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Contents

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Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial

Strange Daze

I awoke on the 1st of January with a skull full of strange memories. Either I've been abducted by aliens, or crossed over into a bizarre parallel world. I'm beginning to conclude it must be the latter, given everyone seems to have the same unfathomable memories. I appear to be in a dimension where the collective grip on reality is so scant, the entire population are under the delusion that a new 'millennium' has dawned one full year early. Of course, there is a sense in which the passing of every moment marks the end of one millennium, and the beginning of another. But they mean The Millennium, the beginning of the nominal third thousand years since the birth of Christ.

This, of course, is inconceivably absurd. Imagine holding the biggest party in history, and getting the date wrong. How, embarrassing, how impossible. Whatever will they think in the future? How they'll laugh at the feeble-minded childishness of such impatience. How they'll point to the fact that *2001: A Space Odyssey* is not, and with very good reason, called *2000: A Space Odyssey*. How they'll scorn the insanity of billions of atheists, Buddhists, Hindus, communists, *et al* celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. People for whom their calendar hasn't yet reached 2000, or else passed it long, long ago. How they'll point out that most people did not even know why it was 2000 (in those places where it was), or what, if any, significance that had. How they'll chortle at the irony of the fact that the only people who might have had a genuine reason to celebrate, the Christians, on the whole regarded the celebrations with bemused detachment, finding far better things to be getting on with.

Even the once reliable BBC fell prey to collective lunacy. Following the sun around the earth for 28 hours resulted in televisual science-fictional time-dislocated surrealism of a most mind-boggling kind. Real-time sunrises preceded real-time sunsets, and vice versa, the planet girdled at the speed of light – certainly faster than Puck (or even Superman) – intercut with flashbacks to other sunsets and rises and fireworks and celebrations... Every major capital city turned into a childlike fantasia in light... a transmission from the end of the world, some strange outpost of the '70s dubbed the Millennium Dome.

In this strange place the Archbishop of Canterbury unconvincingly attempted to introduce an element of faith into farce. He performed The Lord's prayer, and the audience clapped. Specially commissioned music by John Tavener played, but we couldn't hear it because the most appropriately named Gaby Roslin kept saying things like "listen to the beautiful music by John Tavener" over the top of the (presumably beautiful) music by John Tavener. Barbie shut up when pop bands played.

Something involving two children, a laser and a diamond heralded a peculiar-in-the-extreme re-enactment of the opening 'carousel' sequence from the film version of *Logan's Run*. 30-year-olds rose gracefully into the air, and a dazzling beam of light blasted them to infinity. Okay, I made that up. But only that. Promise. They did do the 'carousel' thing. Afterwards a lot of very enthusiastic young people danced the traditional English dance, the samba. Presumably in Latin America other young people were busy Morris dancing. Or more likely not, for Britain is the only country so pathetically scornful of its own heritage.

The whole was deranged in the extreme. Only an addled SF writer could have imagined it. Fortunately for them, many 'celebrities' were left queuing outside in the cold for hours. I'm sure they had much more fun watching the homeless freeze to death, than being inside with the other has-beens who couldn't get invited to a proper party, and hadn't the decency to stay at home and watch it all on TV. For yes, while millions were wasted burning the sky, people who probably don't bother to vote New Labour or Old Tory were still freezing on the ground. Welcome to the new millennium, same as the old millennium.

And the big news story? Nothing happened. The world spectacularly failed to end. The global computer network refused to crash or go Skynet and terminate us. Which is a 'Jolly Good Thing', or I'd have missed the deadline for this editorial. Now, how will I fill the page? Perhaps by speculating about how the world will celebrate the coming Millennium. Oh, they have. For a moment I thought it was an impossible dream. Something left over from a Philip K. Dick memory implant. Time to get back to the future.

Gary S. Dalkin, 26 January, the last year of the 20th Century

LETTERS TO VECTOR

From Jennifer Swift, via email:

Vector 208 was another illuminating issue. I found particularly informative the interview with Ken MacLeod, Farah Mendlesohn's article about his work and Robert Hayler's essay on *Riddley Walker*. The level of literary analysis in *Vector* is often at least as high as many academic journals without being weighed down by jargon or citations of previous research. (It's a shame about the cover, though, because it makes Ken look like a football hooligan.) I understood Ken's work much better after reading Farah's excellent paper, and I think you should tell readers where the longer version of it is going to be published. However, I disagree with her on a couple of points:

1. "anarcho-capitalism is a morality-free paradigm" – no, while it is quite at variance with conventional Western political values, it certainly has a morality. It prizes above all else what Sir Isaiah Berlin called 'negative liberty', i.e. the right not to be interfered with by other people. Anarchistic libertarianism considers 'positive liberty' (that is, the fulfilment of each individual's potential, which would require universal health care and education) to be far less important than the protection of freedom of action. Just as there is more to social morality than sexual behaviour, there's more to political morality than welfare rights.

2. "The French Enlightenment philosopher Rousseau... secularised the Christian mythos of Eden and the Fall into the 'state of nature' in which we were without laws and needed none." I don't dispute that Rousseau thought human beings were naturally good until corrupted by society, but this is better construed as a rejection rather than a secularisation of Genesis, because Rousseau denied that human beings had lost their innate moral perfection. I agree with Farah that Rousseau's ideas were naive, but I do wonder if Ken's anarcho-capitalist utopia is also based on an excessive optimism, in that it depends on its citizens sharing more or less the same views on what constitutes their self-interest and a willingness to shape behaviour to reach long-term rather than merely short-term goals. There's a lot of evidence in the world today that people often don't act rationally, and one might well ask if any sort of anarchistic utopia could ever survive unless it was built on a foundation of robust social indoctrination, all the more so in that there is no police force to deal with anti-social dissidents.

Gary S. Dalkin replies: Many thanks for your kind comments about

Vector*, and for your insightful letter. Farah's paper has resulted in several very positive letters, and the response to issue 208 has been generally very gratifying.*

I'm not sure if Farah is going to publish the longer version of her article – with Vector *only having around 18 pages for articles every 2 months, we necessarily have to put a limit on the length of articles.*

Andrew M. Butler replies: I understand it is going to be in a volume of essays on utopias which she is co-writing with Edward James. Farah did explain what she meant by "morality free" in one of the sections which appeared in the longer version we edited from.

From JDR, via email:

After being moved to send my plaudits on for the excellent *Vector* 208, it somewhat disillusioned me to read in the very first paragraph that the Age of "Acquarious" (*sic*) may now be dawning. That's two bloopers in one word. Oh dear! You say you hope you are not superstitious, but that thirteenth editorial proved to be unlucky for you, didn't it?

On the other hand, thank you and Paul Kincaid for the excellent piece on Christopher Priest. Paul hewed to his usual virtues of sticking closely to his theme and of making his points simply and lucidly. This was a useful and well-written piece of work.

Andrew Darlington's well-researched article on E.R. James was another high point. It is good that we should be reminded of the now almost forgotten authors of earlier years. Perhaps we can look forward to further articles on the more minor figures who operated in the field that we all love?

As for the rest, well... no special plaudits, but no grumbles either. Final report: *Vector* is still doing well in classwork, but must learn to check his spelling more carefully.

Andrew M. Butler: I think that may have been the point... but doesn't explain the hundred of others I've made over the years. We do enjoy running pieces on 'minor' figures (such as Mark Adlard and Howard Baker, written about by L. J. Hurst and Anthony Blundell in V195*) although we then risk getting letters declaring them "where are they now squibs" (see* V197*). We like to think that there's room in* Vector *for both; and encourage anyone who wishes to blow the dust off forgotten writers to get in touch with the editors.*

From Robert Gibson, via email:

Enjoyed the article [*The Best of British I: The 1950s, V209 — Eds*] though (or because) it arouses me to argument. You say "Wyndham sometimes is suggesting that in order for the fit to survive they must wipe out the unfit". More than sometimes – he does it in virtually every book! Every novel except *Trouble with Lichen* and *Chocky* has one species or subspecies in mortal competition with another; considerations of pity or tolerance are rejected. But such is the spell of Wyndham's writing that it was decades before I actually twigged the true bleakness of his philosophy – which is almost on the level of Weston in the C.S. Lewis trilogy. Wyndham, in other words, is so urbane that he can put us in a cheerless cosmic jungle and make us accept it because of the way the story is told. I respect his skill the more in that he pulled the wool over my eyes for so long.

Which brings me to my other point, concerning the "subversive message" that you [*in particular Maureen Kincaid Speller – Eds.*] see in *Midwich Cuckoos*. Perhaps you're right that Wyndham was "handling a subject that was extraordinary sensitive at the time" in some people's eyes but (a) you overestimate the primness of the 1950s (to judge from other books published in that era of the Angry Young Men) and (b) you need to take into account that a writer who is courteous to his readers can get away with much more than the average liberated slob can. Wyndham's mind was liberated but his vocabulary and command of English were, fortunately, still shackled by certain conventions of taste. In other words, no matter what he says, one can read him without wishing to puke.

Letters to Vector *should be sent to* Gary Dalkin, 5 Lydford Road, Bournemouth, BN11 8SN *or emailed to* ambutler@enterprise.net *and marked 'For publication'. We reserve the right to edit or shorten letters.*

Every year at this time we traditionally look back at the previous year's crop of movies. This year we break with the past slightly to offer a selection of pieces. Andrew M. Butler reviews Dogma*, Gary Wilkinson takes a look at* The Blair Witch Project*, Colin Odell & Mitch Le Blanc consider an alternative to the usual English language fare, not just over the last year, but the last decade. We have our usual listing of every genre title of the year, and Gary S. Dalkin attempts to tie it all together with the following article on the major releases of 1999.*

The End of Cinema: A New Hope?

by Gary S. Dalkin

When a critical eye was turned to the fantastical, six films dominated the cinematic landscape of the penultimate year of the 20th century. Unavoidable, such was the inevitable hype, was the fourth, or first, depending upon chronology, of the *Star Wars* films, *The Phantom Menace*. Apart from indicating the sad state of theatrical exhibition, that this most anticipated and visually spectacular movie was not shot (as any real spectacle should be) in 70mm, there was something else missing, and perhaps that was the sheer danger, intensity, thrills and entertainment value of the original trilogy.

More science-fictional was that in a handful of cinemas the 'film' was exhibited in digital form, stored not on celluloid, but as approximately 34 gigabytes of computer data. Such are the financial savings the Studios will be able to make, this new technology will inevitably replace film, probably ushering in a new age of even lower presentation standards than currently exist. Though doubtless the propaganda machine will tell us things are getting better.

In a sense, film has come full circle. A century ago it began with audiences staring in wide-eyed amazement at images which stunned the senses by their very existence. 100 years later George Lucas heralds the death of film, while simultaneously introducing a new era in which any image is now possible, and audiences once again stare in simple wonderment at never-before-seen visions. 100 years ago it was enough to transfer a record of reality: workers leaving a factory, a train arriving, waves breaking on the shore. Today *The Phantom Menace* establishes a new year zero, film-makers now have the means to realise not just external reality, but the internal visions of the most elaborate and fantastical imaginations. The question is, can they make a fast buck in doing so?

At the opposite end of the spectrum, came a film from nowhere, *The Blair Witch Project* (see also Gary Wilkinson's review), made for nothing with no effects and no spectacle. Its box-office galvanised Hollywood, and startled a teen generation raised on horrific comedies. As one cinema advertised, if you don't understand it, you're too old. I understand that like *The Phantom Menace*, it is another sign of the death and reinvention of cinema. That a feature lacking any visual interest, shot on video and 16mm film, has infinitely more box-office appeal than a beautifully crafted,

civilised and intelligent epic such as *Anna and the King*, means that cinema is undergoing radical changes. Me, if I want to watch people run about in the woods being scared I'll stick a filler episode of *The X Files* in the video recorder. The sad thing is that I strongly suspect *The Blair Witch Project* was fully intended as a straight-to-video showreel, with never any expectation on the film-maker's part of any theatrical showing beyond a festival or two. It was simply a demonstration of what they could do with virtually no money. That it made a fortune at the box-office does seem to indicate a generation gap, that a generation which has not known a world before the VCR, is happy to go to the cinema to watch what is essentially a video. It suggests a blurring in audience perception between film and video, and a different set of expectations regarding what film can and should deliver. I'm not too old to understand it, but I am too old to be anything other than dismayed.

Back with real films, *The Matrix* was wildly trumpeted as both a great action movie and a great sf movie. It was neither, but it was a lot of fun until it stopped. The credits ran when they should have closed for the intermission (younger readers, ask your parents about the days when big films really were big). For a supposed decade-defining great action movie, it owned far too much to *Face/Off* and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* – one sequence, the shoot-out in the lobby, was appropriated all but unchanged. For a great sf movie it had the problem of a fundamentally flawed premise, and far too much borrowing from past movies, again including *Terminator 2*. That said, there was much that was imaginative and good in *The Matrix* – though it was amusing to watch mainstream critics praise its 'originality'. Its over-acclaim a sure sign of how most film critics aren't aware of written sf, and of how starved we are of even half-way decent sf films.

