shallow Grave* (1994) and *Trainspotting* (1995) rather ran aground with the self-indulgent but underrated *A Life Less Ordinary* (1997); presumably made alongside *Alien Love Triangle*, their segment of portmanteau movie *The Light Years Trilogy* which gave us *Mimic* (1997) and *Impostor* (2001) but not their piece. *The Beach* (1999), an adaptation of cult novel by Alex Garland, foundered on the need to have a bankable star to match the budget. Unfortunately this didn't seem to be the right part for the boy actor last seen being drowning in Kate Winslet's arms (you'd have to have a heart of stone...) and the film bombed. Now the producer and director have gained a new writer – John Hodges presumably going back to being a doctor – in the form of Alex Garland who had written the novel of *The Beach*. Posters filled the Underground, it promised to bust genres, the film sank without trace, rather like Kathryn Bigelow's submarine movie *K-19: The Widowmaker*.

xXx

Vin Diesel from *Pitch Black* (look out for two sequels soon) appears as a younger, hipper, more American, more tattooed Bond-style hero, with *xXx II* in production. Presumably it isn't pronounced "Thirty-Two".

Television of 2002

by Andrew M. Butler

I don't have cable or broadband or satellite and can barely keep up with what I have on terrestrial. Actually, on terrestrial television there's the sense of an ending. BBC2 shuffles round various incarnations of *Star Trek*, original, improved and minty fresh, alternating with *Farscape* which was axed by its network towards the end of the year. *The X-Files* is in the end game with the guy from *Terminator 2* replacing Mulder. Since BBC2 threw a dice to decide which day to schedule *Roswell High* on each week, the *Dawson's Creek* of Area 51 left us with a cliff-hanger that BBC2 are unlikely to resolve due to low audience figures. Then there are repeats of early *Buffy* alongside whatever series we've reached. Across on Channel 4 they seem to insist on their minority approach by hiding *Angel* in the middle of the night.

The television highlight of 2002 was Kiefer Sutherland as Jack Bauer in the alternate world *24*, one of those high concept shows (remember *Murder One?*), this one built on the principle that it's shown in real time. There's a black senator who is a major presidential contender and the target of an assassin, an assassination which dark forces want to pin on Jack whose daughter has been kidnapped. Of course this all falls down when you remove the advert breaks for the BBC, and you are left to speculate if the missing quarter of an hour each episode was when characters went to the lavatory. It was gripping viewing – if only to see how they could drag out an average thriller to twenty-four episodes. The answer, it seems, was to rely alternately on the stupidity and amnesia of their characters. The liberality of a black presidential contender was tempered by making all of the black female characters untrustworthy (and Mrs Presidential Contender seemed to be moonlighting as a nurse in *ER*, repeated over the same period).

The West Wing moved into alternate world territory; its heart is in the right place but it does rather invent geopolitics to suit the story-line each week, and has its cake and eats it over radical policies. The same can be said of *Enterprise*, a prequel to the whole *Star Trek* business, bought by Channel 4 and apparently starring Sam Beckett from *Quantum Leap*. It does at least attempt to acknowledge difference by making a big deal of how alien languages are translated, only to shift from a sound that might mean "Hello there!" to knowing the phrase for "Can you direct me to a place where I can get a decent cappuccino?" rather rapidly. In one episode a (male) crew member is impregnated, only to be normalised with the next half hour. In another episode the team help a terrorist/freedom fighter escape from a concentration camp, but ignores the family which remains in prison. And there was even a possibility that one character was gay – but he was shown looking for totty by the end of the series (and gay men surely wouldn't wear that kind of underwear...). I actually find the

redneck attitudes of the show more comfortable to watch than the earnest liberalness of *The Next Generation*.

Superman also went back to its roots, with a series called *Smallville*, rapidly renamed *Smallville: Superman: The Early Years* by Channel 4 to help those of us with a shaky sense of geography or comic history. Just as we wait for proper warp factors, stardates, transporter beams and red jumpers to become standard issue in *Enterprise*, so this series has fun with Clark discovering his powers one by one. It's called foreshadowing. Sadly the kryptonite scattered around the area seems to be rather too convenient a plot device; perhaps *Smallville* is over a hellmouth as well. Still, it was Sunday afternoon brain candy, which left us with another cliffhanger. In a Saturday and then a Sunday teatime slot, *Alias* threatened to rival *Buffy* in the beautiful girl kicks male butt stakes as a young woman recruited by a government agency which turns out to be rather more sinister. I didn't get much further than the trailer, I'm afraid.

Ed, placed after the *ER* reruns in deep Channel 4 daytime schedules, was an appealingly quirky series in the *Northern Exposure* or *Twin Peaks* mould. Ed is a lawyer who, having lost his employers millions by a misplaced comma, returns to his home town to take over the bowling alley and sets his heart on winning the highschool sweetheart he never had. Each episode he has a new court case to win, whilst his eccentric employees engage in various shenanigans. It shouldn't have worked, but it left me with as goofy a grin as the rather annoying central character (and it was rather confusing that the love interest was also appearing in some of the episodes of *ER*).

Speaking of *Twin Peaks*, the soap *Night and Day* attempted to be a British version of it, set in Greenwich, with Blake from *Black & White* as the barman. The question of who murdered Laura Palmer, or whatever the girl was called, threatens to unveil dark family secrets. The British like their soaps to aspire to realism, and casual transvestism, satanic flashbacks and talking genitalia don't usually feature. It was shunted off to an after midnight insomniacs' slot and continued its omnibus edition, but not the individual episodes. It might just possibly be genius, especially the episode where time was stopped. Then again, maybe it isn't, but the acting is just about better than the revamped *Crossroads*.

The BBC gave us a version of Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* which had its moments, none of them involving Bob Hoskins's rather unlikely accent. Some nice dinosaurs though. Finally, the same cannot be said when the year ended with *Dinotopia*, a CGI-fest from the people who did *Gulliver's Travels* and based on some best-selling books; think *Planet of the Apes* but with dinosaurs. *Dinotopia*, literally "terrible place". Sadly I failed to watch a single episode. There are limits, after all.

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2002 WAS A GOOD YEAR FOR NON-FICTION IN SF, AND SO HERE THE SHAMELESS FEATURES EDITOR OF VECTOR LOCATES SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS, AND INEXPLICABLY FAILS TO MENTION HIS PIECE IN *FORTEAN TIMES*, ALTHOUGH HE PLUGS HIMSELF QUITE ENOUGH AS IT IS, THANK YOU VERY MUCH...

2002: The Non-fiction

by Andrew M. Butler

I'm not as *auffait* with websites as I ought to be, so this review of the year will restrict itself to the paper-based materials and a few events. Honourable mentions should go to www.alienonline.net with its various columns by British authors and critics, a space for contentious views, as are some of the feedback fora at www.locusmag.com. The latter is worth visiting for its caustic film

reviews alone. I'm excluding anything published by the BSFA from this account, as well as *Interzone*, *3SF* (which had an infuriating piece by Philip Pullman in issue two) and *The New York Review of Science Fiction* because I've not seen enough issues.

To start, then, with the academic journals. *The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* has published at least one issue this year, but as

they haven't sent me anything even though I'm a member of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, I cannot pass comment, nor have I done more than glance at copies of *Extrapolation*. Donald Hassler is in the process of retiring from the editorial chair, with Javier Martinez taking over. Martinez has redesigned the cover (it's previously been an abstract design that's looking rather dated), and has expressed an interest in seeing more post-colonial approaches to sf. It was good to see him and the editors of *Science Fiction Studies* getting on so well at the International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts in March.

Science Fiction Studies began the year with a useful piece on that most written-about of writers, Philip K. Dick, but here Italian scholar Umberto Rossi examines his influence upon Jonathan Lethem. *SFS* editor Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. weaves together films and books in what I'm sure will prove to be a very useful examination of the grotesque. In the July issue Philippe Mather takes the notions of estrangement (as in cognitive estrangement), usually associated with literary sf, to apply to filmed sf. Meanwhile in the Notes and Correspondence section, Marleen Barr responds to the review of her book *Genre Fission* by Wendy Pearson in the November 2001 issue, and once more proves that authors should not respond to reviews. This back section of *SFS* is always lively, with calls for papers rubbing shoulders with notes of sf in odd critical contexts, discussions of minor problems in texts – notes that would never have the critical mass of an article but which are worth making – and in July the news that Andrew M. Butler and Mark Boulton were going to edit a special issue of *SFS* on the British sf Boom in 2003. Well, it was news to me. The journal ended the year with a reassuringly solid special on Japanese science fiction, covering Anime, women's sf, issues of translation, and much more.

Turning back to Britain, *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* produced what were effectively three special issues in 2002. In issue 84 Justine Larbalestier introduced a number of papers from WisCon, the feminist sf convention, with a very useful short history of feminist sf from Mary Shelley to 1960 and Elizabeth Matson on the James Tiptree Jr. Award. Lorna Jowett's article on masculinity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* annoyed me because it said very well what I've said rather poorly in an unpublished and unfinished article on Xander. Grrr. The issue also contains a draft of an article by Umberto Rossi on Thomas M. Disch's *On Wings of Song*, and issue 85 includes the revised version of the piece that should have been published... Tut. It could never happen in *Vector*. Ahem. Moving swiftly on... the rest of the issue is a British sf special, with papers from the 2001: A Celebration of British Science Fiction event by Bridget Wilkinson and Martin Griffiths and Mark Brake (of the University of Glamorgan B.Sc. in Science and Science Fiction), as well as Charles DaPaolo on *The Time Machine*, Patrick Parrinder on far future fiction and Brian Stableford on early sf poetry in the shape of Robert Hunt. Finally the journal rounded out the year with a gay and lesbian sf issue, with articles on Mary Shelley, Robert Louis Stevenson, Robert A. Heinlein, James Tiptree Jr., Suzy McKee Charnas, Geoff Ryman and Julian May, as well as *Flash Gordon* and *Star Trek DS9*. Of course as guest joint editor I need to declare an interest but I think Mark Boulton (who wrote upon notions of camp and crap sf movies) and Chris West (who examined Robert A. Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters* for signs of queerness) was robbed when it came to BSFA Award nominations. But with an announcement in *SFS*, a quarter of that issue taken up by Drs Boulton, Butler and West, and special issues of *Fem-Spec* and *Historical Materialism* in the pipeline with materials by Boulton and Butler something appears to be going on. Expect world domination any day now.

To book-length non-fiction, and three edited collections are worth noting. Ziauddin Sardar and Sean Cubitt's *Aliens R Us: The Other in Science Fiction Cinema* (London: Pluto) traces the figure of the alien as other in a range of sf films from Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element* and Caro and Jeunet's *Delicatessen* to *The Matrix*, as well as (inexplicably, given the title of the book) *Space, Above and Beyond* and various incarnations of *Star Trek*. Insights and mistakes nestle together, one perhaps cancelling out the other, and the contributors seem not to know their sf and film theory as well as they might

(which could be a recommendation for some).

Rob Hitchin and James Kneale's collection, *Lost in Space: Geographies of Science Fiction* (London: Continuum) might lead you to expect essays on a 1960s tv series, and a 1990s film, but in fact it is one of the first major contributions to sf studies from a geographical perspective. As with *Aliens R Us*, there is a danger that the texts themselves are lost sight of – in particular works by Kim Stanley Robinson and Neal Stephenson, as well as alternate histories and *Dark City* – as we are told about a particular aspect of cultural geography. The readings are interesting in themselves (if occasionally ignorant of chronology – *Robocop* post-dates Haraway's 'Manifesto for Cyborgs') but one longs for something sustained. The chapter on early cinema is a cracker, though.

Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon, both now editors of *SFS* and previously co-editors of *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*, now bring together virtually anybody who is anybody in the sf academic critical field (although not Boulton, Butler and West) in *Edging Into the Future: Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania). Brian Attebery, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr, Brooks Landon, Rob Latham, Roger Luckhurst, Lance Olsen, Wendy Pearson, Gary Wolfe, Jenny Wolmark and the editors themselves, plus Gwyneth Jones and Brian Stableford. This is a very impressive examination of near-future sf.

Latham's piece in *Edging into the Future* joins his piece from *Blood Read* in his monograph *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), an extraordinary bringing-together of vampires, cyborgs, cultural theory, generation X, and information superhighway hype. His argument is that Marx provides us with a useful metaphor in the shape of the vampire and capitalism: capital lives by sucking dead labour. But where Marx falls down is his presentation of vampires/capitalism as purely destructive, rather than taking into account its seductive side. Equally the figure of the cyborg is one which can be linked to Marxist analysis of the worker – and everything we do in our jobs and in our leisure time is now work. Latham offers convincing readings of films such as *The Lost Boys* and authors such as Anne Rice, Pat Cadigan and Douglas Coupland.