The Sixth Sense was the most successful of the flotilla of recent supernatural horror films, which has included *The Haunting, End of Days* and *Stigmata*. Like *The Blair Witch Project*, this film came from nowhere to become an enormous box-office success, and is again, a film of no cinematic interest. There may be no running around in the woods, but it is shot exactly like an episode of *The X Files*, elaborating a plot which is no more than a grossly inflated visit to *The Twilight Zone*. Predicated entirely on a gimmick, with a tone which can therefore never vary from first-person-sombre, the entire structure of the film is warped hideously out of shape to accommodate this twist, which is both laughably obvious from the very beginning, but also entirely nonsensical. Not since *The English Patient* has a film so riddled with gaping plotholes received such thoughtless acclaim. *The Sixth Sense* is as over-rated as movies ever get.

Shakespeare in Love was as hyped as any film sanity side of *The Phantom Menace*, but not only was it a superbly crafted, brilliantly acted and intelligent piece of cinema with sufficient depth to reward repeated visits, it was also a fantasy of an altogether more refined degree. A fantasia upon our collective knowledge of the works and life of one William Shakespeare, a theatrical fantasy exploring the many levels of reality in the interzone between film and theatre and audience, actor and camera, stage and screen, and of the complicity to believe in that which can not be. The best cinema is a collective fantasy, dreaming eyes wide open – something the latest version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* failed to capture – while *Shakespeare in Love* encapsulates that fantasy as perfectly as any other film of the year. In *Shakespeare in Love*, love itself is the ultimate fantasy.

As usual, there were many less hyped films which proved at least as interesting as the big guns of the year, among them *Dogma* (see Andrew M. Butler's separate review) *eXistenZ, Gods and Monsters, Mystery Men, Pi* and *Pleasantville*. *Gods and Monsters* played locally on a double-bill with *The Bride of Frankenstein*, appropriate as the film is about director James Whale, and in part also about his 'classic' Universal horror picture. Seeing them together proved what a finely made film *Gods and Monsters* is, what an excellent young actor Brendan Fraser is, and what a tedious piece of inconsequential nonsense *The Bride of Frankenstein* is. In *Gods and Monsters* James Whale condemns the later Frankenstein films, declaring them the work of 'hacks'. He was wrong, they were all the work of hacks. Just because something's a classic doesn't make it any good.

Brendan Fraser turned up again in the single most entertaining slice of pure fun to emerge from Hollywood all year. *The Mummy* was an Indiana Jones film in all but name, and even better than any official entry in the series. This was a true movie-movie, a lavish throwback to the days of grand adventure casting a respectful twinkling eye to everything from *King of the Khyber Rifles* and *The Land of the Pharaohs* to *Jason and the Argonauts*. Almost as breathtakingly spectacular as *The Phantom Menace*, and directed with far more life, élan, energy and pizzazz, Stephen Sommers appears to have watched the collected works of Lucas and Spielberg and delivered the perfect summer romp they have singularly lost the knack of making. Far less generally well received than *The Matrix*, it was gratifying to see *The Mummy* take more money at the box-office. Rather than pretend to be at the cutting edge, it was grandly old-fashioned pure entertainment for people who like real films that demand to be seen on the largest screen around.

The first rule of *Fight Club* is, you don't talk about *Fight Club*. The second rule of *Fight Club* is, you don't talk about *Fight Club*. And with good reason, as you will know if you have seen it. It is not what you might expect from the advertising campaign. It is as dazzlingly original and bold as you would expect from David Fincher, director of *Alien*^{3}, *Se7en* and *The Game*. For different reasons *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Phantom Menace* offer the promise of a new cinema to come. *Fight Club* offers the exhilaration of narrative cinema itself being destroyed and reinvented before your very eyes. It is one of those very rare films that expand the possibilities of cinema. Far too original to be a major box-office contender, *Fight Club* is pure fantasy, David Fincher's best work to date and the best American film of 1999. Anyone want to disagree? See me round the back of the cinema.

DOGMA

The closing credits of *Clerks* promised the return of Jay and Silent Bob in *Dogma*, but in the meantime director Kevin Smith made the studio flop *Mallrats* and indie/arthouse hit *Chasing Amy*, in which the two also returned. Their cameo in *Chasing Amy* left them heading towards Chicago, and through four comics (collected as *Chasing Dogma*) they've ended up in Machenry, Illinois, having failed to find the mythical town where John Hughes sets his movies. Machenry is the home of Bethany (Linda Fiorentino), an abortion clinic worker who one night is visited by the Metatron (Alan Rickman), the voice of God, and told to go to New Jersey to prevent two fallen angels from re-entering heaven, proving God's fallibility and causing the end of creation.

Because one of the angels (Bartleby) is Smith regular Ben Affleck and the other, Loki, is Matt Damon, who cameoed in *Amy*, and the demon Azrael is played by Jason Lee (from *Mallrats* and *Amy*) our loyalties are torn. Their wish to turn home can be empathised with, and their boardroom massacre at the home of Mickey Mouse-like icon Mooby is in a way doing God's bidding. They certainly seem

nice enough guys when Bethany and Jay and Silent Bob (here revealed as prophets) unwittingly stumble across them; here the morality is much more complex than, say, the equally apocalyptic *End of Days*.

Here the Bible is subjected to the same sort of pedantic scrutiny as the Holy Trilogy of the Star Wars movies were in the earlier films, and the Metatron makes a few acidic comments about relative knowledge of the Bible and film, whilst not being above quoting *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Whilst *Amy* maintained comedy and serious issues, the tone in *Dogma* is more serious, with body count along with the gags. Most of the violence is off-screen, which is a wise decision: you watch Smith for dialogue not camera work. However the effects are impressive enough, and the cuts between scenes pay homage to *Star Wars*. The final appearance of God and the contrived (if undercut) happy ending is pious rather than blasphemous; this is a director who has thanked God in the credits of each of his films. A film that will make you laugh and think.

THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT

If you go down to the woods today...

As usual, the bloated CGI monsters and the star vehicles floated past, when out of a dark alley came a lightweight art-house punk, its massive publicity enabling it to punch well above its weight, to tear them all apart – *The Blair Witch Project*. Not only has *Blair* caused a ruckus among this year's films, it could also be the driving force for revitalising a whole genre. Horror was moribund; the endless slasher pics finally evolving into the dead-end knowing irony and self-parody of *Scream*. We needed another landmark film: a *Psycho*, a *Night of the Living Dead*, a *Halloween* and with *Blair* we got it.

For an 'amateur' film it is amazingly well shot: the last lingering shot of the car; the sun setting through the trees; the bleached whites and impenetrable darks of the torch-lit night and Heather's famous final face-to-camera confessional. Along with great sound, effective acting and a story that demands attention and input from the audience, *Blair* becomes a tight, taut masterpiece. The final ten minutes and especially the final scene, forever seared onto my cortex, rank with the best any horror film, in fact any film, have ever come up with.

Most horror films show you too much, but this shows you almost nothing. To fully appreciate it you have to enter into a complicit arrangement with the filmmaker's *vérité* techniques – know it is fake but pretend it is real. It taps into primal pagan hard-wired fears we all have that go back to when we first huddled around campfires afraid of what lay beyond the cave mouth, what was making those noises out in the night. It tells us that life is uncertain and sometimes nasty things happen to nice people. Remember that the next time you're lost in the dark.

Science Fiction and Fantasy in Contemporary Hong Kong Cinema

by Colin Odell and Mitch le Blanc

Hong Kong is the third largest producer of films in the world after Bollywood and Hollywood, but most people think that its films are concerned only with kung fu. This could not be further from the truth, in fact it offers an enormous diversity of product and includes a large number of fantasy and horror films amongst its many genres. The perception of the output as 'just' martial arts presumably comes from the Seventies kung fu marketing boom and the fact that video availability in this country has yet to break away from this traditionally high-selling genre. To the uninitiated the world of Hong Kong cinema can appear bizarre, confusing and strewn with pitfalls. There is the frenetic pace of action, occasionally impenetrable plots, obscure humour and a completely different language (often with cheesy dubbing or minuscule subbing) to contend with. So why bother? The answer is simple. Entertainment. Hong Kong films have a kinetic energy that renders the rest of the world geriatric by comparison. The relentless action, comedy, pathos and range of ideas, and the fact that you never know how the story is going to end, leaves the viewer gasping for breath. Hollywood have latched on to this and in recent years have tried to imitate the Hong Kong formula with limited success. Many HK directors now work in the USA – *The Matrix* (1999) was choreographed by Yuen Woo Ping, and the pace of the action is derived completely from HK cinema. Hollywood has also begun to approach the task of duplicating several Hong Kong genres; the Heroic Bloodshed genre (guns, cops, gangsters, slo-mo shooting and heavy casualties) has translated reasonably, but lost the emotional depth and characterisation of its Eastern counterpart. Its main innovator John Woo, who directed the sci-fi bloodshed film *Face/Off* (1998), is now exerting his vision on the Hollywood system with considerable success. The Swordplay genre has fared less well as the efforts generally seem lacklustre, although *The Mask of Zorro* (1998) was well executed and similarly owes as much to Hong Kong as Errol Flynn. In return Hong Kong has no scruples about raiding film ideas from anywhere – it just does it faster and, normally, better.

Because the market for Hong Kong films is confined predominantly to Asia, its genres are tailored to that market. As a result, there are few pure science fiction films made in Hong Kong and they tend to aim for either the international market (*Black Mask* (1997)), for the Japanese market (*City Hunter* [1993], *Wicked City* [1992]) or just turn out to be financially unsuccessful (*The Heroic Trio* [1993]). Generally science fiction elements occur as a peripheral to the main plot or are used as a McGuffin. Far more common is the fantasy film, of which there is an abundance of superior examples. For example: Name three decent Hollywood fantasy films made in the last decade. Okay, name one decent Hollywood fantasy film made in the last decade. Movies such as *Moon Warriors* (1992), *Blade of Fury* (1993) and *Burning Paradise* (1994) are so far in advance of any Hollywood fantasy film as to render English-speaking fare futile. *Conan The Barbarian* (1982) and *Willow* (1988) don't come close and it is only really the Ray Harryhausen films that stand up to scrutiny. There are also abundant numbers of ghost stories and vampire films, which are completely different to their Western counterparts and all the more exciting and stimulating for it. It is impossible to cover all the films served up by HK, so here are a few pointers to hopefully whet your appetite for further Far Eastern dishes.

As good a place to start as any is Tsui Hark's groundbreaking *Zu: Warriors From The Magic Mountain* (1983), the film that breathed life back into the fantasy genre. Incredibly it hasn't dated a jot, still looking as fresh and inventive as it did the day it was released. Warring factions are causing problems in the martial world, but not as much as the impending destruction of all life by a huge rock which is only being restrained by the sheer power of Sammo Hung's eyebrows. Our hero, played by Yuen Biao, has to overcome many adversaries to get the magic sword and put an end to all of this madness. The kinetic energy of the film will leave you reeling. Unlike Hark's debut *The Butterfly Murders* (1978) there is little time for introspection and plenty of opportunity for spectacle. There are flying dream goddesses with deadly chiffon scarves that dart out to capture weary travellers. There are monstrous mythical beasts, flying heroes, mighty weapons, huge battles and more clans than you can shake a red, yellow, blue or any colour flag at. The editing is fast, the cinematography dazzling, the plot either ludicrously simple or nigh on unfathomable. Masterpiece is not too bold a term.

Hark's place as the most constantly innovative director, period, is difficult to refute. He has rejuvenated almost every genre held dear to the Hong Kong film community – usually as a director but sometimes in his capacity as producer. In this role he led the way for another new wave director of great interest, Ching Siu-Tung. From his debut *Duel To The Death* (1982), Ching's outstanding use of wirework (actors strung on wires to produce the illusion of superhuman strength) and in-camera effects is second to none – his heroes leap a hundred feet in the air and clash swords on ridiculously high cliff tops. Later he directed such classics as *Terracotta Warrior* (1989), the mad 'Indiana Jones on mushrooms' style *Dr Wai In The Scriptures With No Words* (1996) and co-directed *Heroic Trio* (of which more later). He is perhaps best known for the wildly insane *A Chinese Ghost Story* films ('87, '90 and '91). Based on the folk stories of Pu Song-Ling, the films follow the exploits of Leslie Cheung and his bizarre supernatural/fantasy encounters. These range from saucy, salacious sirens bathing provocatively in blossom-sprinkled lakes to vengeful tree monsters with hundred-foot-long lethal tongues, burrowing miners who use their hands to dig and thousand-year-old flying ghosts. You have been warned...

Being a woman in a Hong Kong film does not always mean letting the boys do the fighting – far from it.

Like many others, Ronnie Yu has now started directing in the West. His recent film *Bride of Chucky* (1998) is surprisingly good and suitably deranged, and his bridging production *Warriors of Virtue* (1997) is a family film featuring a young boy hero and his companions – four vicious warriors who happen to be kangaroos.

The highlight of his varied career is undoubtedly the monumental *Bride With The White Hair* (1993), an electrifying fantasy tale of love gained and lost. Brigitte Lin is the beautiful but deadly bride who falls in love with Leslie Cheung. Their relationship is doomed from the outset. Deeply moving and occasionally harrowing, the events are so beautifully shot you feel like crying. Being a woman in a Hong Kong film does not always mean letting the boys do the fighting – far from it. When Brigitte gets angry she wipes out an entire church full of beefy warriors, whipping bodies clean in two as her hair billows around her wild-eyed face. It is an image as hard to forget as Leslie, head bowed, waiting hundreds of years for his lover in the snow next to the single bloom that will give them everlasting life. A classic.