Justine Larbalestier, who introduces the WisCon papers in *Foundation*, had her *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction* (Middletown, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press) published in 2002. This is an examination of the rôle of women in science fiction from 1926 to more or less the present, in fiction and real life, including books, magazines and fanzines. The book reproduces pictures, articles and letters from the pulps, as fascinating primary evidence. Wesleyan have a growing association with sf, having brought out various collections and novels by Samuel R. Delany, and various useful 'Early Classics of Science Fiction' volumes. It is perhaps confusing that this is labelled as one of the latter.

In Jack Zipes's *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter* (New York and London: Routledge) we see a continuation of the work he has done on fairy tales for over twenty years, as well as provocative examinations of the state of children's literature (Zipes argues it doesn't exist as such, at least as something owned by children). The closing chapter deals with the Potter phenomenon and makes an interesting argument about how small a proportion of the US population had actually read them – although he was writing at a point when there were only hardbacks in the US and prior to the films.

'Children's Fantasy' was the name of a conference at Bulmershe College, University of Reading, co-organised by the Science Fiction Foundation and the Association for Research into Popular Fictions – namely by Nickianne Moody. Unfortunately I was able to only make the first day of the three, but I heard interesting papers on Pullman and Robert Swindells, as well as a provocative plenary by Professor Peter Hunt, who defined fantasy and seemed to argue that technology was going to make a new form of narrative possible, one owned by the reader, as it were. This struck me as being the reinvention of the wheel as it sounded awfully like the folk tale. Some of the papers

from the event – which may yet have a sequel – are likely to appear in *Foundation* in 2003. Children's literature was also to the fore at the International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts in Ft Lauderdale, Florida, with various papers and panels on Pullman and Potter, as well as Joan Aiken as a guest of honour.

The centrepiece of the year for me was the conference I co-organised with Farah Mendlesohn at New Lanark Mills World Heritage Site, June 28-July 1. This was to be the first time the Science Fiction Research Association's conference has left North America, and they may yet return to Europe in the next few years. The guests of honour were Pat Cadigan, Paul McAuley and Ken MacLeod, although we nearly lost the first two thanks to a missed flight. Several dozen papers were available in two or three streams, mostly on utopian writers such as Thomas More (the start of a new project by Paul Kincaid) and Robert Owen, Kim Stanley Robinson, Ursula Le Guin, as well as coverage of film, television and comic strips. Ken

MacLeod gave a very interesting speech situating Marx and Engels as a progenitor of science fiction, which I suspect may have shocked some of the audience. There was a gratifying mix of old hands and MA and PhD students, suggesting that non-fiction in sf should flourish for some time.

Finally, in November, Roger Luckhurst organised a half day symposium at Birkbeck College, London, which began with a paper given by Rob Latham who was visiting Britain, and continued with a bizarre piece on Princess Diana conspiracy theories, an examination of the Borg in *Star Trek*, a meditation on special effects in *Blade II* and an analysis of the ethics of dead bodies and body parts, among other delights. The special effects paper helped to finally convince me that the classical Hollywood narrative film was just a brief interruption between the early spectacles of Méliès and the effects-led blockbuster of the 1990s and beyond. Roger plans further symposia in the future.

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ONE OF THE EVENTS OF THE YEAR WAS A HUGE EXHIBITION IN HYDE PARK, ON A CERTAIN TV SHOW FROM THE 1960S. LINCOLN GERAGHTY WAS THERE.

Star Trek: The Adventure

Hyde Park – London, 18th December 2002 to 31st January 2003 by Special Entertainment Events and Paramount Pictures.

reviewed by Lincoln Geraghty

The Adventure was a sight to behold. Standing over seventeen metres tall and stretching for fifty metres into Hyde Park from Marble Arch, the impressive edifice signalled to London that

Star Trek is well and truly one of the world's most enduring cultural phenomena. The efforts to unpack all that was housed inside, let alone display it, must have required transportation technology only the *USS Enterprise* itself could have provided. The list of props, sets, pictures, original costumes and designs was endless and unrivalled; not even *Star Trek: The Experience* in Las Vegas contains as many artefacts plucked from *Star Trek's* labyrinthine future history. *The Adventure* reminded those that approached the building, and those who entered to view never-before-seen relics, that Gene Roddenberry's dream was both galactic in scale and universal in appeal.

However, the main question that struck me as I entered the exhibit was, "What would Gene actually have made of this?" "Would he have appreciated the efforts to transplant thousands of props and sets from Los Angeles to Hyde Park?" I guess so. "Would he have appreciated the cold and austere welcome of the multiple, luminously-clad, part-time security guards surrounding what he might have described as a prison camp?" In this instance, I definitely think not. It was this last thought that lingered the longest after I had left; *The Adventure*, although universal in its concept, was little more than a miniature concentration camp complete with barbed-wire fencing and German guards questioning your every move. Upon driving up to the path which led to the entrance I was met by a stern-faced employee with a German accent stating: "You cannot park here, no cars allowed!" Of course, I did not intend to go further yet the guard felt it necessary to point out that: "No cars next to the building, *Star Trek* is American don't you know!" It was this statement that rang aloud in my head, both as a fan and a scholar. The irony had seemed to have eluded the guard but unfortunately not myself; this was the dichotomy that epitomises *Star Trek*: On the one hand it stands for world peace and harmony in the future but on the other it symbolises a contemporary version of America that suffers from a national anxiety deeply rooted in the conception of its own history and its place in global society. Even *Star Trek* cannot escape the shadow of terrorism that has haunted American institutions ever since 9/11.

Surely, once inside, one might begin to feel welcome? Thankfully

yes; however, there were plenty of ushers who still looked as though they would rather be somewhere else – Vulcan perhaps? But the array of props distracted your attention long enough to remember that Gene's dream is a reality for some and that physical manifestations of it, such as alien headpieces and Federation communicators, were enough for fans to appreciate how real *Star Trek* is for those who hope for a better future. *The Adventure* provided a glimpse into a future history that could happen – one which Gene had envisioned – however, the ushers in ill-fitting boiler suits with condescending comments represented the reality from which fans watch *Star Trek* to escape. Perhaps if the organisers of *The Adventure* (Special Entertainment Events) had followed in the footsteps of *Star Trek: The Exhibition* (Edinburgh District Council) – which toured the world, enjoyed a successful period at the Science Museum and employed fans who wanted to be there – then the total effect of *The Adventure* might have been different. Instead, one was left with the distinct feeling that you were there only to fill in the gaps and pass through without engaging with any of the exhibits or people; a feeling somewhat confirmed if you read the souvenir program offered to people before they had even set foot through the door.

At its peak, *Star Trek The Adventure* can cope with a thousand people an hour. That's 10,000 people in the course of an average day, which means that, during the course of its time in Hyde Park, up to a million people could have passed through those imposing portals and gawped at the displays. That sounds like a lot of people, but when you consider the number of *Star Trek* fans in Great Britain alone, then you might begin to realize just how lucky you are to have had a ticket!

I felt neither lucky nor privileged, but rather alienated and singled-out which is not the ethos which Gene Roddenberry believed to be illustrative of humanity's future. I did, however, think that the portals were imposing – if only because I felt you needed to show your credentials (papers!) to prove your worthiness to enter.

What is important to remember is that *Star Trek* is history; it is more than just good televisual entertainment. *Star Trek* is a historical, narrative discourse that not only feeds our passion for what the future might bring but also forms a relationship with the past mediated, not through written discourse as Hayden White has suggested regarding history, but through television and film.² The interpretation of *Star*

Trek's mission as a meta-narrative of colonialism is well studied and has been thoroughly analysed elsewhere, for example, Daniel Bernardi has described *Star Trek* as a "mega-text: a relatively coherent and seemingly unending enterprise of televisual, filmic, auditory, and written texts."³ Ultimately, the fictional universe in which so many fans immerse themselves represents something entirely exclusive and totally at the mercy of what the producers and creators decide is appropriate. The *Star Trek* canon, including the episodes and films, and now *Star Trek: The Adventure* are in effect rather more constrictive and bound to set values than fans and audiences would come to expect. This would intimate that the *Star Trek* canon and the concept of *The Adventure* as a shared fan mythology is susceptible to the same flaws as America's own mythology. When I was confronted with the verity that *The Adventure* was American then I was also forewarned that I would be exposed to the same social and cultural quandaries and difficulties that have sat restlessly with *Star Trek's* own positive vision of the future, as well as being herded from door to door by employees who were unaware of how sacred *Star Trek* is to its millions of fans.

The one comfort that arose from *The Adventure*, and can be held for the whole *Star Trek* universe, is that fans could take from it what they wished – enjoy the displays, read the exhaustive behind-the-scenes information, or even sample a space ride thanks to a flight simulator. *Star Trek's* various histories and series – faithfully replicated and displayed in *The Adventure* – have created new,

multiple realities which would seem to have a destabilising effect on critical theories that describe *Star Trek* as continuing to perpetuate an exclusive view of the future. Exhibitions like *The Adventure* provide fans with tangible and unlimited freedom for their imaginations, fulfilling their own dreams, desires, and fantasies. The once constrictive and absolute mega-text is at the same time a suitable vehicle to release fans' creativity and to create a sense of personal identity. The imagined reality of *The Adventure* far outweighed the harsh reality of the actual experience – something for which I was particularly thankful when I emerged from the heated building into the cold winter chill of Hyde Park.

Notes

1. Andy Lane and Anna Bowles, *Star Trek The Adventure: The Official Brochure*. (London: Titan Publishing, 2002), p. 4.
2. See Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
3. Daniel L. Bernardi, *Star Trek and History: Race-ing Towards a White Future*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), p. 7.

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Steve Aylett – *Dummyland (Accomplice Book 3)*

Gollancz, London, 2002, 119 pages, £9.99, ISBN 0-575-07087-0

Reviewed by Claire Brialey

It's possible that this book will make no sense to those who aren't familiar with Steve Aylett's way of thinking and manner of expression. It's possible that, more specifically, this book will make no sense to those who haven't read *Accomplice Books 1 and 2* (*Only an Alligator* and *The Velocity Gospel*). It's even possible that, no matter what you do to prepare for it, this book will simply make no sense.

The plot of the sequence is simple enough, but is distorted in the way of nightmares. Casual – or quite deliberate – violence doesn't necessarily kill or maim; diseases and disfigurements abound but don't impede day-to-day life, while their causes prove as oblique as their cures; otherworldly horrors lurk in every dimensional fold but are often less appalling than human machinations. Some distortions are particularly compelling: the protagonists work in the Sorting Office, where they are continually plagued by parcels and letters which arrive addressed to none of the workforce and which they are thus driven to hide or destroy since they have no idea what else to do with them.

Each book follows a roughly similar pattern, with recurring themes one can hope – but not entirely expect – will reach a conclusion in the fourth and final instalment. Thus Barny, despite his

motivating desire to care for the winged and stepping creatures of the Earth, visits his parents and destroys their pet-owning contentment; Gregor commits a victimless act of sexual perversion which nonetheless shocks even his friends; the demon Sweeney sends a minion to destroy Barny without fully exploring its potential vulnerability to the human world; Barny's love life is unnecessarily complicated and too public to be comfortable; and the Mayor pursues his re-election campaign amidst glaring municipal corruption only to find the populace unconvinced and yet uncaring.

But the syntax can be baffling. Some characters' utterances, and whole sections of the narrative, are grammatically rational but seem practically meaningless. Meaning seems sometimes incidental, and trying to decode it not only disrupts the flow of the story but could make you as baffled as most of the characters. Even going with the flow requires a mental readjustment before you can read anything else afterwards.

Don't be daunted. If you're at all inclined to take a twisted perspective on the world, you should try looking through Steve Aylett's fairground mirrors. But at least read the first two books in this sequence first.

Clive Barker – *Abarat*

HarperCollins, London, 2002, 388pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-00-225952-4

Reviewed by Paul Bateman

Abarat is the first of a quartet of children's books already optioned by Disney for reputedly \$8 million in an attempt to rival Harry Potter, though I have yet to find a copy of this book in the children's section of any bookshop. His first children's book, *The Thief of Always*, was far from bad, though his unconventional vision gave little hint that he would appeal to an audience nourished by the most traditional works of J.K. Rowling.

The story follows the adventures of Candy Quakenbush, a schoolgirl in the most boring place on Earth; Chickentown, Minnesota. For a school essay discussing ten things interesting about the town, her mother suggests that Candy visit the local hotel for information. The report she submits recounts the mysterious suicide that occurred in one of the hotel rooms many years ago, before the town was called Chickentown. Candy's teacher hates the essay and with that Candy storms out of class. She doesn't stop until she reaches an unfamiliar field with a disused lighthouse. There she meets John Mischief and his seven brothers who live on the antlers on his head. They are on the run from Mendelson Shape who, on the orders of his master, wants the key John Mischief has. In order to save Mischief from Shape, Candy switches on the lighthouse. The Sea of Izabella appears out of nowhere and washes them away. Soon Candy is lost in the *Abarat*, an archipelago of twenty-five islands, one for each hour of the day and one for the Time Out of Time, and is pursued for the

key Mischief gave her without her knowledge by all manner of creatures under the command of the Prince of Midnight, Christopher Carrion.

Being slightly disappointed with Clive Barker's last effort, *Coldheart Canyon*, I started to read his latest offering with a sense of trepidation. Luckily my worries were short-lived. Within the opening prologue and subsequent chapters I was hooked. Clive Barker has painted *Abarat* on a broad canvas with a carnival of colourful creatures and characters, the like of which he possibly hasn't achieved since *Weaveworld*. This is a world teeming with writers, wizards, dragon-slayers, giant moths and entrepreneurs among others. Visiting Barker's worlds is like visiting a freak show or circus of the grotesque rather than a museum. However, I never feel that Barker's worlds have the same depth of history as one expects from Tolkien, or even Rowling, though they always feel as though they are illustrated with a kaleidoscope of colours other authors rarely touch upon. And speaking of illustrations, possibly it is worth looking at the book just for the pictures, as it is richly illustrated with over a hundred paintings by the author, which should delight any audience; young or old. *Abarat* is the first part of what promises to be an epic tale. I eagerly await the next instalment, though I dread how Disney's syrupy touch will handle this series.

Stephen Baxter – *Evolution*

Gollancz, London, 2002, 585pp, £12.99 (tpb) ISBN 0-575-07312-X

Reviewed by Claire Brialey

There seem to be two linked narratives in this novel, one of them the sum of many more: the gradual story of primate evolution which led to modern humans, and a framing story set a generation into our future. The latter considers how the adaptability which brought us to this point could be deployed as our last chance to save the whole of life as we know it. But this is Stephen Baxter, never one to shirk the big picture, and three-quarters of the way into the book the real story comes into focus.

The only question about this is whether for some readers, wondering what the link will prove to be between the past and future narratives and whether they really needed to be in the same novel, this

revelation will come too late. The assorted chapters could be read separately as short stories or novellas, but the momentum of the overall story saves this novel from reading like a fix-up. But the history of life does take a while. Well-paced though each segment is individually, reading the novel as a whole can sometimes convey rather too much of a sense of geological time.

Baxter has previously addressed life among the hominids in *Origin* (2001), but that was a story seen at least partly through the eyes of his human protagonists. Here he presents what could be the storyboard for a BBC series *Walking with Primates*, beginning with the mammals who lived alongside dinosaurs and tracing a strand of

DNA through our ancestors to our future. The author's afterword makes clear that his intention is "to dramatise the grand story of human evolution, not to define it"; the novel seems to contain as much imagination as it does research, and as ever there is an underlying interest in what it means to be human. But Baxter is never anthropocentric, and takes the opportunity to explore a few evolutionary backwaters to show us alien life-forms every bit as impressive as those in his non-Earth-based fiction. Since this is fiction, he can also include some dinosaur species we'd love to have seen but whose circumstances mean neither their lives nor deaths made it to the fossil record.

On this huge scale, we see the history of life as much as a story of

extinction as a story of development. And however literally earth-shattering cosmic-level impacts can be on the specks of life scattered about the universe, the impact that life itself has in changing its environment is reiterated throughout this novel. It could read as a manifesto for sustainability, except that those less far-sighted than Baxter might lose heart when they consider not only his verdict that we currently have very few chances left but that, viewed over the long-term, "Nothing mankind had done in its short and bloody history had made the slightest bit of difference..." (p.524) But that's not the point. The optimistic can rest assured that in Stephen Baxter's view of the world, life endures.

Pat Cadigan (ed.) – *The Ultimate Cyberpunk*

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

ibooks, New York, 2002, 399pp £10.99 (UK) ISBN 0-7434-5239-9

As our editrix, La Diva Loca, cheerfully admits, the title is publisher's hyperbole, since it's neither, nor can reasonably be, complete – "there's no point, after all, in simply reprinting all of *Mirrorshades*" – and several of the stories included here were around long before the c-word was coined. They were inspirational, rather than sharing the themes and obsessions that later came to be identified as c-p proper: computers, street-smart attitudes, media and an ambivalent relationship to technologically modified flesh. However, given the stories which are collected here, the strength of this book as a collection of classic stories, I'm hardly prepared to quibble that the title should perhaps have been qualified by a pendant "*Companion*". As the lady says, "Just deal with it, OK?"

Since the anthology is arranged chronologically, proto-cyberpunk spans a period from the fifties to the mid seventies. First up is the acknowledged Godfather, Alfie Bester, with the 1954 'Fondly Fahrenheit'. I'd forgotten how good this was, particularly Bester's narrative trickery in which the distinction of identity between the protagonist and his murderous android gradually breaks down. Reet! Next comes Cordwainer Smith's 'The Game of Rat and Dragon' (1955), where you can see the early notions of Gibson's view of cyberspace as a metaphorical construct. Dick's 'We Can Remember It For You Wholesale' (1966) reminded me that *Total Recall* completely missed the final joke in what is, effectively, an extended and funny shaggy-dog story. Tiptree's 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1973), perhaps more than any of the others, starts to point the direction of The Movement to come.

Cyberpunk as a self-conscious genre arrives with Gibson's 'Burning Chrome' (1982), and coincidentally the single story which rekindled my interest in sf in the '80s. Reading it again, it hasn't really lost any of its vitality. It's still one of my favourite stories by Gibson. Another, 'Dogfight', written with Michael Swanwick, is also

included here. I've never quite understood why Bear's 'Blood Music' was included in the c/p canon; it's a far more traditional biological 'radical hard sf' story in the *Interzone* mould (though it first appeared in *Analog* in 1983), shot through at the end with an almost Clarke-like transcendence, and I admit to being equally confused by the inclusion of Bear's 'Petra' in *Mirrorshades*. Two stories are reprinted from *Mirrorshades*: Shiner's 'Till Human Voices Wake Us' and Shirley's 'Freezone', while sitting in the middle of them is what the publishers hope will be the tempter for people who already have that volume or other stories here in different anthologies or collections. This is a dozen pages, in colour, of the 'lost' graphic novel adaptation of *Neuromancer*, originally intended to be published in three volumes by Berkley/Byron Preiss. Only Volume 1, scripted by Tom de Haven and painted by Bruce Jensen, was ever published. The 12 pages reproduced here are from the 'lost' second volume, written by Franz Henkel and with art by Givens Long.

Pat Cadigan's surprisingly short, but no less effective, 'Patterns' (the obsession with TV and celebrity recalling Ballard) slots between two of the longest pieces, Bruce Sterling's 'Green Days in Brunel' and the closing story, Paul McAuley's 'Dr Luther's Assistant' (1993, and arguably a post-c/p story), set in the world of his Clarke Award-winning *Fairyland*. 'Further Reading' is provided by 'Bruce Sterling's Idea of What Every Well-Appointed 'Cyberpunk SF' Library Collection Should Possess', which, unsurprisingly, consists mostly of Gibson, Sterling, Shiner, Shirley, Rucker and Cadigan, divided between 'The Canon' and 'Other Fiction'. You can argue whether *The Difference Engine* should really be in 'The Canon', where Sterling places it, or 'Other Fiction', and whether Cadigan's *Patterns* and *Symmers* ought to be promoted to take their place beside *Mindplayers*. This is, after all, what lists are for. But this is a splendid collection, nonetheless.

Andrew Cartmel – *Foreign Devils*

Reviewed by Ben Jeapes

Telos, Tolworth, 2002, 112pp, £25.00 ISBN 1-903889-11-1

The latest *Dr Who* novella from Telos has some major strengths and a couple of glaring weaknesses. For the strengths, there's a classic, dream ticket *Who* line-up (the Doctor, Zoe and Jamie); settings well-described and brought alive; and strong, well-drawn characters, with one particular stand-out. The greatest strength is that this is really William Hope Hodgson's little-known foray into media spinoffery: it's a deliberate, and successful, pastiche of one of his haunted-house stories (with a touch of Agatha Christie) and his character Carnacki the Ghost-Finder appears as a major player. He and the Doctor get on like a house on fire.

In 1800 Canton, opium trader Roderick Upcott falls foul of the Chinese Imperial Astrologer, who places a time-delayed curse on Roderick's dynasty. A century hence, at a house party in Kent, his descendants start dropping like flies. (There is a logic to the time delay, though given that Roderick has been dead for years by the time it kicks in, the logic is tenuous.) And this is where the problems with the story start. Our heroes first land in Canton in 1800. Zoe and Jamie are transported by a spirit gate to Kent in 1900. But why does the

spirit gate work like that? Who put it there? What purpose does it serve? This is never really resolved, and the story could just as easily have begun with the crew arriving in Kent by TARDIS.

The other biggest problem with this novella is that the set-up and denouement are unashamedly supernatural. Hodgson played straight with his supernatural universe and Carnacki tackles the problems he faces with the same empirical methodology as a detective would take on a real-world crime. Yet it is still supernatural. *Dr Who* is not. Throughout *Who* history, the supernatural has never applied: there has always been a scientific basis to the story. It might be weird and whacky science: psionic aliens, telepathy, the Loch Ness Monster. It might be so way-out that Clarke's Law kicks in, but it is nonetheless, at heart, strictly material. The Doctor starts the right way by suspecting the spirit gate of harbouring a teleportation device, but before long he is blithely accepting Carnacki's supernatural explanations without putting in a single word in favour of reason and science. The two simply do not mix.

As added value, one of Hodgson's own Carnacki stories – 'The

Whistling Room' – is included at the end. I hadn't read any of these before but have every intention of doing so now, so it alone is

probably worth the price of admission – at least, if you buy the 'standard' £10 novella. Maybe not the 'deluxe' £25 one.

Mark Chadbourn – *The Devil in Green*

Gollancz, London, 2002, 358pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-07274-1

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Readers of Mark Chadbourn's Age of Misrule trilogy will know the basic premise of his work: the ancient Celtic gods have returned to this world, old legends come to life, and the normal functioning of modern society breaks down. In this novel, which is the first volume of another trilogy, *The Dark Age*, he picks up the story soon after the ending of the first, with a new set of characters but the same background and central idea.

The protagonist of the novel, Mallory, copes competently with the terrifying new world, but has a dark secret in his past. Though he has no faith, he joins a company of Christian knights who are based in Salisbury Cathedral; their intention is to create a force which will in time spread out and reclaim the world for the light. I don't think I'll be giving much away if I reveal that the attempt fails; a major theme of the novel is charting the progress of that failure and the reasons for it.

I have to come clean and say that as a Christian I get pretty irritated by the 'pagans good, Christians bad' scenario of much current fantasy. Chadbourn's work is much more complex than this; he shows a good understanding of the different varieties of Christian faith and the way that different believers interpret it and embody it in

their lives. At the same time, I feel it's a pity that all his developed Christian characters are either ineffective, corrupt, or pagans at heart, and the rather patronising sympathy which Mallory feels towards his Christian colleagues comes over into the novel as a whole.

When I reviewed Chadbourn's previous novels, I enjoyed the background, the characters and the story, but had occasion to criticise the style. I felt while reading *The Devil in Green* that many of these stylistic questions had been addressed, but I didn't find the story as compelling. The main reason, I feel, is that Chadbourn has done it all before. The first trilogy is centred on a group of five people, the Brothers and Sisters of Dragons, who come together to combat the evil forces which are loose in the world. This new trilogy seems to be taking the same route; *The Devil in Green* brings together two of what will be a new set of five. So while there are new mysteries and dangers which are powerfully described, along with some truly spectacular set pieces, I didn't feel the novel had anything really original to say that hadn't already been covered in the first trilogy. I hope I'm wrong, and I'm prepared to reserve final judgement until the second and third volumes appear; Chadbourn is too good a writer to get stuck in the rut of one scenario.