Andrew Lau is well regarded as the director of the popular *Young and Dangerous* series and also as cinematographer for some of Hong Kong's greatest directors including Tsui Hark, Ringo Lam and arthouse favourite Wong Kar-Wai. In 1996 he embarked on one of Hong Kong's most ambitious fantasy projects – *The Storm Riders* (1998), based on the popular comics. Screen idols Aaron Kwok and Ekin Cheng (aka Dior Cheng) play Wind and Cloud, who battle evil with their mighty magic swords. To increase international sales, veteran martial arts actor Sonny Chiba also plays a substantial role. The film spent an unprecedented two years in post-production (to put this into perspective the first three *Young and Dangerous* [1996] films were completed within eight months) and was the first Hong Kong film to make extensive use of CGI. The results provide a visual indication of the fundamental differences between Western and Eastern film practices. Hollywood films tend to approach effects work from a realistic perspective which, with advances in technology, dates the results rapidly. In contrast, Asian films adopt a fantastic reality that is representational rather than strictly accurate. This frees the filmmaker from the constraints of mundane physics and allows them to concentrate purely on the dynamics and aesthetics. *The Storm Riders* revels in the fantastical and makes a point of emphasising this in almost every shot. There is no attempt to disguise the effects because they are there to provide an artistic context for the action. At times the proceedings look akin to a live action version of the *Final Fantasy* games; the title sequence is almost identical. Hopefully some enterprising company will release the film or video in the UK, otherwise VCD or DVD is your only option.

Not successful in Hong Kong but very popular outside are the two Heroic Trio films, *Heroic Trio* (1993) and *Executioners* (1993). If you have not seen them go out and buy them now, you will not regret it. The ultimate in science fantasy, these are comic strips brought to vivid life. Starring Michelle Yeoh (you may have seen her in *Tomorrow Never Dies* [1997] but check out her Hong Kong c.v. – it's incredible), Anita Mui (singer, actress, celebrity – memorable for her remarkable performance in *Rouge* [1987]) and Maggie Cheung (internationally renowned – even plays the central role in the French film *Irma Vep* [1997]) as the titular superheroines who team up to defeat the evil underground dweller who has kidnapped the city's children. You really will not believe your eyes as a relentless barrage of images assaults your senses. You'll gasp as a girl and a kitten are caught in mid-air and saved from certain braining. You'll cheer as Superwoman bounds across telegraph wires. There's an outrageous barrel ride. Anthony Wong is deranged as a henchman who eats his own fingers, wrenches motorbikes in half despite the fact they are hurtling towards him, decapitates commuters with a cage on a chain and tries to stop runaway trains with his bare hands. *The Executioners* (shot back-to-back with the first to spread the cost of the high budget) is only slightly less manic and works like an apocalyptic version of *Phantom of the Opera*.

There are some films which fall into the realm of science fiction, although many will contain elements of other genres, in order to broaden the potential audience. *The Iceman Cometh* (1989) is a science fantasy version of the underrated *Time After Time* (1979), where two ancient warriors (one good, one evil) frozen in ice are revived by scientists, only to continue their duel across modern day Hong Kong causing the special brand of mayhem and chaos that only superhumans can. Yuen Biao and Yuen Wah (Jackie Chan's schoolmates) play the stunningly acrobatic and totally determined swordsmen. *The Wicked City* (1992), based on the anime, features aliens called raptors who have been dealing in illicit substances. Jackie Cheung and Leon Lai play two cops assigned to deal with these beings, but as the raptors can take human form, is everyone who they seem to be and can anyone be trusted? *Robotrix* (1991) stars Amy Yip as a robot undercover cop posing as a prostitute in order to supply ample quantities of gratuitous (and in the UK heavily censored) sex and a sprinkling of sci-fi kung fu action.

This is an example of the Category III film, typified normally by its high quota of sex/violence/glorification of gangsters, blossoming into a rich source of exploitation cinema unrivalled in the West since the early Eighties. *Black Mask* features Jet Lee as a librarian by day, superhero by night fighting against (literally) brainless denizens in a fetching... black mask. *Forbidden City Cop* (1996) is a totally crazy period film that is worth a mention for a hilarious Schwa autopsy scene in a circus tent in ancient China. This, the James

Bond pastiche titles and the plethora of barmy gadgets has to be seen to be believed. Hong Kong's biggest star Stephen Chow Sing Chi is breathtaking in his stupidity – he is often compared to Jim Carrey but this is really an insult to Stephen. Those seeking low-budget superhero action should check out *Midnight Angel* (1991) with cape-wearing skateboarding Japanese star Nagisha Oshima in the title role.

Ghost and supernatural stories have an immensely important part to play in HK cinema. Eastern myths and legends are fundamentally different to Western ones, but no less interesting, and add a new dimension to the enjoyment of horror films. Chinese vampires, for example, are not the dark charismatic individuals with whom we are familiar, but bonkers hopping zombies. They sense humans breathing and can be stopped by a Taoist prayer written on yellow paper and placed upon the forehead. You can poke them about a bit once pacified but this, combined with an inevitable breeze, usually results in the loss of the prayer and ensures that mayhem ensues. Sticky rice also restrains vampires effectively, but must be pure, and some unscrupulous traders tend to mix expensive sticky rice with the cheaper ordinary variety, allowing the vampire to continue unhindered. Chinese ghosts may be frenetic or tragic, and the humans who encounter them usually have to go to extraordinary lengths to defeat them.

Chinese vampires are not the dark, charismatic individuals with whom we are familiar, but bonkers hopping zombies

Stanley Kwan's *Rouge* is one of the most beautiful and elegant films produced in years. It tells the compelling tale of the tragic courtesan Fleur (Anita Mui) a ghost who has returned to earth to find her lover (Leslie Cheung) who was meant to have died with her in a suicide pact. Refined and tender, this is a remarkable film that should be seen at all costs. If *Rouge* is too delicate, then perhaps the *Mr Vampire* films (at least six have made since 1985 – Hong Kong's capacity to produce sequels is peerless) may be of interest. These are nothing short of deranged and enormous fun to watch. The early ones feature everybody's favourite vampire hunter Lam Ching Ying and an assortment of hopeless associates. What sets the vampire films apart is that they are invariably fast, furious and funny. Some of the techniques used in these films are audacious in the extreme – in *Mr Vampire 2* (1987), the vampires terrorise their keepers by chasing them, but under the influence of a 'slow motion potion'. Rather than shoot the scene in slo-mo, the film makers opted to have the actors hopping, jumping and bending v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y, in an absolutely hilarious manner. The child vampire of *Mr Vampire 2*, known as the OK Boy, makes friends with some of the local schoolkids, who pretend he is an illegal immigrant from the mainland and smuggle him into hospitals to find him blood.

Other classic ghost stories include *Spiritual Love* (1987), the everyday story of boy meets girl, girl is ghost, boy's living girlfriend isn't impressed, and *Close Encounters Of The Spooky Kind* (1989) where Sammo Hung has to contend with zombies and kung fu mummies, and the success of exorcisms depends largely upon the height of the altar the priests can build.

Naturally, we can only scratch the surface of what Hong Kong cinema has to offer, there is so much out there, but do give it a go and approach with an open mind. When Hollywood films seem stale or pedestrian you know where to go – what Hong Kong films lack in budget, they more than make up for in sheer exuberance, pace and inventiveness. Some of these films are so bright you need sunglasses to see them, some so fast you'll feel the G-forces rippling your face, some so mad you'll think your tea's been spiked. Enjoy!

AVAILABILITY

Sadly science fiction and fantasy are not as strong sellers as martial arts or heroic bloodshed films so the range of videos available is fairly limited in the UK. That said most video shops should have a few, normally filed as Martial Arts. Do try to get subtitled versions as the dubbing is invariably poor and go for widescreen if possible, many fantasy films are shot in epic 1:2.35 ratio and lose composition if cropped. After dipping your toes in Blighty's meagre waters, you may feel the need to feed your addiction from the deeper pools of foreign lands. Those with internet connections, a credit card and a DVD player will find a far wider selection available on-line. Be sure to check region compatibility when buying DVDs, but take heart from the fact that most Chinese DVDs are Region O and should play on any player, albeit in NTSC.

All recent releases come with the option of English subtitles. Many DVD players can also cope with the old VCD format which is still a commonly used video format in Asia. This is a real boon to the HK cinephile as VCDs are cheap and plentiful, you can often pick them up from Chinese stores in the UK. While the quality of picture can be a bit ropey (as the information is highly compressed) the access to films that will never see the light of day on Western release schedules is irresistible. A big bonus is that most, but not all, are subtitled into English, but even if they are not you can still derive a great deal of enjoyment from the visual assault alone. Be adventurous and treat yourself.

Films of 1999

Compiled by Gary S. Dalkin
with additional material by Andrew M. Butler

Here is a hopefully complete list of every science fiction, fantasy and associational (by which we mean works with genre connections, including non-supernatural horror and the surreal, or by directors usually associated with the genre) film released in the UK in 1999. The usual mix of good, bad, interesting and plain weird. The number of stars indicate the urgency with which you should dash out and catch them at the cinema (if you still can...).

A Bug's Life – you wait a lifetime for a computer-animated movie about an ant colony, then two come along at once (the first was *Antz* [1998]).

The Acid House – Irving Welsh drug fantasia.

After Life – Japanese fantasy in which the dead relive happy memories.

All About My Mother – mature melodrama from Almodovar which has been read as the fantasy of one character imagining his life as a combination of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *All About Eve.*

Animal Farm – live-action/animatronic TV movie version given festival screening.

Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me – time travelling inversion of the first AP movie.

Babe: Pig in the City – very dark fairy tale of a talking pig – the unfairly slated sequel to *Babe*.

Being John Malkovich – [✶✶amb] London Film Festival and LFF On Tour release featuring a character played by John Cusack discovering a tunnel that leads into the very real actor John Malkovich's head. See the review in *Matrix.*

Beloved – Toni Morrison adaptation, with ghosts; too close to *The Exorcist* for many tastes.
The Blair Witch Project – straight to video no budget calling-card turned box-office smash by internet hype.
Blast From the Past – Cold War fallout.
Bowfinger – Steve Martin's penniless director makes a sci-fi movie.
Bride of Chucky – surprisingly well-received, belated addition to the *Child's Play* franchise.
Cat People – [✶✶gsd] re-release of Val Lewton classic.
The Curse of the Cat People – [✶✶gsd] re-release of another Val Lewton classic.
Deep Blue Sea – the sharks appear to be more intelligent than the writers.
Dogma – see Andrew M. Butler's review.
8mm – associational; *Se7en* writer Kevin Andrew Walker has written better scripts, Joel Schumacher has directed more interesting films. Ludicrous exploration of snuff movies.
End of Days – *Terminator 2* rehash, with the devil in the T1000 role.
eXistenZ – [✶✶gsd/amb] semi-remake of Cronenberg's own *Videodrome.*
Eyes Wide Shut – Kubrick's fantastical swansong; a dud.
The Faculty – *The Thing* meets *Scream* (and loses).
Felicia's Journey – [✶amb] – psychological serial killer, with Bob Hoskins as a quiet loner re-enacting his childhood and hovering between reality and fantasising.
Gods and Monsters – [✶✶gsd/amb] superior drama about the director of Universal's *Frankenstein.*
Fight Club – [✶✶✶gsd/amb] the most intelligent and imaginative American film of the year, a fine fantasy open to multiple interpretations.
The Haunting – appalling new version of Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, and officially not a remake of the Robert Wise classic.
Holy Smoke – more pretension from Jane Campion.
In Dreams – a bloody, awful, mess from the once interesting Neil Jordan.
Inspector Gadget – live action version of kid's cartoon.
The Iron Giant – Ted Hughes's story animated to great acclaim .
I Still Know What You Did Last Summer – from *Judge Dread*ful to the sequel to a *Scream* rip-off, that difficult third feature from the once promising Danny Cannon.
Jack Frost – Michael Keaton is temporarily reincarnated as a snowman.
John Carpenter's Vampires – [✶ gsd] a striking mess from a once great director.
The King and I – dreadful animated remake of classic musical, not to be confused with the superb new historical-epic version of the same story, Anna and the King.
The Matrix – [✶✶ gsd] muddled and unoriginal, but hugely enjoyable virtual reality rehash in John Woo meets *Terminator 2* style.
Meet Joe Black – remake of *Death Takes a Holiday*, stretched to twice the original running time.
A Midsummer Night's Dream – inconsistent and unconvincing rehash.
Mighty Joe (Young) – remake of 1949 *King Kong* semi-remake, the posters keep the original title, the film itself varies from print to print.
The Mummy – [✶✶✶gsd/amb] *Indiana Jones* 4 in all but name, and better than the first three.
Muppets From Space – [✶gsd] polished muppetry, but alas, not the *Swine Trek* / *Pigs in Space* masterpiece we hoped for.
My Favourite Martian – everyone's least favourite movie.
Mystery Men – [✶ gsd] quirky, fun and inventive superhero spoof.
The Night of the Hunter – [✶ gsd/amb] re-release of early serial killer thriller, now considered a minor classic, but literally loses the plot towards the end.
The Ninth Configuration – re-release on the back of *The Exorcist,* fared no better than the first time it flopped.
Notting Hill – [✶✶ gsd] associational, features sf film *Helix* within the narrative.
Orgazmo – Mormon porno superhero, from the creators of *South Park.*
Pi – [✶✶ amb] – apocalyptic Jewish maths, masterpiece or muddle?.
Pleasantville – [✶✶gsd/✶✶✶ amb] *The Truman Show* with a cleverer gimmick: these people aren't *on* TV, but *in* it.
Plunkett & Macleane – bizarrely achronistic historical drama .
Practical Magic – Kidman and Bullock fail to leave us bewitched.
Prometheus – pretentious, poetic, political polemic from Tony Harrison.
Psycho – [✶✶✶ gsd/amb] re-issue of Hitchcock's seminal slasher.
Psycho (1999) – pointless remake of above in colour; interesting only for its sound effects.
The Rage: Carrie II – hopeless sequel to one of the finest horror films ever.
Ravenous – black-comedy gothic cannibal supernatural horror western, the birth of a new sub-genre?.
Run Lola Run – [✶ amb] German thriller, all style, no substance and more than a little strangeness as Lola runs three times to save her boyfriend.
Schizopolis – [✶ amb] zero-budget personal film by Steven Soderbergh, playing games with language and cinema.
Scrooge – 1951 re-release.
Shakespeare in Love – [✶✶✶ gsd] literary fantasy, wonderfully crafted in every respect.
Simply Irresistible – romantic comedy with magic shellfish.
The Sixth Sense – tedious feature-length gimmick predicated on an obviously predictable and nonsensical twist.
South Park: Bigger, Longer, Uncut – now with extra swearing (and cut).
Star Trek: Insurrection – number nine, for anyone still counting.
Star Wars Episode 1: The Phantom Menace – [✶✶ gsd] number four, for anyone still counting, the recipe remains the same, but its all gone a bit stale.
The Sticky Fingers of Time – arthouse time travel flick which barely saw the inside of a cinema.
The Straight Story – associational, straight fable from David Lynch: a man's epic journey on his lawnmower.
Tarzan – latest Disney atrocity.
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre – re-release, first full UK release for proto slasher 'classic'.
The 13th Warrior – [✶gsd] enjoyable but disappointing anthropological fantasy.
Universal Soldier: The Return – beat-'em-up with less convincing performances than a video game.
Urban Legend – the year's worst *Halloween* rip-off.
Virtual Sexuality – sex swap comedy by *The Sun's* agony uncle.
Virus – terminating aliens on a titanic ship, from James Cameron's FX man.
Wild Wild West – Jules Vernesque wooden, wooden western.
The World is Not Enough – [✶ gsd] Bond saves the world, with more plot than but inferior action to *Tomorrow Never Dies.*
Yellow Submarine – re-release.

Books of the Year – 1999

Compiled by Steve Jeffery

Towards the end of each year we ask the *Vector* reviewers and BSFA committee members to choose their five favourite books read (though not necessarily published) that year. As well as providing a potted set of recommendations (why take six *Vector*s into the bathroom when you need only take one?), the wider remit of the poll allows it not to overlap too closely with either the BSFA or Clarke Awards, except perhaps where a *The Sparrow* happens to be published in Britain in the same year.

This year again, the results were widely spread over a large range of titles with a 'winner' (although this isn't really the object of the exercise) only gradually appearing towards the end.

Out of some 130 different titles, 18 received more than one vote; 15 were mentioned twice, 2 books (Vernor Vinge's *A Deepness in the Sky* and a relatively quite late entrant in Mary Gentle's *A Secret History,* the first volume of her ambitious four part sequence 'The Book of Ash' [reviewed in this issue's First Impressions]) shared joint second with 3 votes, while Neal Stephenson's massive *Cryptonomicon* tops the list with 5 votes to become our reviewers' choice for Book of the Year.

Andrew Adams

White Mars or, The Mind Set Free. Brian W. Aldiss, in collaboration with Roger Penrose (Little, Brown). This Wellsian discussion novel with ecological attitude couldn't have come at a better time. *Pace* Kim Stanley Robinson & co., I fart on the idea of 'terraforming' Mars – or any other planet that isn't des. res. enough for humanity's expansionist liking. Just because something *can* be done doesn't mean it *ought* to be done.

Darwin's Radio. Greg Bear (Del Rey). "In the next stage of evolution, humans are history..." (uncommonly accurate blurb). Bear has updated *Blood Music* for Millennium 2.0, using all the biogenetic buzzwords in the new Devil's dictionary. A Hugo/Nebula/everything-else award contender. I can't help feeling, however, that *Darwin's Radio* ends where *The Midwich Cuckoos* begins.

The Dark Heart of Time: A Tarzan Novel. Philip José Farmer (Del Rey). Farmer's previous forays into ERBdom are best exemplified by 'The Jungle Rot Kid on the Nod' (1971). But now he's playing it straight – with the occasional bendy bit. Jane has been kidnapped, yet again, so Tarzan hits the liana-vine trail to City Built by God and the Crystal Tree of Time. He also meets Umpa the Caterpillar.

The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon. Stephen King (Hodder & Stoughton). "Brevity does not preclude scope in fiction; especially where the author is as economical, perceptive, and just plain smart as Stephen King with *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*." Taken from my own review for *Vector* #206. And why not, may I ask? Self-plagiarism is no crime.

Double Contact. James White (Tor). The twelfth and, alas, the final Sector General book. White had rung many beneficial changes in the cosmic polyclinic, not least with new characters like Padre Lioren and Gurronsevas the Galactic Gourmet. Old hands O'Mara and Mannen were also given more prominent roles, thereby relieving star surgeon Conway. Now it's the turn of Prilicla – everybody's favourite empath.

K.V. Bailey

A delayed reading of Connie Willis's ***The Doomsday Book***. The mechanics of time-travel crudely devised; nevertheless, the present and past are given a remarkable contemporaneity, and the actual experience of the past, the knowledge and sensitivities of a later culture entrapped within it, is overwhelming.

In ***The Martians***, Stan Robinson contrives variations on his dominant three coloured theme, and in 'Purple Mars', and especially in the poems, justifies his claim that "...in the /attempt to imagine the Mars I came to see / Earth more clearly than ever before..."

Gene Wolfe impressively opens his new 'Book of the Short Sun' trilogy with ***On Blue's Waters***, which is an epic one-man narration of an imposed quest backwards in search of guidance and authority on a planet, the goal of his generation ship's voyage, which is new yet untenanted by every myth, memory and novum that can make for tragic instabilities. A superb exercise in sustained metaphor.

Few hard sf novels have given such boundless scope for speculation – which, because it raises 'first cause' issues, strays over scientific boundaries – as does Greg Benford's ***Cosm***. On top of that, it is an action packed thriller, satirises academia and stylishly achieves a sensawunda.

My fantasy inclusion is Storm Constantine's ***Sea Dragon Heir***, greatly enjoyed for the way her mythopoetic populating of the elements is conjoined with a development of royal dynastic oppositions and entanglements to produce a sophisticated romance of symbolic magic.

Elizabeth Billinger

Jeff Noon's ***Pixel Juice*** is a collection of short stories in which Noon, inspired by Borges, has fun playing with language and stretching words and phrases into entirely new shapes. Though his world is dark, the stories are infused with a joyous pleasure in language itself.

Justina Robson, ***Silver Screen***. Robson's world is also a dark future England which, despite the familiarity of many new things – sentient houses, grown rather than built – is disturbingly alien. Robson poses questions about artificial intelligence, about what it is to be alive/human and she writes characters that are not just believable, but seem to be people I know.

Philip Pullman's ***Northern Lights*** is at the same time a Bildungsroman and a quest novel: Lyra is abruptly uprooted from the safe and familiar surroundings of Jordan College, Oxford as she first searches for her friend Roger and then becomes involved in an increasingly dangerous quest that leads her to the frozen North where there are armoured bears and other, far more dangerous things.

In ***An Item from the Late News,*** Thea Astley, an Australian author, considers the way an isolated community fears and rejects 'the other'. Wafer, a gentle, peace-loving nomad in search of he ideal location to protect him from a nuclear bomb is the other. The gemstone, that to Wafer is something he treasures for its beauty becomes to the townsmen a symbol of his separateness.

Pattern for a Tapestry by the Brazilian Autran Dourado, weaves together interconnected stories about the same family in a beautiful, lyrical book, full of life and sunlight, much joy and some sadness.

Paul Billinger

Silver Screen, the first novel from British author Justina Robson, starts from a familiar premise, the possible sentience of AIs, but rapidly moves in unexpected directions. Captivating from the start, original characters, a fully realised near-future Britain and a satisfying conclusion.

Another first novel is ***ThiGMOO*** by Eugene Byrne. AIs are used to create fictional historical characters which are used as interactive learning tools. At least that was the plan... Byrne's excellent story telling has a deceptively light style but makes serious political points.

Headlong is Simon Ing's many-layered story centred around Yale who, as well as trying to come to terms with a technologically induced brain disorder, must deal with the consequences of his wife's suspicious death. This book also has a very British, Wyndhamesque, feel to a downbeat, tragic story.

To Say Nothing of the Dog by Connie Willis is a retelling, of sorts, of *Three Men in a Boat* in a future society where time travel is used for academic research into the bombing of Coventry Cathedral. Completely absorbing.

The Blue Place by Nicola Griffith is a move from her highly regarded SF writing into the crime genre. It has a conventional set-up with ex-cop Aud Torvingen working as a security consultant. Walking late at night, she collides with a woman on the street just as a house around the corner explodes. Aud turns back to the woman, but she has vanished. This then swiftly moves into a taut, well-paced story, moving between Atlanta and Norway. A beautifully written book with brilliantly drawn characters and a heartbreaking conclusion.

Tanya Brown

Indulgence of the year was ***A Civil Campaign***, latest in Lois McMaster Bujold's Vorkosigan saga. Hilarious SF romance, with futuristic takes on all the genre conventions immortalised by Georgette Heyer: estates in jeopardy, questions of legitimacy, cross-dressing heroines and a dinner party from hell. Funnily enough, I never used to like the Vorkosigan books: maybe I'm mellowing.

For sheer enjoyment – if not originality – I'd have to nominate the ***Harry Potter*** books, by J. K. Rowling. I was never a great fan of the school story per se, but the blend of magical and mundane works well, and the humour isn't too heavy-handed.

Real old-fashioned space opera like they don't make any more, Jane Emerson's ***City of Diamond*** (the first, and so far only, part of a trilogy) was published in 1996, but I've only just discovered it. A huge cast, a set of three generations ships gifted centuries ago by mysterious aliens,

and some of the most appealing characters I've encountered this year. If only she'd write another.

For brain food, I reject fiction altogether in favour of Kary B Mullis' ***Dancing Naked in the Mind Field***. Mullis writes about experiments with telekinesis, his own encounter with aliens, and whether or not LSD should be legalised. Oh, and his Nobel prize for biochemistry. Colourful.

Discovery of the year was ***The Vintner's Luck***, by New Zealand writer Elizabeth Knox. Marketed as 'real literature', this is an evocative historical fantasy with angels, love and wine, set in 19th-century France. Anyone who admires Neil Gaiman's work should give this a chance.

COLIN BIRD

For once a single novel stands head and shoulders above the other books I have read this year: ***To Say Nothing Of The Dog*** by Connie Willis. I enjoyed it so much I tracked down another of her whimsical SF fantasies, *Bellwether*, which I also heartily recommend. Willis handles convoluted narratives with consummate ease and imbues both novels with genuine laugh-out-loud comedy.

Second choice would have to be ***Forever Peace*** by Joe Haldeman. A clever companion work to its illustrious predecessor which works on a number of levels. Hard SF is rarely as moving and resonant as this masterful novel.

Third choice is ***Darwinia*** by Robert Charles Wilson. Yes, I know it's flawed but the genuinely unsettling opening section coupled with its impressive narrative sweep gets this novel my vote for most original concept of the year.

Fourth choice: ***Corrupting Dr Nice*** by John Kessel. This book's elegant dismissal of all the accepted rules of fictional time travel make it a delight. Sure, the screwball comedy lacks edge, but the narrative has a galloping charm all its own.

Fifth choice has to be the second volume of Peter Hamilton's ludicrously huge The Night's Dawn Trilogy – ***The Neutronium Alchemist***. MFI bookshelves just aren't designed for books as weighty as this!

Publisher of the year has to be Millennium for the superb SF Masterworks reprints several of which I've purchased and all of which deserve to be back on the bookshelves.

CLAIRE BRIALEY

Cryptonomicon – Neal Stephenson (Heinemann, 1999)
The Bones of Time – Kathleen Ann Goonan (Voyager, 1999)
Time – Stephen Baxter (Voyager, 1999)
The Man in the High Castle – Philip K Dick (Penguin, 1965)
The Affirmation – Christopher Priest (Faber & Faber, 1981)

ANDREW M BUTLER

I confess to having read little sf this year; between reading the Clarke shortlist and rereading Dick's novels, I've been on a diet of crime and Victorian literature. Peter Delacorte's time travel thriller ***Time on my Hands*** stood up for me as a better choice for the award, but as a depiction of Hollywood rather than sf, I suspect.