Hal Clement – *Heavy Planet*

Orb, New York, 2002, 414pp, \$15.95 ISBN 0-765-30368-8

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

A big fat book about a big heavy planet. Big, but strangely light in weight, thank goodness – I've had enough of wrist-straining doorstops. A light, breezy read as well.

Mission off Gravity (first published way back in 1954) is the classic hard sf novel about a heavy-gravity planet told from the point of view of one of its caterpillar-like alien inhabitants, a sailor/trader who comes into contact with visiting Earthmen for the first time. Strange to find out that *Mission* was published in a year with no Hugo Awards as I'm sure it would have been a dead cert for Best Novel, though it was nominated for the International Fantasy Award.

Heavy Planet is a compilation of *Mission off Gravity*, the sequel *Star Light* (1971), which was nominated for a Hugo Award, along with the essay 'Whirligig World', a follow-up when *Gravity* was serialised in *Astounding*; plus two stories, 'Lecture Demonstration' and 'Under'. The star of the books and stories is Mesklin, a fast-spinning world that bulges like a top. This produces treble Earth gravity at the equator which increases to a bone-crushing strength of hundreds of gravities at the poles. The aliens themselves are relatively primitive and have not yet, until the arrival of the humans, explored the whole of their planet. Primitive, but not stupid, though. The wily Barlennan, captain of the trading raft *Bree*, takes on the

mission to recover a malfunctioning probe but decides to extract the most he can out of the humans, as he sets sail on his incredible voyage of exploration... In some ways the Mesklinites are idealised humans with their thirst for knowledge greater than other wants, but with added interestingly and logically worked out quirks such as not jumping (one nearly goes mad when a human lifts him!) and the fear of falling, or – horror-of-horrors – something falling on you.

'Under' and 'Lecture Demonstration' both take place on the surface of Mesklin, though at opposite ends of the gravity spectrum. *Star Light* however takes place on a new world, Dhrawn, which is either a really big planet or a really tiny star that failed to ignite. Several Mesklinites have been shipped there to explore. The conflict of the first book is expanded on – the aliens want the knowledge that will enable them to escape their world's grip while the humans have policies that limit the transfer of knowledge.

Although obviously a labour of love, *Mission* and sequels may get a little slowed down with the gravity of its dense details. It does show its age a few times – it's difficult not to raise a smile when the scientists reach for their slide-rules to make calculations. However it's hard to imagine something like *Dragon's Egg* by Robert L. Forward without it. A classic in more than one sense.

Cecilia Dart-Thornton – *The Lady of Sorrows*

Macmillan, London, 2003, 477pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-333-90756-6

Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

The second volume of the *Bitterbynde* trilogy. At the close of *The Ill-made Mute*, the questing girl Rohain had found her voice (but not her memory), lost her disfigurement, discovered the location of a lost treasure, and fallen in love with Sir Thorn, a transient knight. Her aim now is to travel to Caemelor, her planet Erith's capital, to inform the King-Emperor of the treasure. Succeeding in this, she finds the King-Emperor and Sir Thorn to be one person. She becomes his betrothed. That event, occurring halfway through the volume, is as much as it provides of a happy ending. From there it's a downhill slide, Rohain, and those associated with her, continuing to be objects of the Wild Hunt's destructive pursuit. As the book ends, not so much in suspense as indeterminacy, Rohain's evasive memory is at best discontinuous.

Though the slide is downhill, and fatal to some attractive

characters, Rohain possesses a life-preserving bracelet; and the journey has its idyllic phases. When the Emperor goes to war, he places Rohain on the secure island of Tamhania, a (delightfully described) Edenic retreat. It is only her well-intentioned foolishness that lets evil in, enabling it to trigger a (horrifically described) vulcanism. Surviving a mega-tsunami, Rohain sets out for the Huntingtowers, where she hopes to gain knowledge of her destiny. Here, quite late in the book, the author starts juggling with timescales, cosmoses and identities. Arbitrarily, we are a thousand years back, when the ways between Erith and the Fair Realm beyond the stars were still open. Erith's Avlantian city of Hythe Mellyn is then the scene of a rats / Piper / children tragedy; but the Mayor's daughter, Ashalind, prototype or avatar of Rohain, succeeds in bringing back the forfeited children from that Realm of the Faëran. In doing so,

however, she infects Hythe Mellyn (occasioning its downfall), and herself, with Langothe, an irresistible longing for the Fair Realm. As gates between the worlds begin irrevocably to close, this volume ends with the twin convergence of Rohain-Ashalind on the Huntingtowers, and the situation, both temporal and identity-wise, seems far from resolution.

The Pied Piper is not the only folktale to be woven into the plot: a source-bibliography of a score of such indicates indebtedness, and the

ingenuity of their deployment is disarming. Place-names – Erith, Camelior, Avlantia, Rimany etc. – are evocative and allegorically suggestive. At many points and levels the story engenders strong mythic resonances: an Orphean strand, for instance, in the children's return. All this, together with a distinctive and pleasing style of romance prose, makes for enjoyable reading, though there is finally an uncertainty of direction which undoubtedly her third volume will resolve.

John Davey – *Blood And Souls*

Nephyrite Press, London, 2002, 220pp, £202 (unpriced copy) ISBN 1-95200-746-0

Reviewed by L.J. Hurst

Blood And Souls may be the first volume from the Nephyrite Press; at least, I have not been able to locate anything else from them. And readers who know John Davey's name from his work with Nomads of the Timestreams, the Michael Moorcock appreciation society, may be surprised to read his debut novel, as it is fantasy as far removed from Moorcock as it is possible to be.

Readers may be as surprised as Simon Colvin, though that it is unlikely. For surely nothing could be so surprising as to look up at the roof of Victoria Station and see an angel playing a harp, nor to recognise the tune filling the vaults as Led Zeppelin's 'Whole Lotta Love', yet that is what happens to tax inspector Colvin. As his mind is full of his problems at home – his wife has been distant ever since he admitted an act of adultery – the angel's intervention is unfortunate. When the angel finally approaches Colvin and tells him of his mission to save the world from the powers of near-ubiquitous evil, Colvin is going to be at a disadvantage, especially after Ellie, the cheated wife, throws the wretched civil servant out of their home, so that he has nowhere to cast his protective pentangles.

On hearing of his mission, Colvin protests, "I'm a fucking tax inspector, off all things! What kind of hero, a 'force for good', is that?" We readers know the force of evil working against him. That force has laboured against some discrimination in the past, being manifest in an undead, lesbian Victorian proto-feminist who now looks her age. One might almost think they deserve each other. However, for reasons neither angel nor Satan are able to explain, the time has come for the Grail to matter again and one or other must find it and either save or destroy the world. Satan cannot have many disciples on whom he can call – so the lot falls on his nameless old lady, while the angel (he's called Dylan) tells Colvin chance has chosen him to be the opponent of evil.

So it's hi-ho, off to Tintagel we go. Simon has his new girlfriend (a tax suspect he has been interviewing) and his two kids (it's his week for the kids) in the car. The grail they find, though, has little use until they are back in the suburbs of London and chasing the crooks to whom the devil and his old lady sub-contract their work. That's when the killing is done.

John Davey has brought many things together here (he is a designer as well, so may be responsible for this superb-looking volume and dustjacket), but I am not sure they combine. Colvin himself is a morally neutral character – a Laodicean in St Paul's terms – who makes a weak protagonist, while the nameless epitome of evil seems to have been unduly punished for her objections to an overbearing husband. When evil does make itself manifest in the final battles it does so in much clearer moralist terms (goodies against crooks), while Colvin has never proved himself. For instance, he 'gets off' with the client he is investigating – he is never shown having some reserve, such as having caught tax frauds in his professional career.

I was surprised to discover John Davey's design career as this is a novel short on physical descriptions. It is only late on, for instance, that we realize that Colvin's was a multi-racial marriage. On the other hand, Davey has paid a lot of attention to language and construction, not just in the alternation of chapters and subjects, but down to the repetition of phrases, as if these were spells and enchantments hidden in the text. I think they are intended to be (A.E. Van Vogt used a similar method), so the magic is there. I just wish a plot was there more clearly.

(Available from: Nephyrite Press, PO Box 37815, London SE23 3WQ)

Sara Douglass – *The Crippled Angel*

Voyager, London, 2002, 455pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-00-710849-4

Reviewed by Penny Hill

This is the third volume in Sara Douglass' The Crucible Trilogy, and, despite having somehow missed the second volume, it took me very little time to catch up with the main plot. This could be because the events of the trilogy begin by mirroring those of European medieval history, so a vague knowledge of events based on Shakespeare's history plays and Antonia Fraser's *Kings and Queens of England* is enough to get you started.

What struck me as strange about this volume was that Douglass then diverted from the actual course of history in a way which made me almost feel that it was a mistake rather than a conscious literary choice. After all, having Henry IV fight the battle of Agincourt approximately 20 years too early, and then marry Catherine, made me wonder how Douglass rationalised the internal chronology. Either Catherine was born 20-odd years early, or is it just possible that it's a mistake and that Douglass has confused Henry IV with his son Henry V? I felt that Douglass spoiled the effect of having a history that so closely related to our own, illuminated by the supernatural reality she has posited, by then heading down such an unprofitable path.

The supernatural element was superbly woven into the main narrative again, with the shadowy misapprehensions I had from

reading the first volume brought out into the open and resolved. The relationships between the angels, humans and demons are explained – including the basis for the angels' misogyny which had made me so uncomfortable before. Again though, I found myself uncomfortable with the extent to which she distorted Christianity.

Like Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy, Douglass depicts a universe without an omnipotent creator, thus demoting Jesus to a "son of the angels" rather than "son of God". I was surprised by the strength of my reaction to the reduction of his status, making him a victim who needs to be saved by others. I will happily accept all kinds of different philosophical and religious positions in fiction, but this, and the *Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* style consequences, I found unacceptable.

Overall I found this a fast, enjoyable read – the plot kept me fascinated – and yet the ideas behind it were so alien and uncomfortable as to make me feel morally queasy for having enjoyed reading it. If you know or care about medieval history or Christianity, I would recommend you avoid this series as these distortions will outweigh the pleasure of an otherwise enjoyable dark fantasy.

Mick Farren – *Underland*

Tor, New York, 2002, 448pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-765-30321-3

Reviewed by Mark Greener

Something is rotten in Antarctica. And the ultra-secretive US National Security Agency, specialists in the Paranormal and Unexplained, has lost two crack teams attempting to discover the source. They recruit vampire Victor Renquist, master of a colony of the undead. Renquist learns that the Third Reich established a secret base in the hollow earth below Antarctica at the end of WWII. For years, the Third Reich's offspring secretly traded with the surface dwellers, but generally kept themselves to themselves. But now, supported by an ancient race of sentient reptiles, they plan world domination...

Over a series of four books, beginning with *The Time of Feasting*, Farren's developed a compelling series of vampire stories. However, these are, at their heart, sf, rather than horror. Indeed, there's very little horror per se in *Underland*. The vampires are descendants of a race of genetically-engineered warriors bred by the ancient Nephilim to help their interplanetary expansion. Over time, vampires passed into legend, but they still hunt among us.

Farren's ability as an sf writer has, perhaps, never received the attention it deserves. His remarkable *DNA Cowboys Trilogy* (recently reissued), for example, draws together influences as diverse as *Star Trek*, *Kung Fu* and Sam Peckinpah to create a wild, bizarre world that is almost unique in the genre. The Renquist books are more restrained. But it's fun to check off the numerous references. Indeed, the number of cultural elements Farren weaves together is remarkable. Merlin becomes National Security Adviser, for example. He explains why some nosferatu appear tall, bald with "down-pointing yellow fangs" – akin to the classic 1922 German film. He name-checks Lovecraft, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Dennis Wheatley among many others. I

gained the impression Farren really enjoys writing these books.

Indeed, the pace cracks along. The Renquist books are never slow, sluggish or insipid. They remind me of the narrative pace of the old adventure pulp stories – *Doc Savage*, for example – which is a difficult trick to pull off effectively. And there are some lovely turns of almost hard-boiled phrasing: "the young man's brain had not only been washed, but also fluffed and folded".

However, as mentioned above, the Renquist books aren't really horror novels. The violence and the horror are restrained. It seems that Farren wanted to define a group that exists outside cultural and societal norms – and vampires fitted the bill. He seems less interested than, for example, Rice or Nancy Kilpatrick in exploring the vampire mythology. Farren was, of course, a leader of the underground movement in the late 60s and early 70s. In some ways, the vampire colony captures echoes of the counter-cultural zeitgeist Farren chronicles in his autobiography *Give the Anarchist a Cigarette*.