The massive anthology edited by Jack Dann and Janeen Webb, ***Dreaming Downunder***, (Sydney: HarperCollins, 1998) offers myriad delights. An unusual case of dashing out to buy the book that inspired the film led me to Chuck Palahniuk's quasi-sfnal ***Fight Club*** (London: Vintage, 1997), to which the film was remarkably faithful, but to say more would be to spoil it; the first rule about *Fight Club* is don't talk about *Fight Club*. Finally two film books: Stephen Herbert's ***Industry, Liberty, and a Vision: Wordsworth Donisthorpe's Kinesigraph*** (London: The Projection Box, 1998) is a remarkable piece of detective work. The Libertarian Donisthorpe appears to have invented a camera for taking moving pictures in the early 1890s, a few years prior to the established date of the invention. John Pierson acts as a broker between film maker and distributor, and is responsible for the careers of Spike Lee, Kevin Smith and Richard Linklater. ***Spike, Mike, Slackers and Dykes: A Guided Tour Across a Decade of American Independent Cinema*** (New York: Miramax/ Hyperion, 1997) is an endlessly fascinating warts and all description of the process.

MAT COWARD

Snuff Fiction (Doubleday) may be Robert Rankin's best yet – all the usual loony laughs, but in a more conventional frame, with greater depth to plot and characterisation. The year's thrillingest thriller was ***Executive Action*** by Richard Doyle (Arrow): an evil impostor gains control of the White House. Reminiscent of some of the spooky suspense paperbacks that made me a genre fan in childhood, and providing fascinating insights into America's largely unelected government. Two very different historical novels set in the ancient world, both thoroughly involving and gorgeously detailed: ***Gates Of Fire*** by Steven Pressfield (Doubleday), a fine account of the battle of Thermopylae, and much more than that; and Tom Holt's stunningly good ***Alexander At The World's End*** (Little Brown) – not a comic novel, as such; rather, a serious story, told with immense wit. It's structurally flawed, but Holt's nerve never fails him, and it's impossible to resist the power of his imagination, intellect and storytelling ability. Most unalloyed reading joy of the year – a new Inspector Frost book, at last: ***Winter Frost*** (Constable), by R.D. Wingfield. As good as ever, hilarious, humane, unique. If you enjoy crime fiction at all, read this. If you've never read a crime novel in your life, start with this one.

STEPHEN DEAS

1999 turned out to be a fantasy-orientated year, and two of my 'best of 1999' entries are actually trilogies: Elizabeth Moon's 'The Deed of Paksenarrion' and Guy Gavriel Kay's 'Fionavar Tapestry'. ***Sheepfarmer's Daughter***, the first of the Paksennarion series, creates the most substantial, believable, human set of characters I've seen in a fantasy novel for a very long time (possibly ever?); and, while the series is at its best early on, the ending of the second book is positively evil – best to have the third one already to hand.

The Fionavar Tapestry, on the other hand (and again, I pick the first of the series, ***The Summer Tree***), is populated entirely by archetypes. Everything is loaded with portent and inevitability, and somehow Kay makes it work. Don't ask me how – all I can do is sit back and envy...

Vector #208 has reviews of the next two: Cordwainer Smith's ***The Rediscovery of Man*** and Jeff Long's ***The Descent***. I don't have much to add to my review of the Smith stories except that I still find myself mulling them over from time to time. *The Descent*' as Liam Proven points out in his review, is hardly long on scientific realism (Liam and I have found, in the past, an almost uncanny ability to form perfectly opposite opinions as to what makes a good book). But it's a cracking good read. It's like *Doom* with words – it has that atmosphere to it.

Number five: Arthur Golden's ***Memoirs of a Geisha***, which is just simply a beautiful book, and nothing to do with SF whatsoever.

IAIN EMSLEY

The highlight of this year was Mary Gentle's ***A Secret History: The Book of Ash #1***(Avon Eos 1999). Unsettling in its honesty, this novel offers an alternate history of the late Middle Ages where the leading mercenary captain is ensnared within political intrigue as Europe is invaded by the Visigoths from Carthage. Gentle never falters from showing the brutal reality that surrounds her character's lives whilst also amazing the reader with the events that she describes. This part of the quartet offers so much promise for the remaining books. For the tenth anniversary of the Sandman, Neil Gaiman created a tale with its roots in Japanese mythology. ***The Dream Hunters*** (DC Comics/Vertigo 1999) twists its way through the relationship between a fox and a monk as an evil sorcerer kills the monk. The illustrations bring out many of the complexities of the tale, offering new perspectives on the narrative. In ***Stardust*** (Spike 1999) he narrates a simple fairy tale, but like Faerie, the simplicity is deceptive, hiding meanings and truths. Neal Stephenson's cross-genre novel, ***Cryptonomicon*** (Avon 1999), beguiled this reader as he developed puzzles within the cryptographic deception. However he managed to create believable characters that also drove the book, adding to the complexity surrounding the initial problems. John Crowley's ***Engine Summer*** (Gollancz) proved to be a book of exhilaration and despair as the character came to full self-awareness and consciousness.

ALAN FRASER

Inversions – Iain M. Banks. There's no indication on the cover that this book of two initially unconnected stories is anything to do with the Culture. Reviews on amazon.com show that readers new to Banks have been utterly perplexed by it! Both protagonists are close to the rulers of their adopted countries in this primitive world, the woman a king's doctor, the man a usurper's bodyguard. They have achieved positions which allow them to have some control over events, but which have also given them powerful enemies. Since the stories are told from the indigenous point-of-view, even the familiar reader takes some time to catch on that the doctor and the bodyguard are actually Culture

Contact/Special Circumstances agents, which explains the incidents the new readers don't understand. That, of course, is fun for the seasoned Banks reader, but it does make this a book that you can't recommend unreservedly.

Prelude To Dune I: House Atreides – Brian Herbert & Kevin J. Anderson. Son of Frank, known previously for not-very-funny 'humorous' SF, and a Star Wars noveliser join forces to write a *Dune* prequel? Sounds a recipe for disaster and definitely not a book on anyone's favourites list. I have no idea why I picked it up, but I found these interwoven tales set around 30 years before the events in *Dune* both engrossing and faithful to the spirit of the 'Duniverse', as we follow the fortunes of young Leto Atreides on Caladan and Duncan Idaho on Giedi Prime, and the younger Vladimir Harkonnen (no less evil) and Pardot Kynes on Arrakis. Best of all, it prompted me to start rereading *Dune*!

Children Of God – Mary Doria Russell. Father Emilio Sanchez is press-ganged into returning to Rakhat, the planet of his maiming and violation, in this fine sequel to *The Sparrow*. The original Earth mission has set off a chain of events that has led the planet into a revolution as the Runa rebel against their masters the Jana'ata, who treat them not just as slaves but as food animals. After the first book I was desperate to read this, and was not disappointed by it. Like Orson Scott Card's work, this is SF with a religious message, but which can still be enjoyed for its own sake.

Legends/Far Horizons – Robert Silverberg (Ed.). Two mighty tomes of apocryphal tales from Silverberg, the first from the creators of fantasy worlds, the second from creators of SF future histories, all novellas specially commissioned for these collections. Some of the stories are inconsequential, and add little to the body of their writers' work, others are very worthwhile indeed. Ursula K. Le Guin and Orson Scott Card appear in both volumes, the former with a story from Earthsea and one from the Hainish Universe, the latter adding to his stories of Alvin Maker and Ender. These two books are worth getting even if you aren't familiar with all the series represented.

Return To Lankhmar – Fritz Leiber. I remember picking up one of the Lankhmar series at the start of my SF/fantasy reading career in the '50s and being left cold by it. Now I know why. This is much more knowing, adult, fantasy than I was prepared for then. This reissue contains the novel *The Swords Of Lankhmar*, and a short story collection, *Swords And Ice Magic*. It was a great mistake of mine to avoid Leiber's fantasy for so many years!

LESLEY HATCH

Top of the list has to be Storm Constantine's ***Thin Air***, in which she takes the concept of people disappearing that Neil Gaiman used in *Neverwhere*, but deals with it in a totally different and, to me, far more believable way. Jay's misadventures and misfortunes made this novel compulsive reading. A close second is James Lovegrove's ***Days***, which cleverly expands on the idea of large shopping centres and details one day in the life of the employees, customers and owners of the world's largest gigastore: as a satire on shopping centres and their customers and staff, it works very well. Next is Mary Doria Russell with ***Children of God***, sequel to *The Sparrow*, and a worthy successor to it, both thought-provoking and entertaining. It was interesting to return to Rakhat and see what had transpired, and it came as a total surprise to find Sofia Mendez still alive. Next we have Nigel Bennett's and P.N. Elrod's ***Keeper of the King***, the story of a young knight made vampire whose task throughout the centuries has been to protect the 'king' or (in this case) prime minister of Canada from assassination: of course, things are not that simple, as the assassin turns out to be another vampire. And finally, there's Joanne Bertin's ***The Last Dragonlord***, a fantasy which treats the concept of dragons in fiction in a totally different way, one that I never expected to see. As a long time devotee of Anne McCaffrey's Pernese dragons, this made a refreshing change.

ROBERT W. HAYLER

Happily, two of the best books I read in 1999 were sent for me to review by the BSFA. ***Headlong*** by Simon Ings (coincidentally, more enjoyable than the Booker-shortlisted 'novel of ideas' *Headlong* by Michael Frayn) and the anthology ***Beaker's Dozen*** by Nancy Kress both showed a rare maturity in their handling of character and relationships. Both were also good illustrations of the increasing meaninglessness of the hard/soft SF divide: in both the science is prominent and heavy-duty yet the core concerns are absolutely human.

Millennium's SF Masterworks series has built up over the year into a handsomely produced but largely unread and guilt-inducing pile. Those I did get around to reading were uniformly excellent. In particular Bester's ***The Stars My Destination*** stood out as a marvellous book. Its incredible momentum and flawless set-pieces are exhilarating. Another classic I revisited, in the light of a flurry of scholarly activity, was John Wyndham's ***Day of the Triffids***. An interestingly British social document now, as well as a ripping yarn, and of course the triffids are still as repulsive as when I first read the book aged 12.

In non-fiction my favourite read was Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont's ***Intellectual Impostures*** – a discussion of the misuse of scientific terminology and analogy by leading lights of (mainly French) cultural theory. I approached it warily having read reports of it from both rabid critics and vociferous defenders and was glad to find that it was modest, thoughtful, informative and entertaining.

CHRIS HILL

I found that my best of year selection was a bit of a generic mixture in 1999. My chosen books are (in no particular order):

The Jersey Shore – William Mayne. An old man recounts his history to his grandson. The story has a dreamlike, hallucinatory quality; beautiful and moving.

Smoke and Mirrors – Neil Gaiman. A gorgeous collection of short stories. Gaiman is one of the best pure story-tellers around and this book is something to just immerse yourself into.

The Magician's Assistant – Ann Patchett. After he dies, a stage magician's assistant gets involved with his family, which she previously had no idea existed. A beautifully told story of love and friendship, with (perhaps) just a hint of magic.

A Deepness in the Sky – Vernor Vinge. Disaster strikes when rival trading ships go to investigate a new civilisation. A fun, well-written big-screen space opera with some genuine surprises.

Cryptonomicon – Neal Stephenson. A story of World War II code-breaking and modern high-tech industry. An absolutely fascinating story of technological breakthrough. Probably not science fiction, although that may depend on where you put your boundaries.

So we have one out-and-out sf novel, one fantasy collection, one magic-realism and two that are frankly unclassifiable.

PENNY HILL

When I came to make my selection, I chose books that were extremely enjoyable and about which I had enthused to all and sundry straight after completion. I would happily re-read any of these books right now.

A Deepness in the Sky by Vernor Vinge is a huge, sprawling book in which I immersed myself for hours at a time. I loved the different stories that were being told and the ways in which they interacted. Definitely a book that I wanted to keep reading even after I had finished.

Smoke and Mirrors by Neil Gaiman is a short story collection of wonderful originality and charm. It was a birthday present that I wanted to share urgently, so that we could discuss the ideas and stories in it.

Corrupting Dr Nice by Robert Kessel reminded me of Connie Willis at her best. It was just such enormous fun and I couldn't wait to find out what was going to happen next and how.

The Magician's Assistant by Ann Patchett was beautifully eerie and evocative. I was fascinated by the atmosphere and the special yet believable characters. It was thought-provoking and very satisfying

A Spoonful of Jam by Michelle Magorian is the sort of children's book that everyone should read. A direct sequel to *A Cuckoo in the Nest* (which very nearly made it onto the list also), it deals sympathetically and amusingly with an ambitious working-class girl growing up immediately after the second-world war.

STEVE JEFFERY

First place goes to one of the last books read in 1999, Mary Gentle's ***The Book of Ash 1: A Secret History*** (Avon Eos) the first of a four-part counterfactual historical which will curiously appear next year in the UK in one volume. It is a stunning, bravura exercise with all the ambition of John Crowley's other 'Secret History of the World' started with *Ægypt*. Crowley leads me an almost impossible choice between *Little, Big* (Gollancz) and *Engine Summer* (Methuen), both re-read this year, but goes finally to ***Engine Summer*** because the end of story (in so many senses) that is the life of Rush-That-Speaks made me choke and cry (twice).

Desperately performing triage on a shortlist of 15 books all of which I had space to mention, 1999 was the year I first read Charles de Lint

with ***Someplace to be Flying***, a wonderful urban fantasy.

Another late discovery, in the wake of Eastercon, was Peter S. Beagle, and the astonishing ***The Innkeeper's Song*** which shouldn't work – probably couldn't, if almost anyone else had tried it – but, magnificently, does. Which leaves the final selection horribly torn between Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' trilogy (but waiting for the third part of this, due this year), Patricia Anthony's quasi sf-historical *God's Fires,* Justina Robson's impressive sf debut with *Silver Screen* and Zamyatin's *We* (re-released by Avon this year), but finally goes to Elizabeth Knox's ***The Vintner's Luck*** (QPD), a (non genre) fantasy that combines a life lived wholly and richly, loves – sacred and mundane – with and against the perspective of an ageless war and pact between Heaven and Hell.

PAUL KINCAID

There can be little doubt about the outstanding book of the year as far as I am concerned, it is ***Cryptonomicon*** by Neal Stephenson (Heinemann), a massive piece of work which still manages to keep you involved in and excited by the various story lines across nearly a thousand pages. Is it science fiction? Yes, if you accept that there is a continuous line connecting yesterday and tomorrow and it is impossible to identify at which point one becomes the other. Writer of the year, on the other hand, has to be Steven Millhauser, an exquisite American fantasist, the precision, touch and beauty of whose work can perhaps be best gauged in his collection ***The Knife Thrower*** (Phoenix House). If not for Millhauser, the collection of the year would certainly have gone to ***The Dream Archipelago*** by Christopher Priest (Earthlight), a long-overdue bringing together and revision of these disturbing stories. Entertaining as the Connie Willis novel was, this year's Hugo Award really should have gone to ***Distraction*** by Bruce Sterling (Orion), a subtle political novel that is easily the best thing he has done. Finally, and belatedly, I caught up with ***Rocket Boys*** by Homer H. Hickam (Fourth Estate), a stunning autobiography that captures something of what turned so many of us into science fiction fans in the first place.

VIKKI LEE

A little harder this year to pick five books, not because there weren't many around but more because I've read slightly more books this year than the previous two or three.

First off, and undisputedly my favourite read of the year was ***The Chosen*** by Ricardo Pinto. Not actually a *fun* book to read, but a very dark book of unrelenting gothic broodiness and violence. A well thought-out society of oppressive rulers, dogged and often pointless tradition, and political machinations. A great first novel from Pinto. Another first novel that hit the mark for me was Steve Erikson's ***Gardens of the Moon***. A sprawling fantasy of epic proportions that drags the reader in and refuses to let them go. A real page-turner and first in a long series than can only get better. Once again, my recommendations include a book by Roger Taylor, who for me is a very much under-rated writer. ***Caddoran*** is again storytelling at its best from this man; well plotted, well written and engrossing. One of those rare fantasy authors who can tell a story in a single book. Maggie Furey's ***The Heart of Myrial*** is on my list for exactly the same reason – another well-told and engrossing story from a writer for whom characterisation is her main strength. First in a new series this one, but well worth following through the books to come. My final selection was one of a few re-reads this year, Clive Barker's ***Weaveworld***. As many people will already know, this is dark fantasy that will stand the test of time and simply gets better with every read. Expect this one on a future list when I read it again one day.

JOHN D. OWEN

An astonishingly quiet year, really, with few books that really reached out to grab me and refuse to let go.

Kathleen Ann Goonan certainly did, though, both with ***Queen City Jazz*** and ***The Bones of Time***. *Queen City Jazz* was a splendidly miasmic look at the consequences of nano-technology, while *The Bones of Time* crossed cyberpunk with romance and came up with a real winner of a novel.

Robert Charles Wilson's ***Darwinia*** was another miasmic novel, this time playing nasty with evolution and concepts of reality. It doesn't quite work 100%, but makes for a hell of a ride.

Sheri S. Tepper's ***Six Moon Dance*** was fascinating more for what it wasn't. It wasn't another of Tepper's heavily feminist works, but instead something with a lighter touch, and even a strong sense of irony about it, as the McGuffin driving the whole plot also undermines the readers' assumptions about gender roles in the story.

Having disappointed with *Seasons of Plenty* it was great to see Colin Greenland recapture his form with the conclusion to the Tabitha Jute saga, ***Mother of Plenty***. Having Jute come out of her drugged stupor and take an active part in the book certainly helped. That Greenland also came up with some wonderful plot pyrotechnics does wonders for the book, too.

The annual pre-Christmas visit to Discworld is always fun, even more so when Terry Pratchett turns in something as comically accomplished as ***The Fifth Elephant***. Nowadays, Pratchett's plotting is so good, you start to wish he'd spread his wings a little, and work outside Discworld more often.

ANDREW SAWYER

J. B. S. Haldane – ***Possible Worlds and Other essays*** (Chatto & Windus, 1927) It was Haldane who said that the universe is "not only queerer than we suppose but queerer than we *can* suppose." *Possible Worlds...* is series of popular-scientific speculations in which we can see the seeds of later sf (note the Stapledonian visions of 'The Last Judgement') and viewpoints which are now fascinatingly skewed (see his defence of vivisection). The title essay itself has enough speculation for a library of sf.

Mary Gentle – ***The Secret History*** (Avon, 1999) Part 1 of the long-awaited *Ash*, to be published in the UK this spring, this introduces a 15th century female mercenary whose kick-ass adventures in Europe and North Africa are chronicled by a twentieth-century historian who discovers that a) her chronicles are fake and b) the archaeological evidence supports them. Confused? We will be... This seems to be putting Mary Gentle back on form after the rather disappointing *Left To His Own Devices*.

Stephen Baxter – ***Time*** (Harper Collins, 1999). Visions of deep time, distant futures and a splendidly-conceived intelligent squid are part of a cosmological epic which may be Baxter's most Stapledonian effort yet.

Susan Price – ***The Sterkarm Handshake*** (Scholastic, 1999) "Elves" (in fact time-travellers from the 21st century) attempt to exploit the English-Scottish Borderers of an alternative 16th, in a brilliantly-written story which echoes local legends by being full of romance, tragic love and the clash of very different cultures. Price is one of that number of 'writers for children' who knock spots off many adult sf writers. Here she is ingenious and gripping by turns.

Lyndsey Davies: The 'Falco' series. All right, this is a cheat, but for those in the know Falco is a Private Informer going down those mean streets of Imperial Rome. As a whole they're an amusing clash of noir crime and costume drama. It's almost impossible to pick a favourite from these books, but if I had to it would be *Shadows in Bronze* (Pan, 1990) purely because I've been to the villa in Oplontis (near Naples)

The Final Results

5 VOTES

Cryptonomicon – Neal Stephenson

3 VOTES

Ash: A Secret History – Mary Gentle
A Deepness in the Sky – Vernor Vinge

2 VOTES

Time – Stephen Baxter
Engine Summer – John Crowley
Smoke and Mirrors – Neil Gaiman
The Bones of Time – Kathleen Ann Goonan
*Rocket Boys** – Homer H. Hickam
Headlong – Simon Ings
Corrupting Dr Nice – John Kessell
The Vintner's Luck – Elizabeth Knox
The Descent – Jeff Long
The Magician's Assistant – Anne Patchett
Northern Lights – Philip Pullman
Silver Screen – Justina Robson
Children of God – Mary Doria Russell
To Say Nothing of the Dog – Connie Willis
Darwinia – Robert Charles Wilson

* Published in the UK in paperback under the title *October Sky*.

where part of the action takes place and had fun identifying the wall-paintings Davies describes.

ANDREW SEAMAN

Full Moon by Michael Light (Jonathan Cape). Digitally re-mastered pictures from NASAs Apollo mission archives; Light's stunning art book is a celebration of the technology, but also of the human endeavour that drove that 'giant leap for mankind'. The next best thing to being there yourself.

A Deepness in the Sky by Vernor Vinge (TOR Books). A pure shot of that good ol' sense of wonder for the jaded reader, Vinge's prequel to *A Fire Upon the Deep* has everything the discerning sf fan could want – believable characters, fascinating ideas and a cunningly wrought plot full of surprises.

Cryptonomicon by Neal Stephenson (Avon Books). Despite a tendency to occasional self-indulgence Stephenson's sprawling epic of modern-day cypherpunks and their Second World War progenitors makes gripping reading. Never has nine hundred pages flown by so fast.

Word Made Flesh by Jack O'Connell (No Exit Press). Like the designer drugs that blight his fictional New England industrial town of Quinsigamond, O'Connell's neo-noir crime novels are lethally addictive; brutally surreal, but painfully moral dispatches from the abyss. This novel (his fourth) is his best yet.

About This Life by Barry Lopez (The Harvill Press). Travel writing, like sf, can open the mind to novel and strange environments, reminding us that, as Ballard said, Earth is perhaps the only alien planet. Whether writing about time spent criss-crossing the globe with air cargo crews ('Flight'), or communal ceramic firing in the Pacific North West ('Effleurage: the stroke of fire'), Lopez's pieces in this collection of his journalism urge us to look anew at both ourselves and the world in which we live.

MAUREEN KINCAID SPELLER

1999 turned into one of those years where I finally caught up with books other people have been talking about, not least among them, John Crowley's ***Little, Big***. I've made several abortive attempts to read it previously but it suddenly clicked this year. It's an extraordinary book, complex, absorbing and allusive, as convoluted as the house at the centre of the story, impossible to summarise but essential reading for anyone interested in the fantastic.

Philip Pullman's ***Northern Lights*** and ***The Subtle Knife*** have proved to be a real delight as well, and I eagerly await the last part of the 'His Dark Materials' trilogy, to see how he resolves the story of Will and Lyra, and to gain, I hope, a fuller understanding of how the different worlds mesh together... and there are those angels to consider. Pullman, like Crowley, seems able to pack so much into his writing and to enable it to function at a number of different levels, satisfying child and adult readers alike.

Homer H. Hickam's ***Rocket Boys*** proved to be a book which I genuinely couldn't put down. I'm fascinated by 'rocketeers' and Hickam produces a compelling account of schoolboy scientists inspired by the start of the space race, but also of a small coal-mining community, struggling to respond to post-war life in America.

Brian Stableford

The five best novels I read in 1999 (assuming, of course, that I don't read anything much in December) were:

Perdido Street Station by China Mieville. Although it's not due to be published until March 2000, I was lucky enough the get an advance copy of this magnifient dark fantasy. It's the author's second novel, after King Rat, and it's an astonishingly vivid, complex and accomplished work. Mieville has a fabulous imagination and writes with great verve and style; everyone should make certain to get a copy of this one.

Teranesia by Greg Egan. Egan is the world's most intelligent and ingenious writer of hard science fiction, and although I didn't like this one quite as much as ***Distress*** or ***Diaspora*** it's still one of the best sf novels of 1999.

The Hoegbotton Guide To The Early History Of Ambergris By Duncan Shriek by Jeff Vandermeer. A small-press item issued by Necropolitan Press. Vandermeer is the best writer of offbeat literary fantasy to emerge from the small presses since Thomas Ligotti, and this peculiar masterpiece of baroque horror/comedy is my favourite among his works so far.

Satan Wants Me by Robert Irwin. A fascinating memoir of the late 1960s, carefully filtered through the illusion-afflicted consciousness of a veritable paragon among unreliable narrators.

Starfarers by Poul Anderson. A heartfelt elegy for the dreams of galactic empire that Anderson did so much to sophisticate in the earlier part of his career. Hard sf at its finest, from a writer whose vision and competence have not been in the least affected by his advanced years (he and Jack Williamson have posted amazingly bright beacons of hope for all those of us who intend to keep going as long as the light of reason persists....)

SUE THOMASON

Thrones, Dominations is Jill Paton Walsh's continuation of Dorothy L. Sayers' unfinished Peter Wimsey novel. I think posthumous collaborations are often mistakes: this one isn't. It's a seamless, classic detective story with many deeper levels, also an accurate portrayal of the history and manners of a bygone age.

In July I had a James White orgy. Most of the 'Sector General' books are old friends – the combination of intellectual puzzle and positive values (healing, understanding, co-operation, etc.) is irresistible. However the story that now haunts me is ***The Watch Below***, an inspiring and really odd tale of a multi-generation colony of humans living in a sunken-but-watertight WWII supertanker.

I picked up ***All Points North*** by Simon Armitage from a station bookstall, en route to Milford. It's a poet's scrapbook, illustrating the surreality of ordinary everyday magical-realist life in the North of England; funny, affectionate, wickedly accurate, full of sense and sensawunda; entertaining and enlightening. I now understand what I'm trying to do with my own writing...

The Science Of Discworld pips several others to the post as my favourite popular-science book of the year. It's an entertaining and thought-provoking look at evolution and stuff, rendered palatable to ordinary non-scientists by interlayering it with a typical Discworld storyline. Can't cite the authors (I've lent my copy to someone), but Terry Pratchett and Jack Cohen were certainly involved.