And, as befits a regular contributor to *International Times* and founder of the proto-punk band *The Deviants*, Farren takes numerous swipes at the government. In places, the comments are sharply barbed – even disturbing. The colony allows Farren to counterpoint their independence with the lives of the rest of us who are, all too often, "neat, malleable" and who "followed orders without reflection or question". But these political comments never overwhelm the narrative.

Even after four novels, I still find the Renquist books hugely enjoyable. And I'll be first in line to get the next in this excellent series.

Maggie Furey – *The Eye of Eternity*

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Orbit, London, 2002, 550pp, £12.99 ISBN 1-84149-115-2

The Eye of Eternity is the third and final volume of Furey's Shadowleague trilogy and picks up directly after events in the previous book.

In Gendival, the renegade Loremaster, Amaun, is recovering from his epic battle with Cergom, the Archimandrite, for control of the Shadowleague. Whilst Cergom lies near death, Amaun has to consolidate his position as the new Archimandrite. As a renegade and exile, he has a tough task ahead persuading the Loremasters to accept and follow him. The curtain walls that protect and divide the worlds are failing more rapidly each day and the deadly Ak'Zahar are abroad in Callisiora slaughtering all in their path. If the curtain walls fail completely, then all sorts of horrors will be set loose on the world.

Ignorant of the Shadowleague, the curtain walls and anything other than Callisiora, the survivors of the Ak'Zahar attack on Tiarond are penned up in the temple. The new Hierarch, Gillarra, is unable to fulfil her position as leader of the faith because her ring of office has apparently fallen into the hands of the Ak'Zahar. Whilst all in Tiarond look to her to intercede with Myrial on their behalf, a desperate search for the ring ensues. Gillarra has no idea why Myrial appears to have turned His/Her back on them, or just how important

the ring of office is, just that the ring should be returned to its rightful place on her hand and all will be well.

Having come over to Amaun's side, Veldan, Kaz and Elion, along with Zavahl, the former Hierarch of Callisiora (who has the spirit of the Dragon Seer Aethon trapped within him), have to go into the tunnels beneath Tiarond to repair whatever damage is causing the curtain walls to fail. Unfortunately, Amaun, during his long years of exile from Gendival, was also Lord Blade, leader of the Godswords and keepers of the faith in Callisiora, and made many enemies who now need to be united to his cause.

Furey has managed to end this trilogy in spectacular fashion, tying up all the various storylines neatly and effectively. There is a minor plot glitch in the middle of this book which should have been picked up by an editor, though fortunately it doesn't really detract from the whole. It's another complicated tale with loads of characters who are sometimes hard to keep track of, but well worth following around until they eventually meet up for the grand finale. Well written, fast-paced and fun – all the things one expects from one of the real storytellers in the field. Read and enjoy!

Nick Gifford – *Piggies*

Reviewed by Penny Hill

Puffin, London, 2003, 214pp (proof), £4.99 ISBN 0-14-151-189-3

This is a straightforward horror story aimed at early teenagers. Ben, our protagonist, accidentally walks into an alternative world on his way home from a friend's house. Because he is new to the area, he doesn't at first realise what has happened and the first few chapters dwell on his gradual realisation of his plight and the nature of the world he has walked into.

This is one of those books where the cover gives too much away. If we are supposed to share Ben's shock at discovering he is in a world of vampires where other non-bloodsuckers may only be a myth, then having a cover illustration of a pint of human blood with a 'best before' date rather ruins the surprise.

The tension as Ben tries to find some form of safety in this world,

eventually meeting up with outlaws who share his plight, works quite well as does the description of the hidden community he tries to join.

I felt the narrative lost its way later in the story, when Ben contacts Rachel, one of the first vampire teenagers he had met earlier. Given the situation he is in and what he knows about her, it is not realistic that he would be this casual. Again, when she shows him vampires "factory farming" humans as part of getting him to trust her, his response is surely too naive. I have a sense that the writer needed Ben to react this way in order to get on with the plot (betrayal, capture, flight, the usual motifs) but wasn't skilled enough to make these turning points convincing.

The analogy between how the vampires farm the humans and

factory farming in the real world was so blatantly drawn that I suspect the intended audience would resent being patronised and preached at in such a manner. As an adult, I certainly did.

On the other hand, the moral dilemmas the outlaws find themselves in, with the chance to bargain with their enemies by betraying other people, were more subtly drawn and argued over. Their initial wariness about Ben, who cannot explain his presence or his affiliations, was understandable and well-conveyed.

Kathleen Ann Goonan – *Light Music*

Reviewed by Chris Hill

There was also a neat little twist at the end, indicating that with the roles reversed, anything could happen next. I found myself trying to assess how much of a threat Rachel might be in these new circumstances.

Overall I found this book slightly disappointing. There was nothing particularly original or inventive about it but it passed the time reasonably enough. One of those books for children that doesn't really have anything in it for adults.

Gollancz, London, 2002, 424pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-8579-889-2

This is the final volume of the sequence that began with *Queen City Jazz*. Crescent City is the final stages of converting part of itself into a spaceship to investigate the source of the signal that has been disabling technology and causing mutations in people born when the signal started. But it is attacked by pirates, losing vital data, so two of the inhabitants, Jason Peabody and Dania Cooper, leave to try and find the missing data from Johnson Space Center. However both have in some way been affected by changes in the city that threaten their mission. Meanwhile, the last person surviving on a Moon base finds her way back to Earth and heads for Crescent City.

As the final volume in a series *Light Music* does a good job of tying up the loose ends. Although you still don't really know where the signal comes from you do find out more about the senders' intentions. More areas of the altered America are shown to the reader;

Goonan has obviously had a lot of fun working out the consequences of the nanotechnology outbreaks. As the titles of all the series suggest, music once again becomes the mediator between the people and their changed environment.

However, there are so many loose ends to tie up that characterization does suffer a little. It is also long enough ago that I read *Crescent City Rhapsody* that I was finding it difficult to remember whether certain of the characters were people I had already met or not.

Overall, this certainly feels like the end of the series and a fairly satisfying one. The part of me that likes to see every loose end tied up would like to see what happens to the spaceship when it finds the senders of the signal, but perhaps it is time for Goonan to start mining a different vein.

Colin Greenland – *Finding Helen*

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Black Swan, London, 2003 (seen in proof) 367pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-552-77080-9

It's been four years since Colin Greenland finished his Tabitha Jute trilogy with *Mother of Plenty*, during which he seems to have kept a relatively low profile. Now he's back with a contemporary 'mainstream' novel, *Finding Helen*, which comes with publicity puffs from Neil Gaiman, Robert Irwin and even Annie Nightingale.

Christopher Gale, forty-something, married, a teacher, hears an old song one morning on the radio. For some reason the DJ's irritating talking over the final six chords leaves him feeling lost, as if his life is as unresolved as the song he has just heard, and precipitates him into a hallucinatory journey to discover what happened to the singer, and the idealism of his lost youth.

Twenty five years earlier, in the middle of the seventies, Chris was obsessed with singer Helen Leonard, and based his university thesis on her work, with plans to turn it into a book. He writes to her and receives a cursory note telling him to go the isolated Scottish station at Knockhallow and wait. Helen is a mess of contradictions, disarming and dismissive, childish and demanding. Gradually, he is

drawn into Helen's circle just at the point where it becomes obvious that her best work is behind her, her record company have grown frustrated, and her most recent record may well be her last.

Greenland alternates Chris's journey back up the length of the country, sharing his car with the imaginary king of the Dog Walkers, the Beagle Man, and his equally smelly hound Gobbo, with Chris's flashbacks and memories of his times with Helen, twenty five years earlier, wondering where it all went wrong and why he has a revolver wrapped in plastic bag in the glove compartment. How is it that Helen seems unchanged by the years, while those who were drawn to her, her lovers, confidants and admirers, are all broken, used up or dead?

Although *Finding Helen* is being marketed as a mainstream novel, it is as enigmatic and understatedly fantastic as anything from, say, Jonathan Carroll or Graham Joyce, Geoff Ryman or Steve Erickson, forming part of that dark fantasy/magic realism crossover between the genre and outside. It is also, quite possibly, Colin Greenland's best novel yet.

Elizabeth Haydon – *Requiem for the Sun*

Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

Gollancz, London, 2002, 436pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-575-07307-1

Requiem for the Sun is a follow-up novel to the Rhapsody trilogy (*Rhapsody*, *Prophecy* and *Destiny*) and takes place three years after the events of the concluding volume. The story of the earlier trilogy comes across well without the need to have read the earlier books, nor with any obtrusive info dumps about what has gone on before.

Rhapsody and her companions Grunthor and Achmed have settled into their new land and their new lives. Achmed is King of the Bolg, Grunthor is heavily involved with recreating his mountain kingdom and Rhapsody has her duties as Lady of the Cymrians. However, their peace is not to last. Rhapsody's old enemy, Michael, the Wind of Death, whom she believed long-dead when the Island of Sendair sank into the sea, has survived by becoming the host to a F'dor demon. Now he becomes aware that Rhapsody also survived and he is determined to have her.

Rhapsody, meanwhile, has set out to help the people of the desert of Yarim regain the source of water, Entudenin, that had succoured its people for centuries. With the aid of Achmed, Grunthor and a contingent of Bolg (whose presence is almost too much for their

reluctant hosts), they dig out the well-head and restore water to the people. The Guildmistress of Yarim is none too happy at this intervention; it had been her intention to subvert the water for her own use and she is determined to wreak vengeance on the Bolg, and Achmed in particular.

In the meantime, the Dowager Empress of Sorbold dies, preceded by her heir, and the search for her successor begins. Gwydion, Rhapsody's husband, reluctantly leaves his newly pregnant wife to attend the funeral ceremonies. He leaves Rhapsody in the hands of his uncle, Anborn, and the commander of his army, to escort her to the cave of the dragon Elynos.

It is on the journey from her home to Elynos's cave that Rhapsody is kidnapped by Michael's servants. News of Rhapsody's kidnapping reaches Gwydion, and he sets off with Achmed to rescue his wife.

There are many strands woven into this novel, and many of them are resolved before the end of the book. However, there are some strands that do not appear to have been followed to their conclusion

and leave the way open to a follow-up volume. Although the book itself does not say it is the first in a new series, a note on Haydon's website states that with this book, "The next era in the symphony of

Ages begins." If there are more to come, I'll look forward to reading them.

Graham Joyce – *The Facts of Life*

Reviewed by Paul Bateman

Gollancz, London, 2002, 263pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-575-07230-X

At the last moment, wayward 20-year-old Cassie Vine decides not to give up her illegitimate baby son. In order to keep Frank, Cassie agrees with her mother, Martha, the matriarch of the family, for her son to be looked after each of her six sisters in turn as Cassie is thought to be too flighty and fey to care for Frank on her own. The plot follows Frank growing up in post-war Britain. Presided over by Martha, Frank lives briefly with each of his Aunts: Una, whose husband works on a farm where, under a wooden bridge, the young Frank discovers The-Man-Behind-The-Glass to whom he speaks and brings gifts; the prim and proper spinster twins, Evelyn and Ina, who host séances and believe that there is something 'special' about Frank; Coventry Council candidate Olive, whose husband has yet to fulfil a promise he made to a fellow soldier during the war; Beatrice, who lives in sin with her boyfriend; and Aida, married to a mortician.

The plot is set primarily in post-war Coventry but also takes in a variety of locations including the asylum Cassie is taken to after one of her 'episodes', and the Oxford commune, which is supposedly a social experiment, housing various left-wing intellectuals, including Beatrice and her boyfriend.

Though set during the aftermath of the Second World War, the author also brilliantly describes Cassie's more unusual escapades during the Blitz of Coventry, which only she had foreseen.

The Facts of Life is an accomplished study of a working class family in post-war Britain. Each of the members of the Vine family, as well as other subsidiary characters, is rich, varied and brilliantly portrayed. The dialogue is crisp, bringing to life the character's hopes, fears and prejudices. Each sentence is carefully crafted for maximum effect. The plot is subtle – at times possibly too subtle for this reviewer – hinting at the supernatural talents some of the members of the Vine family possess.

Though each of the characters is suitably explored and the tale is nicely rounded off, I felt more could have been done. The novel covers about ten years of Frank's life, which was recounted, at times, too quickly. There were a number of episodes that could have been more prolonged. For example, I wanted to know more about Frank's schooling, the Man-Behind-The-Glass and the spiritual church the twins attended. The occult elements were secondary, so as not to overshadow the portrait of family life, but to such an extent it was a wonder that a publisher other than Gollancz, who usually specialize in more overtly fantastical stories, couldn't have produced this novel. A gem of a book by a talented writer, certainly, but it fell slightly short of what would be expected from a four-times winner of the British Fantasy Society Best Novel Award.

John Light – *No Space in Time*

Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

Photon Press, Berwick-upon-Tweed, 2002, 111pp, np ISBN 1-897968-18-3

Acknowledgements indicate that this has appeared fragmentarily in sundry small-press magazines. This may be one reason for an impression of disjointedness; another is that the plot is progressed through often arbitrary-seeming time-quakes which cause it to jump along rather than flow. The opening chapters introduce the improbable planet Gildon which wanders around the variously coloured stars of an improbable cluster. Its Emperor and Empress are (initially) immortal, but childless. A venerable visitant materialises from a jar in a room topping their castle's highest tower, bringing them a baby princess. They come from the planet Anren, which exists in a five-dimensional continuum. The old man stays as the baby's Guardian, warning of doom if ever he is allowed to marry her – for through the years he will (and does) grow backwards to become a babe, she forwards to become a crone. At midway equilibrium, however, they do marry. Finally they journey through the jar (and/or cylinder) back to Anren, the baby Guardian cradled in the princess's arms, leaving behind their son, Melgor Erdin. He, usually referred to as the Guardian, is the protagonist of the rest of the novel, departing Gildon, to the accompaniment of time tremors, to try to circumvent its foretold fate.

The antipolar time-growth is analogous to that of the babe in Blake's 'The Mental Traveller' and the dwindling/expansion of Yeats's 'gyres', morphologically symbolic of both individual and cultural histories. John Light employs another, and not unrelated, trope: the unifying alchemical marriage. When the Gildan follows his parents into the five-dimensional continuum, he finds they have become one person. Feeling himself ill-adapted to their planet, he moves on, assisted and guided by a kind of omnipresent computer entity, the Transcender, an agent of higher powers. Entering the planet Shon, one which exists in an antimatter galaxy, where time's direction is in reverse of that of his native galaxy, he meets and subsequently marries Lu-se, an emerald-haired antimatter priestess. After a succession of chronally complex planetary wanderings, his destiny is to return to and restore equilibrium to a now stricken Gildon, which he does, though Lu-se cannot accompany him. The saga has no conventionally happy resolution, but the two time-incompatible planets, Shon and Gildon, do benefit from his action, and he is remembered as a once-and-future hero by both. A great bonus is that, relevantly designed, two of John Light's brilliant black-and-white geometric paintings adorn the covers.

Eric Van Lustbader – *The Veil Of A Thousand Tears*

Reviewed by Fiona Grove

Voyager, London, 2002, 624pp, £18.99 ISBN 0-00-224730-5

The Veil of a Thousand Tears is the second volume in the Pearl Saga, begun in *The Ring of Five Dragons*. The story continues to follow the lives of Raine – the Dar Sala-at, and prophesied saviour of the world of Kundala – and her friends Giyan, the Osoru Sorceress, Reckk Hacilar renegade V'ornn, and Eleana, a freedom fighter of Kundala.

Giyan has been possessed by a daemon, which has escaped the abyss where the goddess Miina banished them in time immemorial. The only way to save her is for Raine to find the Veil of a Thousand Tears before the solstice, and use it to rescue Giyan. This, of course, is no easy task as the Gyrkon, Nith Batoxxx, as well as a group of necromancers, also want the same long-lost artefact. Raine must learn more about her sorcery and that of the Dar Sala-at, while her friends

each have their own struggle and parts to play. Various people, V'ornn and Kundalan alike, seek to find the seven portals, which Nith Batoxxx needs in order to free the daemons from the abyss, and which Raine and her friends also need in order to seal the abyss' breach. Only one person appears to know their whereabouts, and who would listen to a madman?

At the same time the ruler, Kurgan Stogggul, is busy plotting the overthrow of Nith Batoxxx and his evil tyranny, whilst star-admiral Olonn Ryddlin, the V'ornn with the ensorcelled leg, endeavours to plot Kurgan's overthrow. The Kundalan freedom fighters also plan to overthrow the whole V'ornn nation, and Kurgan's sister, Marethyn has – unknown to him – begun to support the Kundalan nationalists.

The drama of the book moves from the city of Axis Tyr to the desert of the Korrush and the ancient city of Za Hara-at, where the culmination of events leads to a dramatic confrontation between the main protagonists.

Whilst this is a very interesting story, which wills you to read on, the book is not easy to read, nor especially well constructed. This, in my opinion, is due more to the editing than the actual writing, although the style is not always easy to follow. Lustbader writes with half a dozen stories running together and double paragraph spacing is often the only indication that the theme is about to change. This

means that you are frequently two or three sentences into a section before you realise that the viewpoint, and even the geography has changed. Clearer marking of changes would have led to a much smoother translation of the story line and made the book easier to follow. This should not, however, put you off reading the book. The characters are well-constructed and new characters have been introduced and developed. There is your fair share of mythical beings, not least Thigpen – a Rappa, and the mythical Fulkaan, a huge bird, and of course the five dragons of Miina keep on interfering with the lives of the people they are following.

John Meaney – *Context*

Reviewed by Chris Hill

Bantam Press, London, 2002, 241pp, £18.99 ISBN 0-59301-735-4

In *Context*, the follow-up to *Paradox*, Tom Corcorigan and his security specialist Elva travel to the realm of Aurineate Grand'aume in search of a cure for the nanotech injury that threatens his life.

When they go to visit a Seer, whose powers seem to be greater than the Oracles who Tom had helped undermine, Elva kills herself, seemingly because of some piece of information that the Seer reveals. Just before the Seer is himself murdered Tom discovers that Elva's consciousness was quantum-entangled with that of her twin sister and at her death her sister's mind would be overwhelmed with Elva's. Tom sets out to find the 'replacement' Elva, but becomes caught up in a fight against a mysterious 'Blight' which seems quickly to be taking over huge areas of Nulapeiron.

If I had to describe John Meaney's writing in one sentence it would be 'Greg Egan's delinquent younger brother.' Both writers are unafraid to write about the most far-reaching implications of current theories of physics, but Meaney seems determined to have a lot more fun with it. *Context* is also, unashamedly, an adventure story. During the course of it, there is torture, hairs-breadth escapes, battles and hissable villains. If this seems to be a bit lightweight there is also

moral ambiguity, tough choices and complex physics. There is also a clever tie-back to *To Hold Infinity*, Meaney's first novel, which makes it quite clear that not only is the Nulapeiron Sequence set in the same universe some time later, but can also in a sense be considered a sequel to the earlier work.

As in *Paradox* you also get a parallel narrative concerning the pilot, Ro, which provides background material and also tantalizing hints that Ro's and Tom's stories may be connected.

The book does have two particular faults. One is that the narrative thread in *Context* is not always clear. There are diversions from the central quests (the search for Elva and the defeat of the Blight) that are somewhat distracting. The second is more a personal thing. Once again Tom is driven to great feats of endurance at various points in the plot which, if you are not a martial arts fanatic, can get a little dull (with his mathematical brilliance and physical abilities, at times Tom borders on being a Zelazny quasi-superman.)

But overall *Context* is an exciting and thoughtful read, with enough hints of what is to come to make me anticipate the next volume with pleasure.

Michael Moorcock – *Firing the Cathedral*

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

PS Publishing, Harrogate, 2002, 112pp, £8.00 ISBN 1-902-880-44-7 £25.00 ISBN 1-902-880-45-5

Times have been hard on poor Jerry Cornelius. Apart from a few excursions such as 'The Spencer Inheritance' (*The Edge*) and brief cameo walk-on roles, he appears to have been frozen out (perhaps literally, along with his sister) for much of the last couple of decades. The problem was that Jerry was always too much a man of his times, "so up to the moment", as Alan Moore writes in his splendid introduction, "it risked rear-end collision."

That introduction is almost worth the price of the book alone (well, the paperback at least) in which Moore lays out a convincing, incisive and supremely funny argument that far from being a relic of the seventies, locked in an Entropy Tango now overtaken by rival gods of Chaos and Complexity, Moorcock's protean anti-hero is "one of the only genuinely modern characters in British fiction", the first post-quantum personality, a superimposed flux of states and identities. The problem is that the seventies of the New Wave turned out not even to have been about the seventies: "Why was Sladek wasting his time on texts that seemed obsessed with codes, as if encryption had some part to play in human times to come? Why couldn't J.G. Ballard just stop going on about how tower blocks shape psychopathologies, about celebrity car crashes as emergent icons...?"

So here's Jerry, Pierrot of Amageddon and a man for our very own End Times, emerging to breakfast in the ruins of 21st century Britain to the end-of-the-pier strains of *Oh What a Lovely War!* (Una Persson is starring in Hove). The gang's all here – Bishop Beesley has been filling in as an end-of-season Gandalf at the World Trade Centre Memorial Hall – so let's do the End of the World Show right here. Time and geography have collapsed again. The UK and US are indistinguishable, and if you can avoid the cluster bomb craters on the M25 and the rising waters, you can get from Carthage to Ground Zero on a Number 15 bus. (Whether you can get back again is another matter.) While Cossacks ride through Deansgate, bombers fly overhead on a punitive strike on Nova New Washington for the collateral damage of Glasgow. Shaky Mo Collier, invisible under an arsenal of semi-automatics and rocket launchers, is back in his element.

"By blurr and boosh our world's restored, so on our knees and thank the Lord."... "It's a hymn," Mitzi apologises. "You need to hear the music."

The future's looking fresh already.

Andre Norton & Sherwood Smith – *Atlantis Endgame*

Reviewed by N.M. Browne

Tor, New York, 2002, 253pp, £14.95 ISBN 0-312-85922-8

This latest Time Traders' Adventure begins with the discovery of a time patrol member's earring on an archaeological site at Thera, once Kalliste, and known in legend as Atlantis. A huge volcanic eruption in 1620BC destroyed the sophisticated Minoan civilisation that existed on Kalliste, thus either delaying human technological development by several centuries or accelerating it by removing a force for peace from the ancient world and permitting war to become the driver for invention. The time patrol fear that the aliens known as

the 'Baldies' may try to affect history by influencing the eruption and the patrol team have to go back in time to investigate – and, if necessary, intervene to ensure that history proceeds as it should. Once there, they discover another group of aliens, the Kayu, enemies of the Baldies, who may be in Kalliste to oppose the Baldies' plans. The Kayu also want to 'hear the entity' with whom the seer at Kalliste communes. In the course of the adventure the time travellers learn that the 'Baldies' may not be straightforward baddies but alien

eco-warriors, preserving the galaxy from destructive human incursions.

I hate to say it but the whole story feels as dated as the language: people go 'nuts'; there is talk of 'science types,' 'brain boys,' and 'computer jockeys.' The time agents have to stay out of the Baldies' 'mitts' while Ross Murdock, the man of action, raised on the streets, says thing like: "...those damned Kayu guys had the gall to judge us!"

Moreover the sensitive time patrol team, who must not "surprise people with things that never have been" act like caricature American tourists showering in their boat's 'sweat box' and drinking freshly

brewed coffee. While they apparently leave behind them all their obvious twenty first century trappings (their equipment is heavily disguised), one of their number retains her silk underwear and, most bizarrely of all, they wear fake fur! There are other odd nods towards political correctness: "the soubriquet 'Baldies' was silly" but was 'rather like the way we still call 'Native Americans' 'Indians"', while one of the travellers felt obliged to point out that the priestesses of Kalliste were wise "...much wiser, I think, than I will ever be." Just in case we thought the past was peopled by idiots.

Atlantis Endgame is an easy, action-packed read, but, disappointingly, its flaws keep my disbelief resolutely unsuspended.

Tim Powers – *The Drawing Of The Dark*

Ciollanez, Fantasy Masterworks, London, 2002, 328pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07426-4

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

There can be few novels that successfully manage to bring together Merlin, Vikings and Suleiman the Magnificent, but *The Drawing Of The Dark* makes this extraordinary combination of characters seem entirely reasonable.

The year is 1529. Brian Duffy, an ageing mercenary, low on funds, and currently living in Venice, is employed by one Aurelianus to work as a bouncer at the Zimmerman Inn in Vienna, which brews the famous Herzwesten beer. Duffy, for whom an altercation with the local nobility makes it suddenly politic to leave Venice, accepts the job and heads north, but his journey is interrupted by both men and monsters, some who seem intent on preventing him ever reaching his destination and others who protect him and treat him as a revered king. Too many strange things occur and for too long a time for Duffy to be able to convince himself that he has imagined them, and he recalls other odd incidents from his past.