Geoff Ryman's ***253*** is, um, oh hell, go and read it (preferably while travelling on the Bakerloo line). It's brilliant.

JON WALLACE

Hm, 250 words and what *did* I read in 1999? To start with there was a bit of Stephen King. I read *Bag of Bones*, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* and the single volume version of *The Green Mile*, and the winner (because I couldn't put it down...) is ***The Green Mile***. King is one of my favourite authors, and in *The Green Mile* he mixes suspense and the supernatural and the ordinary perfectly.

Greg Bear's ***Dinosaur Summer*** is a coming of age amongst The Lost World sort of book, which recaptures that Bradburyish teenage goshwow sense-of-wonder very nicely.

I've always liked short stories, so a collection like the Gardner Dozois-edited ***Best New SF #12*** filled that gap for a while. Of course, like all collections, this one has its good and bad bits, but the bad bits (Robert Reed's 'The Cuckoo's Boys') weren't too bad and the good bits (Cory Doctorow's 'Craphound') were excellent.

As always, I did a bit of re-reading in 1999 but the one that sticks is Iain Banks' ***Feersum Endjinn***, just the sort of supercharged cyberspace sort of thing that adds perspective to the day job... That and Ken MacLeod's ***The Stone Canal***. (I read the other two as well, but *The Stone Canal* was my favourite...) Sociopolitics meets hard SF on a large scale with characters, both real and AI, that everyone can identify with. Well, maybe not.

All in all I found it a sparse year, but the stuff I did read gleamed like nuggets...

GARY WILKINSON

Highly anticipated was Thomas Harris's ***Hannibal.*** Deeply flawed, but still interesting it split the critics and my own opinion. This deliciously twisted love story was certainly not what the fans were expecting.

Jake Arnott's ***The Long Firm*** was an exceptional first novel. Set in the London underground of the sixties, it is a crime novel that captures every nuance of its setting as five lives (written in five separate first-person tales) orbit around the Kray-like uber-villain 'Mad' Harry Starks. Read the first page and be immediately hooked.

Ken Macleods' ***The Sky Road*** brought shipbuilding back to Scotland. Its dual-narrative alternative 'future', rather than history, shows a writer maturing into real talent. A fine addition to the series started with the *Star Fraction,* with each new volume informing on the rest. Sometime soon I will read them all again.

Jeff Long's ***The Descent*** was a pulpy journey into the centre of the

earth. Ridiculous and outrageous it remained a fun read and impossible to put down.

And in the chill winter days at the end of the Millennium I read Alan Moore's ***From Hell***, a deep dark graphic odyssey into the legend of Jack the Ripper, Freemasonry, magic and the birth of the twentieth century. Like *Watchmen* (re-read again this year) it is simply brilliant.

Stepping through the Silver Screen: The Fiction of Kim Newman

by Gary Wilkinson

'Nothing is real and nothing to get hung about'
Strawberry Fields Forever – The Beatles.

The twentieth century has seen cinema, only invented at the end of the last century, becoming the dominant art form and method of entertainment, only to be superseded by its bastard cousin, television. Now the mass media totally dominates our lives. During the century, written fiction has been splintered into a number of different genres which have constantly redefined themselves. Science fiction has flown from its gothic roots into golden age, new wave, cyberpunk and beyond. Crime has gone from the quiet parlours of country houses to the dark alleys of the mean streets. And horror has had to reflect this century of terror, where more lives have been lost in armed conflict that in all the rest of history. From a rather gentle product in the 1800s it has acquired sharp teeth and a blade and stalks ever-darker shadows. We have also entered a post-modern age. In fact it is so all encompassing that most of the time we scarcely notice it. This country's major art prize is won by an artist whose work features a video installation of the recreation of a Buster Keaton stunt endlessly repeated, from every possible angle and speed. A Welsh cleaner can briefly achieve national fame just because she drives badly. One of the most popular recent television programmes is a comedy sketch show which, although its humour is entirely based in Asian culture, has an eighty percent white audience. These are dazzling, exciting and insane times. One of the few writers to reflect this state of affairs is Kim Newman.

Kim Newman was born in 1959 in London, but grew in up in Somerset. After a brief career in the theatre and cabaret he branched out into freelance film and book criticism and then eventually into writing fiction. To say Kim Newman is prolific is an understatement. He has published very many short stories, a number of novels and many reviews, articles (including pieces for the internet) and non-fiction books, mainly on the cinema. He has written for virtually every film publication of note as well as for radio and television, where he has appeared as a presenter. As well as writing under his own name he has also published a number of works, mainly set in worlds based on *Games Workshop* games of the early nineties, as Jack Yeovil. He also writes in collaboration with his old friend Eugene Byrne. Together they have written a number of short stories and are currently working on the first novel of a new series. Most of his novels fall, or are pushed, into the horror genre, whilst his many short stories are either horror or science fiction, usually in that sub-category of science fiction known as alternative history. His work has garnered many awards.

...the abundance of disconnected images and styles that permeate contemporary culture...

Post-Modernism

Post-modernist theory is loose and amorphous. A disputed term, it has occupied much debate since the early nineteen-eighties. In the simplest and thus least satisfactory sense it refers generally to the phase of late twentieth century Western culture that succeeded the reign of 'high modernism', the 'Space Age', some time in the 1950s and '60s. Generally it has been applied to the abundance of disconnected images and styles that permeate contemporary culture in advanced capitalist societies. It exists in the so-called 'End of History', meaning the end of 'Cold War' certainty in state or religion. Post-modernism rejects the big ideas and certainties, and the difference between high and low culture.

Kim Newman is a very much a post-modernist especially when his work is compared to the ideas of Jean Baudrillard regarding 'hyperreality'. In his landmark 1975 essay, 'The Precession of Simulacra', Baudrillard introduced the notion that we inhabit a hyperreality, a hall of media mirrors in which reality has been lost in an infinity of reflections. We 'experience' events, first and foremost, as electronic reproductions of rumoured phenomena many times removed. How much of what we know of the world has been though our direct experience rather then through our mass media? The originals, invariably compared to their digitally enhanced representations, inevitably fall short. Televised sport allows the key moments of an event to be endlessly repeated, an opportunity missed by those watching live and *in situ*. A televised concert puts you on stage with the performer: how many of the people at the back of the crowd at the live show watch the stage or the close-ups on the huge Diamond-Vision screens to the side? In the "desert of the real," asserts Baudrillard, mirages outnumber oases and are more alluring to the thirsty eye. It seems reality isn't what it used to be. But it goes much further than that. Disneyland's Main Street, U.S.A, which depicts the sort of idyllic, turn-of-the-century community that only ever existed in Norman Rockwell paintings and MGM back lots, is a textbook example of self-referential simulation, a painstaking replica of something that never was, a pure simulacrum.

In producing his alternative histories Newman does not reach for the history book in the first instance; for the most part he creates his fictional universe by delving into our mutually remembered history of this century obtained via the cinema, television and the most popular works of written fiction. As he himself has said "I admit that my re-imaginings of recent history are drawn from mainly secondary sources, not least the fictions and fantasies thrown up by the 20th Century." In reading his short stories and novels we step through the flickering silver screen into the fictional universe beyond.

In his first novel *The Night Mayor* (1989) the super-villain Daine seeks escape in a cyberpunk virtual universe of his own construction, a melange of every noir movie ever made. In his world it is always four o'clock in the morning and it is always raining. Cyberpunk, especially in novels such as *Neuromancer* (1984), pays homage to the mean streets of Marlow and Sam Spade and to the Noir films they spawned: Newman filters it back out. It is a playful, irresistible game that Newman plays. How many of the characters do we recognise from their movie star name instead of their familiar black and white image? How many of his references can we spot? The reader is left in awe of Newman's vast knowledge, though not every reference needs to be recognised for the work to have its impact. It is a game that would continue in much of his later fiction.

This postmodern trickery reaches its zenith with the *USSA* stories, written in partnership with Eugene Bynre. They take a simple premise – what if the socialist revolution occurred in America, and that nation became communist, whilst Russia became capitalist? In 1917, following a Eugene Debs-led revolution, the United States becomes a socialist superpower, opposed to the other world superpower, a Czarist Russia. Although called a novel, *Back in the U.S.S.A.* (1997) is composed of several short stories, all except one of which were originally published in *Interzone*. Ranging in period from 1912 to post-socialist 1998, these stories

cover a wide range of serious topics, but manage to maintain a diversity of humorous pop-culture references throughout. A dazzling array of real and imaginary characters are presented to us from 'Scarface' Al Capone, this history's Stalin, to the *Likely Lads* Bob and Terry in a brilliant re-imagining of *Apocalypse Now* (1979) in 'Teddy Bears' Picnic'. Newman would come back to *Apocalypse Now* and also *Hearts of Darkness* (1991), the documentary about the turbulent making of *Apocalypse Now,* in the vampire novella 'Coppola's Dracula'. It is interesting that *Apocalypse Now* itself is based on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and Coppola takes a post-modernist approach in his adaptation by shifting the location from deepest Africa to the hell of the Vietnam War. In 'Coppola's Dracula' Newman shifts the location of both into his vampire-infested Carpathians. Coppola's actual filmed version of *Dracula* is itself post-modern in that it draws as much from previous Dracula movies as on the original novel. Other notable *USSA* stories include 'Citizen Ed' inspired by *Psycho* (book 1959, film 1960) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) (themselves inspired by real-life murderer Ed Gein) and Prince Charles's love life in 'Abdication Street'.

In other works the process is reversed and post-modernist imagery is drawn into his fictional character's lives. In *Jago* (1991) a powerful psychic allows the various members of Somerset village to project their dreams into reality with horrifying affect. Mythical creatures stalk the streets and a Martian Tripod, 'summoned' by an academic researching turn of the century invasion stories, crashes through the local woods. This was also a theme explored by Newman in *Bad Dreams* (1990) with its dreamscapes merging with reality, and also in the short story 'The Original Dr Shade' where a fictional character steps into the 'real' world to stalk its creator.

As well as the films themselves, Newman uses Hollywood's own past for inspiration. 'The Pierce Arrow Stalled, and...' is a fascinating study of the history of Hollywood. The Pierced Arrow was the name of a custom car belonging to silent film star and director Fatty Arbuckle. Due to it breaking-down he misses the fateful party in which an aspiring actress died in suspicious circumstances. In our history this led to a massive scandal and the downfall of Fatty, then one of the highest-paid stars in Hollywood. Via his story, Newman argues that this led to the introduction of the Hayes Code and a sharp reduction of the freedoms Hollywood then had. In Newman's story/history Fatty misses the party, avoids the scandal and thus Hollywood's licentiousness continues to increase until we are left with a film industry filled with explicit violence and hard-core sex. Another aspect of American history that heavily influenced Hollywood, among many other aspects of life, and which Newman returns to a number of times is McCarthyism.

In many of his short stories he will merge two seemingly incompatible genres to interesting effect, as in 'D & D' where the orcs and dungeons of the eponymous role-playing game universe are experienced by Vietnam grunts and 'The Big Fish' which deposits the classic hard-boiled detective into a Lovecraftean scenario; a sequel to *The Shadow over Innsmouth* transferred from the east coast to the mean streets of west coast 1940s Bay City and Hollywood.

With Newman's latest work, *Life's Lottery* (1999), he extends into other areas of post-modernism by examining the basic structure of the novel itself. It follows the same structure as such 'choose your own adventure' game books as *The Warlock of Fire Top Mountain* (1982), but with hopefully rather more literary merit. Written it the second person, after the end of each section, the reader is presented with a number of choices which lead to different sections. The rapidly branching options lead to large possible number of endings reflecting one's own life choices. There seems to a number of works of this sort springing up all over the internet but few seem to have made a serious attempt in print.

Vampires

Since Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, published in 1897, the eponymous villain has risen to become the premier horror icon of our time, appearing in literally hundreds of books, films and plays. Almost every popular horror writer has written about vampires to some extent, from the vicious blood-sucking undead of King's *Salem's Lot* (1977) to the fey old-world Romantics that populate the novels of Anne Rice. Newman is no exception.

In *Bad Dreams* he introduces the vampire-like Mr Skinner, 'The King of Cats', who sucks out the creativity and the life of all he comes across. This novel would also introduce an idea that would be expanded upon later, the vampire as yuppie. As Kim Newman has said "...I lived through the 1980s, when it seemed to me that much of the Western world was being run by people whose values, attitudes and methods owed a lot to Dracula and Vlad the Impaler." With the rise of Thatcher it seemed that a minority, especially the urban nouveau-riche financial whiz-kid yuppie, were benefiting, leeching, even 'feeding' off an increasingly impoverished majority.

Another Thatcherite character of Newman's who feeds parasitically off society is the aptly named Derek Leech, a Rupert Murdoch-like newspaper magnate who features in *The Quorum* (1994), as well as making an appearance in a number of Newman's short stories. *The Quorum*, a horror novel where no one dies, again explores the viscous and vacuous nature of the eighties, where three friends are offered a Faustian deal by Leech and gain wealth, glamour, and success at the expense of their other friend.