Once in Vienna, Duffy is faced with more strange happenings, the explanations for which it appears only the enigmatic Aurelianus can provide. Not the least of these is the true significance of the Herzwesten beer: the light beer, the bock – and the dark. Vienna is

besieged by the armies of Suleiman, but, as Aurelianus eventually reveals to Duffy, much more is at stake than war between the Turks and the forces of the Hapsburg Emperor Charles V. From the beginning, Aurelianus has manipulated events; even his and Duffy's seemingly chance meeting in Venice was not accidental, and is intended to bring Duffy to the place where he can come to the aid of the Fisher King – as he has done before in another lifetime that he begins to remember in his dreams.

I do not know how authentic is Tim Power's portrayal of the Vienna of 1529, but the descriptions of inns, guns and mercenaries in a city under siege certainly feel right, and the characters simply leap off the page. What is certain is that the magical and historical elements of the plot and the many references, often humorous, to all manner of historical, fictional and mythological personages, mesh together seamlessly, to make a novel that is both erudite and very readable at the same time. Any historical fantasy whose main character declares, "What a way to end an evening – 'by the waters of the San Marco Canal I sat down and puked,' " must be worth a look.

Geoff Ryman – *VAO*

PS Publishing, Harrogate, 2002, 66pp, £8.00 ISBN 1-902-880-48-X

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

VAO, standing for Victim Activated Ordinance, as Gwyneth Jones points out in her introduction to Ryman's slim but hard-hitting novella, is the charming industry term coined by the friendly people who brought you such things as landmines, presumably to try and make you believe it's your fault you had your legs blown off. Its smart cousin, employing such techniques as computer face recognition, is what Ryman's protagonist, Brewster, used to work on for SecureIT, and now protects him and his friends in his sheltered retirement at the Happy Farm – for a mere \$100,000 per year. But an ex-hacker like Brewster has ways of keeping up his payments, and to know when his doctor is siphoning off the 'discretionary' tips. Someone, though, has found a way to turn round VAO, and Brewster's granddaughter, Bessie, becomes the latest victim in the news, her face fried by the microwave beam that was intended to protect her. This makes it personal, even if Brewster weren't himself tagged as a suspect because of his previous profession and the fact that these particular muggers, lending the acronym VAO a double

meaning, are elderly people targeting the young. Or, as the headlines shriek, "Very Ancient Offenders". The new crime of "Age Rage" even has its own spokesperson, known only as Silhouette. Brewster, while fending off the thinly-veiled threats of a young Secret Squirrel from the Feds, has other things to worry about, like his friend Jazzanova, who is starting to go AWOL in mind and body. Perhaps the only way of diverting the unwelcome attention that the Age Rage attacks are focussing on their own cosy quasi-legal activities is to unmask Silhouette themselves. But once started, everyone starts to look like a potential suspect.

VAO is both a warning (and, with talk of an increasingly ageing population and a pensions crisis, perhaps a timely one) but also a celebration – that life needn't end with a gold watch and a bus pass. Your kids may blench at the thought of you still enjoying sex at 80, but if you had a good life, and made the most of it, you can still show them a thing or two.

Fred Saberhagen – *A Coldness in the Blood*

Tor, New York, 2002, 383pp, US\$25.95 ISBN 0-765-30045-1

Reviewed by Chris Amies

Matthew Maule, or Dracula as he prefers not to be called, is dead and well and residing at the top of a ninety-storey apartment building in Chicago. Despite this attempt at fore-loading the novel with near-future referents and naming modern technology (such as late-model Apple Macs), there is something monochrome about this story. Cars pass in the sticky late summer afternoons and ceiling fans turn ineffectually; and something's gone missing from a neighbourhood museum. The Field Museum has, as it were, lost its charm. This wouldn't be of concern to Maule at the top of his tower, except that someone gets murdered in his apartment and it seems to

be connected to the theft. Maule is no longer the bloodsucking fiend that history remembers; he is a cultured gentleman and one of the good guys.

What follows is an exercise in marrying Egyptian mythology with vampirism, and also a chase narrative as Maule fights off ancient evil in the spirit world. There's a lot of hand-waving about how vampires can change shape and transmute into a mist (as a quantum wave function, apparently), and it seems they can carry mobile phones and other small devices with them while they do so. In the end the science is no more than window-dressing in any vampire story,

which can't explain in other than supernatural terms how any creature can be both living and not, unless it's Schrödinger's cat. All the hand-waving in the world won't get over that one and it's best not to try.

This novel goes along, keeping the interest ticking over at a certain level, and the level of writing is usually quite good, but some pause must be suggested by a book whose back cover blurbs includes

one by someone who's been dead for eight years: the author's former collaborator Roger Zelazny. Saberhagen has been writing these Dracula novels since 1975 – there are modern authors of SF and Fantasy who are no older than this series. Apparently the early books, which united Sherlock Holmes and Dracula, are a good deal better. There is a certain coldness in the story also.

Brian Stableford – *The Omega Expedition*

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Tor, New York, 2002, 554pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-765-30169-5

The Omega Expedition is the sixth and concluding book in Stableford's 'Emortality' sequence of almost uncompromisingly speculative sf novels, begun (in terms of internal chronology at least) with *The Cassandra Complex* (2001), and continuing through *Inherit the Earth* (1998), *Dark Ararat* (2002), *Architects of Emortality* (1999) and *The Fountains of Youth* (2000). A quick glance at those dates will reveal that the publication history is somewhat more confused, and made even more so in that each of the novels have earlier roots in short stories. The present volume is no exception, starting life in different form as 'And He Not Busy Being Born...' as far back as *Interzone* 26 (1986, reprinted in the 1991 collection *Sexual Chemistry*).

Little wonder that Stableford feels obliged, in his introduction to *The Omega Expedition*, to spend some time resolving the internal chronology of 'the story so far' through a quick *precis* of the major characters and events in the books leading up to this volume. This is something that may prove useful for readers (and this reviewer) who have been following the series, although perhaps it will also gently discourage new readers from starting here and hoping to make sense of this ambitious 'future history' (a term we'll come back to later).

The various books in the series have attempted to marry (or sometimes veered wildly between) the twin sf traditions of pulp adventure and the didactic lecture, often embedded as extended speculative commentary or argument. *The Omega Expedition* is no exception. Indeed, my first impression was that for an awful lot of time very little actually happens in terms of any proactive agency, while characters sit around and debate their situation. Re-reading it, I am convinced it is far more cleverly constructed than it might appear on first reading, and its structure becomes apparent as you approach it a second time. Not that we aren't given sufficient hints. After Stableford's introduction, and bracketed by both a Prologue and Epilogue titled *The Last Adam: A Myth for the Children of Humankind* by Mortimer Gray, author of the monumental *History of Death* and whose adventures were recounted in *The Fountains of Youth*, the tale is taken up by the tellingly-named Madoc Tamlin, first met in *Inherit the Earth*. Tamlin, aware of the freight of his name, calls his own account a 'lo-story', a memoir of hazard, whimsy and coincidence, "more comedy than drama, more cautionary tale than

epic".

Tamlin finds himself reawakened in the year 3263 on the counter-Earth orbital Excelsior after being frozen down in 2022 for a reason he can no longer remember. He is, apparently, a trial run, along with convicted mass murderer Christine Caine who was frozen down 35 years before him, for the unfreezing of the legendary Adam Zimmerman. News of Zimmerman's re-awakening has created a flurry of interest and the ships carry representatives from the United Nations of Earth and the Outer Systems Federation are en route to Excelsior to be there when he awakens. It rapidly becomes clear, however, that no one knows who gave the order to awaken Zimmerman. Before things can get much further, during a trip across to the Outer Systems ship *Child of Fortune*, the ship comes under supposed attack and all the major protagonists are kidnapped, awakening (stripped of their Internal Technology and smartsuits) in the hold of what may be another ship. They just get to the point of working out where they are and who is responsible for their abduction when they are abducted yet again by another of the shadowy 'players', and find themselves cast in a pivotal role to try and prevent, or mitigate, the devastation of a system-wide war. As I mentioned above, there is little proactive agency on the part of Tamlin and his companions. What follows is an authorial showpiece of staging, argument and debate for the examination of a range of possible futures open to post-humanity that cleverly draws in the threads of each of the books that has gone before. It is a speculative tour de force carried out over almost 120 pages of individual 'psychodramas' (where we learn the real reason for Tamlin and Caine's freezing and subsequent re-awakening). But even as these are being played out and beamed live to an audience of those willing to listen (like Matthew Fleury's impassioned broadcast at the end of *Dark Ararat*), events are already acquiring their own momentum.

The Omega Expedition is a fitting, if curiously ambivalent, conclusion to the series. It is, like a number of the previous books in the series (and the *Werewolves of London* trilogy before them), uncompromising in its view of sf as a platform for serious, and often heady, scientific thought, but if you can stay the course the view from the top can be exhilarating.

Sheri S. Tepper – *A Plague of Angels*

Reviewed by Fiona Grove

Gollancz, London, 2002 (1993), 559pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-799-3

A Plague of Angels is a captivating story of two young people seeking a better world. Take Abasio, a country boy who runs off to the big city, but there encounters violence, drugs and a pretty rotten life (and yet he survives along with his love of books); add a young Orphan (plus guardian angel), growing up in an archetypal village, full of stereotypes: the Oracle, the Drowned Woman, the Bastard, and the Hero – and where can you possibly find a connection? And yet they have met at a very early age, and seemed fated to meet again on their travels.

Abasio becomes a trusted member of the 'Purple' gang and is chosen to escort the young chief of the Purples concubine, Sybbis, to visit the Oracle in an archetypal village. Here, Orphan sees him and something makes her want to know more about him.

Orphan, thrown out of her village for becoming too old to fulfil her archetype any longer, then heads off to find her destiny, and at the same time Abasio, disillusioned about life in the city and fleeing the

wrath of Lord Chief Purple, leaves to return to his grandfather's farm in the country. The two meet up and, along with many others, search for answers to questions that keep arising, and seem to have an answer only at the source of Power.

The two travellers pass close to the Edge, a land that still has technology, and then into Artemisia, a country where men and women live in harmony and the diseases and drugs of the cities are banned. Here they meet a young librarian, Arakny, who offers to help them find the way to the place of power. With her help and that of a talking Coyote and a taciturn talking Bear, straight out of Amerindian legend, the two travellers are led, pursued by evil walkers, towards the Place of Power, where help is offered by the Gaddirs, one of the pre-eminent families, and danger is offered by the witch Ellet, who controls the walkers and whose single-minded aim is to once more take Man into space and, through this, dominate the whole world.

Whether those questions are answered is debatable, but this is an

entrancing book full of contradictions and juxtapositions. If you like Tepper you will love this book, and if you're not sure but like a bit of mystery, religion, or cultural history, then this book will challenge

Kelley Armstrong – *Bitten*

Time Warner, London, 2003, 451pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-7515-3094-8
Elena Michaels is just like any other bright 21st century girl... almost. There is also the small fact that she happens to be a werewolf.

This is a paperback reissue of Kelley Armstrong's debut novel, first published 2001 by Little Brown (a review copy of which was supplied), and possibly timed to catch on to the current fascination with feisty heroines (*Buffy*, *Alias*, *Dark Angel*, *Charmed*). Joanne Harris (*Chocolat*) describes it on the cover as "clever, quirky, hip and funny" and "the most appealing heroine I have come across in ages".

Tom Arden – *Shadow Black*

Big Engine, Abingdon, 2002, 299pp, £8.99, ISBN 1 903468 05 1
Reviewed by Colin Bird
Various foppish characters gather at a family mansion to have their dark secrets revealed by a mysterious stranger straight out of a David Lynch film. The overheated gothic melodramatics are fun if viewed as a sly take on excessively plotted daytime soaps. But the genre content is slim – rationed to speculation on the origin of the catalytic guest, Mr Vox, who drags the bitter truth out of the characters before vanishing into the void.

Lois McMaster Bujold – *The Curse of Chalion*

Voyager, London, 2002, 490pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-713361-8
Mass market paperback edition of a fantasy novel by the author of the highly praised 'Miles Vorkosigan' sf novels. Lord Cazaril, ex-courtier, soldier and, latterly, galley slave, now only seeks peace and security in the service of the Dowager Provincara, where he becomes secretary-tutor to the Dowager's granddaughter Isselle. However, his hopes for a quiet life are unfulfilled as he becomes embroiled in court intrigues and rivalries which threaten the life of his young charge. First reviewed for *Vector* by Carol Ann Kerry-Green in issue 225, who thought it "Fast paced and well-written, a marvellous fantasy that takes the reader on a journey through the history, culture and landscape of Chalion and her neighbours".

Steve Cockayne – *Wanderers and Islanders*

Orbit, London, 2003, 406pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-153-5
Mass market reprint of Cockayne's first book of Legends of the Land. Once upon a time, goes the story told to Rusty Brown, humankind was divided into two clans: the Wanderers, who went abroad in the world, and the Islanders, who remained at home and preserved the places sacred to the Great Being who created them. But in time, the covenant between the two broke down, and then came the arrival of the Wounded Ones, building towns and cities, 'managing' the world. *Wanderers and Islanders* follows the stories of three protagonists; Rusty, Victor Lazarus, custodian of an old house, and Leonardo Pegasus, a court magician spending his time tinkering with the Multiple Empathy Engine. *Vector* reviewer John Newsinger, who reviewed the trade paperback edition in V224, was impressed but decided to reserve judgement as to whether *Wanderers and Islanders* signalled "the arrival of major new fantasy writer". This mass market edition comes with praise from China Miéville, *Interzone*, *Starburst* and *SFX*.

Avram Davidson – *The Other Nineteenth Century*

Tor, New York, 2002, 327pp, £15.95 ISBN 0-312-87492-8
A trade paperback reissue of a splendid collection of Davidson's quirky, original stories, thematically linked by being set (as the title suggests) in various alternate nineteenth centuries. Davidson, like Lafferty, was one of the genre's few true originals. This should fit on your shelf next to *The Avram Davidson Treasury* (1998, Tor, edited by Robert Silverberg and Grania Davis). First reviewed in hardback edition by Steve Jeffery in *Vector* 223.

J.M. Dillard – *Star Trek: Nemesis*

and keep you asking questions right up until the very end. The book is fascinating and one you definitely don't want to put down. I loved it.

Pocket Books, London, 2003, 227pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-7434-5772-2

John Vornholt – *Star Trek: Nemesis*

Pocket Books, London, 2003, 145pp, £3.99 ISBN 0-7434-6159-2
Novelisation of the new *Star Trek* movie, based on the story created by John Logan, Rick Berman and Brent Spiner, which starts with a wedding and a diplomatic mission to Romulus for the *Enterprise*, and ends with the threat of annihilation of the Earth.

The paperback by John Vornholt is specifically adapted for young readers. Both editions contain 8 pages of colour photos from the film.

Greg Egan – *Schild's Ladder*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 327pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07391-8
In the far future, where the Sarumpet Laws of physics have provided, for some twenty thousand years, an unchallenged Theory of Everything, the physicist Cass initiates an experiment to investigate alternate quantum states and gives birth to a small novo-vacuum. Six hundred years later, its half-light-speed expansion has swallowed two hundred formerly inhabited systems. Debate rages about whether this new unique system should be preserved, and humanity dispersed to make room for it, or whether it should be destroyed. The argument polarises when possibly-intelligent signatures are detected beyond the boundary. "A work of radically strange and estranging ideas whose currency lies in dizzying shifts of perspective from the sub-microscopic to the cosmological", wrote *Vector* reviewer Andrew Seaman in issue 223, "a dazzlingly imaginative and stimulating addition to Egan's already formidable canon of work".

Harlan Ellison (ed.) – *Dangerous Visions: 35th Anniversary Edition*

ibooks, London, 2002, 544pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-7434-5261-5
Is it really 35 years since Ellison's groundbreaking anthology, *Dangerous Visions*? ("I grow old, I grow old"). And still no sign of the much promised and much overdue *Last Dangerous Visions*? And if that is ever released, can stories purchased back in the 1970s still be considered taboo-breaking now?

Dangerous Visions was a landmark, deliberately conceived as a showcase for stories that no one else would publish, because of their style, language, or subject matter. It was a different world back then. And yet a lot of these stories still stand up today, indeed have become acknowledged classics of the genre: Delany's 'Aye and Gomorrhah', Bloch's chilling 'A Toy for Juliette' (and Ellison's 'answer' to that story, 'Prowler in the City on the Edge of the World'), Lieber's 'Gonna Roll Them Bones', Dick's 'Faith of Our Fathers', Pohl's 'The Day After the Day the Martians Came', Carol Emshwiller's 'Sex And/Or Mr Morrison'...

OK, if you haven't already got these stories in the original edition (or if your copy, like mine, is falling apart), then this is pretty much an obligatory purchase.

Ellison's new 2002 introduction serves as a sad reminder of the people we've lost since the first publication: Anderson, Asimov, Bloch, Brunner, Lafferty, Lieber, Knight, deFord, Slesar, Zelazny... too many.

Simon Green – *Deathstalker Legacy*

Gollancz, London, 2002, 409pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-07247-4
"The Legend Continues". Two hundred years after the fall of Owen Deathstalker, it is a Golden Age for humans, aliens and the Shub AI's alike. But one man is determined to bring it all down again, unleashing the Terror. It is up to Lewis, the new Deathstalker, to save Humanity and the Empire, again. Unfortunately the Deathstalker luck (all bad) holds true, as he and his companions have all been declared outlaws and traitors. *Legacy* follows on from Green's six previous tongue-in-cheek action-adventure novels in the series. The cover of this Gollancz trade paperback edition is deliberately designed (by Mark Thomas and Tim Byrne) to look like a scuffed and dog-eared

1950's pulp novel.

Jon Courtenay Grimwood – *Effendi*

Pocket Books, London, 2003, 376pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-691-77369-0

B-format paperback reprint of the second volume in Grimwood's 'Arabesk' sequence, following *Pashazade*, and which tracks the rise of Ashraf Bey, one time hoodlum and convict to (as much to his surprise as anyone's) Chief of Detectives of the city of El Iskandryia. Unfortunately his new position puts him at the centre of a political and family conflict (probably why he was lumbered with the job) as prosecutor of his prospective father-in-law, millionaire industrialist Hamzah Effendi, on a charge of war crimes. Grimwood weaves Ashraf's story with a complex unfolding back-story with deft assurance. But for me, the highlight of the 'Arabesk' sequence is the skill and care which Grimwood draws the relationship between Raf and his precocious but fragile nine-year old niece.

First reviewed here in *Vector* 224 by Steve Jeffery.

Nancy Holder – *Hauntings*

Orbit, London, 2003, 280pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-84149-248-5

"An original, all-new novel based on the hit TV series", although you would be forgiven any confusion as to whether this is named *Hauntings* or *Smallville*, as the latter TV series title appears in bigger bolder text on the cover, with the book title tucked away, almost apologetically, near the bottom. Although this is the first we've seen for review, there are a number of other tie-in titles (*Strange Visitors*, *Dragon*, *Whodunnit*) for this series based on the early years of *Superman* characters Clark Kent, Lana Lang and Lex Luther.

Thomas Holt – *A Song for Nero*

Little, Brown, London, 2003, 470pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-316-86113-8

A historical novel from the newly 'renamed' Thomas Holt, who as Tom Holt is equally known for his comic fantasies and three previous historical novels, *The Walled Orchard*, *Alexander at the World's End*, *Olympiad*, and two novels based on E.F. Benson's 'Mapp and Lucia' books, *Lucia Triumphant* and *Lucia in Wartime*. (I was sure there was another Tom Holt novel, *Goatsong*, which the Encyclopedia of Fantasy confirms (1990) but which has been unaccountably omitted from the list of books 'by the same author' in this volume.) *A Song for Nero* hinges on an almost (Christopher) Priestian conceit, that Nero didn't die by his own hand in 69AD, aged thirty-three, but someone very like him did, leaving the former emperor to start a new life and pursue his first love, music. But there are those who suspect his real identity and one at least wants him properly dead.

Kim Hunter – *Wizard's Funeral*

Orbit, London, 2003, 343pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-143-8

Book Two of The Red Pavilions, following on from *Knight's Dawn* (reviewed by N.M. Browne in V217), whose central premise, an amnesiac known only as Soldier, who awakens on a battlefield on which no war has been fought for two hundred years, recalls Gene Wolfe's *Soldier in the Mist* and K.J. Parker's *Shadow*.

In Zamerkand the fate of the kingdom rests on the ailing King Magus, whose strength to hold the forces of good and evil in balance is waning. A new heir must be found, and Soldier is charged with this task, although there are those, jealous of Soldier's influence at court, who would rather see him fail.

John Marco – *The Eyes of God*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 789pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-575-07393-6

After his *Tyrants and Kings* sequence, this is a standalone fantasy novel, set in a different world.

Akeela, the young and idealistic king of Liiria, comes to make peace with his country's long-time King Karis of Reec. With him comes his champion, Lukien, the Bronze Knight, loyal to his king, but a sworn enemy of Reec. To seal the peace, Karis bestows Akeela with his daughter Cassandra, who unfortunately complicates things by falling in love with Lukien. Unknown to either, or even her father, Cassandra is hiding a terrible and terminal illness. The only thing that may save her are two amulets, said to preserve the wearer against disease and ageing, in far-off Jador, but the search strains their

loyalties to breaking point.

First reviewed in trade paperback edition by Alan Fraser in *Vector* 225, who wrote that it had "an engrossing plot that goes off in unexpected directions, flawed heroes, sympathetic villains, sticky ends not always deserved and a muscular, page-turning writing style".

Stephen Palmer – *Muezzinland*

Cosmos Books/Wildside Press, 2003, 278pp, £17.95 ISBN 1-58715-450-1

In the twenty-second century, the insane Mnada, heir to the Ghanian throne, flees across jungle and desert to a mysterious place called Muezzinland. Her sister, Nshalla, follows, and behind her, their mother, Empress of Ghana, one of the most powerful women in the world, with all the tools that modern technology can provide: androids, AIs, orbital stations, advanced biotech and morphic tools. What will happen when the family are reunited, and if it occurs in Muezzinland, is anyone's guess.

[available from PO Box 301, Holicong, PA 18928-0301, USA. www.wildsidepress.com]

Kim Stanley Robinson – *The Years of Rice and Salt*

Voyager, London, 2003, 772pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-00-651148-1

An ambitious alternate history in which Robinson reimagines the political, economic and scientific (and, towards the end, utopian) development of the world from a hinge point in which Europe fails to recover from an even more devastating Black Death, and the rival cultures of Islam and China grow to dominate the world stage. To tie this vast enterprise together, Robinson uses a linking and framing theme in which a small group of characters (or, perhaps more properly, souls) are reincarnated time and again through the course of this history (the recurrent first letters of their names providing a continuity for the reader), meeting again to finally recognise each other in the *bardo*, where souls reside and examine their action between lives. First reviewed in *Vector* by Steve Jeffery in issue 223.

Jan Siegel – *Witch's Honour*

Voyager, London, 2002, 312pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-651282-8

Mass market paperback reprint of the third and concluding volume of Siegel's fantasy series, started with *Prospero's Children* and continued through *The Dragon Charmer*. Fern (Fernanda) is still afraid of her Gift, but events at a millennium ball at Wrokeby remind her she cannot put it aside so easily, particularly when her friends are put in danger by the return of an old adversary.

First reviewed in *Vector* in hardback by Penny Hill in V225.

Patrick Thompson – *Execution Plan*

HarperCollins, London, 2003, 310pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-710523-1

A post-cyberpunk techno-thriller that appears (from the blurb) in some way predicated on a cross between Christopher Priest's *The Extremes* and Roger Levy's *Reckless Sleep*. Mick is a computer programmer in Dudley, and a long-time computer games addict. When the images from the screen start invading his real life, and even try to kill him, he knows he's got a problem. Is any of this related to a bizarre psychology experiment he once took part in back in college? He needs to find an answer, and quickly, before things get out of hand.

Thompson's previous novel, *Seeing the Wires*, was praised by Michael Marshall (Smith) "Utterly magical and genuinely unusual. Brilliant."

Jack Vance – *Lyonesse II: The Green Pearl and Madouc*

Gollancz, London, Fantasy Masterworks 35, 2003, 776pp, £8.99 ISBN 0-575-07517-1

Two further novels from the magical Elder Isles of Lyonesse, the lost lands from which the ancestors of Arthur fled to Britain. In their last and glorious days, the Elder Isles are divided against each other by war and political intrigue, enchantment and the ideals of chivalry as Madouc, changeling daughter of the princess Suldrun, becomes caught up in court and political rivalries and the quest for the Grail.

Originally published as *Lyonesse II: The Green Pearl* (1985) and *Lyonesse III: Madouc* (1989), the latter winning a World Fantasy

Award. *Lyonesse I: Suldrun's Garden* was reissued in 2002 as Gollancz Fantasy Masterworks 27.