Newman combined these ideas along with his love of the postmodern inclusion of popular fiction to produce a sequel to *Dracula*, *Anno Dracula* (1992). The premise in this alternative history is that instead of being destroyed by Van Helsing, Dracula survives and in pursuing his original political ambitions he marries the widowed Queen Victoria and begins to spread his pestilence from the dark heart of the British Empire. Far from being horrified, many of the general populace are eager to take advantage of the situation, as would many in Thatcherite Britain, in this case by becoming 'new-bloods'. As in the *USSA* stories Newman merges fictional and historical characters and events. Instead of The Ripper, we have the vampire slaying Silver Knife, while Sir Francis Varney is the Viceroy of India (*Varney the Vampire* [1847] was a very popular early 'penny dreadful' vampire story). Dracula himself remains in the background as a grand Satan and around this black hole of evil the murder-mystery plot orbits. The adventurer Charles Beauregard and the vampire Geneviève Dieudonne (imported from a Jack Yeovil novel) hunt Silver Knife through a series of vignettes with an enormous number of fictional and non-fictional personages until they are brought into final confrontation with Dracula. It is obvious that Newman is having a great deal of fun.

Anno Dracula was followed by the more serious *Bloody Red Baron* (1995) which takes place in the trenches, and the skies above them, of the Western Front during the Great War. The horror factor is turned up a notch, building on the already horrific slaughter of our own history. The plot follows the pattern established in the first novel. The Hitler-like Dracula is again too big, too monstrous to fit in the conventional narrative although his influence is immense. In another series of vignettes we encounter characters such as the now vampirised writer Edgar Poe ('Allan' was a rarely used addition to his name given by his stepfather, something which Newman explores in his recent *Interzone* story 'Just Like Eddy') and his biographical subject, the Bloody Red Baron of the title, Von Richthofen. He and his flying circus confront Biggles and other allied air aces in thrilling dog fights, while as in our history, war has fed the fires not only of technical invention, but also of new scientific experimentation in vampirism, resulting in terrible new breeds of the undead. The novel examines a time when men's lives became mere statistics, pawns to be used and wasted by those running the war.

In the latest Dracula novel, *Dracula Cha-Cha-Cha* (US title: *Judgement of Tears* [1998]) Newman is again more playful, using as his background the *Dolce Vita* of 1950s Italy for another murder mystery. The novellas 'Coppola's Dracula' and 'Warhol's Dracula' form epilogues to the main series.

Fascism

Many of Newman's stories go on from the problems generated by right-wing capitalism to deal with outright fascist oppression. In fact, both of the first two Dracula novels start to explore this area by

examining societies that are moving towards totalitarianism, wherein violence (the vampiric blood-letting) is institutionalised. This is one reason why Newman has not shown us the 'Dracula' Nazis directly, although they are mentioned in passing. This has not, however, stopped Newman examining this aspect of fascism in other ways. In the alternate history short story 'Slow News Day' John Major (and Mr Spotty) celebrate the 50th anniversary of D-Day, the German invasion of England, on a rain-swept south coast. At first seemingly playful, like many of his alternate histories, this has a deep underlying sadness, becoming an examination of the banality of evil. In a similar vein, subject-wise, his next project, in partnership with Eugene Byrne (as with the *USSA* stories) is set in 1940's England where Operation Sealion has been successful and Hitler's armies have invaded Britain. *The Matter of Britain* is the first novel in a projected series of six.

> **"...I lived through the 1980s, when it seemed to me that much of the Western world was being run by people whose values, attitudes and methods owed a lot to Dracula and Vlad the Impaler."**

In 'The Original Dr Shade' Newman looks at how attitudes to fascism have changed over the century via the fabricated history of the fictional comic strip character Dr Shade. In typical post-modern style, a mixture of extracts from the Dr Shade stories of the thirties and forties, encyclopaedia entries, National Front flyers and newspaper articles are intermixed with a near-contemporary story regarding the resurrection of the character for the Leech-owned *Comet*. During the events of the story the character is sighted in the real world, and seems to becoming literally resurrected. The story shows how out-of-place the racist, anti-Semitic attitudes of the '30s Dr Shade (obviously derived from a character such as The Shadow but also reminiscent of Sapper's Bulldog Drummond) became. It is also a warning that, during the thirties these attitudes were not that unpopular and that, given the right circumstances, we are in danger of their return.

Another aspect of totalitarianism that Newman has returned to a number of times is McCarthyism. In the story 'The McCarthy Witch Trials' the witch-hunt is not for communists, but for real witches, while in the novel *Bad Dreams* the villain takes the opportunity of the witch-hunts to prey on creative minds. McCarthyism also influences the short story 'Famous Monsters' and the *USSA* alternative histories 'Tom Joad'. McCarthy himself actually make an appearance in the another *USSA* story 'In the Air'. In fact, at their core, all the *USSA* stories look at various aspects of oppression.

Newman also looks at fascism in *Jago*. One of the characters, a policeman, horrifically transforms himself into his dream, a cartoon-extreme Nazi. This novel looks at the oppression that can result within religious cults cut-off from the real world, and also what groups like the Hells Angels are potentially capable of when all restrictions are taken from society.

Nothing is Real

In *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, John Clute has criticised Newman's horror, essentially for not being horrible enough. Well this could be said to be the case, but a careful reading shows plenty of horror. It is just that Newman is rather economical with his shock effects. For instance, in the recent 'Warhol's Dracula', the rather detached ice-cool vampire character of Johnny Pop rises to all his horrible power for only a short moment, and it is that restraint which gives it all the more impact. Another occasion is in the beginning of *Bad Dreams* where a character wakes to find herself handcuffed to a severed arm. Newman keeps this fact from the reader until the very last sentence of the opening chapter, and thus delays the shock to greater effect. Also one does not easily forget the gory excesses of 'Citizen Ed', not least because they are for the most part taken from reality.

Other criticisms have been made that Newman is too light, that his fiction is too much froth and bubble. To some extent I hope I have disproved this. Although, like many post-modernists, he is playful and whimsical in execution, in subject matter he can be deadly serious. There has also been criticism against alternate history in general. Brian Stableford has said that it is the new fantasy, being easy to write and that it lacks the rigour of sf. Given the obviously vast research that Newman draws on I cannot see that it is true in his case. I feel that it can be just as insightful as any other genre or sub-genre. However even if that is true, in the end, all fiction is fictional, nothing is real and it is really nothing to get hungabout.

Thanks to Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne.

For further information on Kim Newman check out Dr Shade's Laboratory at http://indigo.ie/~imago/newman.html. b*More details on The Matter of Britain can be found at* http://www.angelfire.com/ak2/newmanbyrne/

A Select Kim Newman Bibliography compiled by Andrew M. Butler

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Too Clever By Half?

an interview with Kim Newman by Gary Wilkinson

Gary Wilkinson: You have to be one of the most prolific writers out there. What's the secret?

Kim Newman: I don't think I'm especially prolific by my own standards. I probably write a novel a year, and one other book project (non-fiction, a collaboration, whatever). It's been a while since I was also doing three or four Jack Yeovil books annually as well as my own novels. I think the illusion that I'm prolific has a lot to do with the amount of journalism and broadcasting I do in between the fiction. I have quite a range of freelance markets, which is called 'not keeping all your eggs in one basket', and therefore might seem to pop up all over the place: I doubt if you could find anyone else who'd contributed to the *New Statesman*, *Knave*, *Shock Xpress*, the *Guardian*, *Smash Hits*, *Radio Times*, *Eyeball*, *The Big Match*, etc. I don't write as much short fiction as I probably ought to; though I have rather a lot coming out this year, it was written over a lengthy period.

GW: I think you're being modest here and I was thinking in terms of the past and the present. Maybe not up to King-like standards, but there seems to be a lot of stuff with your name on it. I gather you don't suffer much from writer block!

KN: I admit that I can usually turn the writing on, and if I have an off-day – usually when other things get in the way rather than that sat-at-the-screen-with-no-ideas feeling – I'm a fast enough writer to catch up the next day or the next week.

GW: Is it easy to switch from journalism to fiction and vice versa?

KN: I tend to write fiction in the morning, and do the journalism in the afternoon. This isn't a hard and fast system, but it works roughly.

GW: Out of all the books you have written what's your favourite?

KN: Probably *The Quorum*, but there's a *Sophie's Choice* which-of-your-children-should-live sting to the question. I'm always most bound up with the current or most recent novel.

GW: Vampires seem to figure largely in your fiction. What's the attraction?

KN: I got into the genre because I was fascinated by the 1931 version of *Dracula*, which I saw at an impressionable age. I think the enduring appeal of the vampire is not down to one single thing (Goth sexiness, say) but because it can be recycled to have many, many meanings. The project of the *Anno Dracula* series has been to explore as many of the metaphorical or literal meanings of vampirism, and the figure of Dracula, as is possible.

GW: I gather you intended to do a couple of fill-in stories for the *Dracula* series – a western and a gangster story. Are they likely to appear or will you continue onwards into the twentieth century with the adventures of Johnny Alucard?

KN: The next thing I do will be to finish Johnny Alucard, which ought to conclude the cycle. Other stories would be fill-ins or side-trips.

GW: In looking at your work I detect a pro-left, anti-right wing bias. Is this deliberate?

KN: I come from a mildly leftist background (my parents are craftspeople/artists), went to Sussex University in the late 1970s, was on the dole in the early '80s, worked for *City Limits* (I felt like one of the least political of the collective), lived through Thatcherism and John Major, and am a feeling, sensitive human being (i.e. a woolly liberal). I think it'd be hard for me not to write out of this sensibility. I think of myself as a libertarian socialist, but as an electoral pragmatist I voted for Tony Blair. I probably despise the Tories a lot more than I admire New Labour, and my feelings about the current government are not untouched by a sense of betrayal I didn't have when the Enemy was in power.

GW: These are my feelings exactly. I once saw an interview on TV with a young musician who basically said we didn't expect Nye Bevan to rise unreconstructed from the grave but we did expect something.

KN: Absolutely. Then again, it's Tory Conference week, which is always good for reminding you just how much more loathsome and evil they are than New Labour. What can you say about people who feel compassion for General Pinochet but no one else.

GW: In my article I claim you are a Post-Modernist. What do you think?

KN: Guilty, with qualifications. Even as a critic, I haven't devoted a lot of time to theory since the late '70s (when I took quite a bit of Structuralism and semiology on board). I certainly write the way I do and about the things I write about through personal interest or obsession, rather than by following some abstract notion of any movement I might belong to. It may well be that I'm interested in satire or irony because I grew up on *Mad Magazine* or listening to Spike Jones rather than because I was poring over theory texts. The abiding sin of my generation, which I own up to, is being too clever by half.

GW: Yes, I think few people sit down and think "Right I going to write a post-structuralist, post-modernist, post-Marxist..." Still as a 'critic' I can talk about the end product rather than the process... I see you as the playful end of post-modernism. After all it's a broad church pulling in Pynchon and Gibson among many, many others. You must have realised you were taking a post-modernist stance in writing *Life's Lottery*? In other words why a hypertext novel?

KN: I prefer the term 'choose your own adventure' to hypertext. What I was trying to do was be experimental but still be appealing to general readers. As to why, well – someone had to write it. Once I had the idea, I knew someone would write a book like this and there's no percentage in being second. I've written enough different types of novel to earn a chance to play around a little, but there are clearly a great many opportunities to do interesting things in the format.

GW: It obvious that the cinema is a huge influence in your writing.

Where did this love come from?

KN: That viewing of *Dracula* made me interested in horror as a genre, equally in film and literature. A year or so later, I found my interests broadening, beyond horror movies into movies in general (and the same in books). I did a course in American Cinema at Sussex (one term on Westerns, one on gangsters) which was probably influential, though perhaps not as much as the simple fact of being on a campus and near a town where a lot of films were being shown all the time. I've been making notes on every film I've seen since my mid-teens (a useful resource), and have catholic tastes in cinema. Of course, I also earn a significant part of my living as a film critic, and frequently the ideas I toss around in my criticism turn up in my fiction.

GW: I believe you started as a film reviewer for *Sight and Sound* by seeing all the terrible stalk and slash movies no one else wanted to see.

KN: It was the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, which was later incorporated into *Sight and Sound*. The magazine's remit was to review everything, and I said I'd see anything. Actually, the lowest rung of film to cover then was porno, which I covered (Anne Billson did much the same a year or so later) for a while.

GW: There seems to bit of a mini revival in horror at the moment especially in the cinema with the *Blair Witch Project*, *Stigmata*, *The Haunting,* etc. Also a number of previously banned films have been released on video such as *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Exorcist* and the re-release of *Clockwork Orange* may be just around the corner. Is this a move back from the in-jokes of *Scream* into real horror?

KN: It's a blip in the cycle. No idea how long it will last.

GW: Am I right in thinking that *Bad Dreams* was originally a film script? Are there any plans for any more screenplays? Any chances to direct?

KN: *Bad Dreams*, and also *Orgy of the Blood Parasites* (aka *Bloody Students*), were originally film outlines, done in collaboration with Neil Gaiman, Phil Nutman and Stefan Jaworzyn for producer Richard Gordon and director Norman J. Warren. I've done scripts from my novels *The Quorum* and *Anno Dracula* and the story 'The Original Dr Shade', but they seem stuck in development limbo. I'll take movie meetings, but I'm not that interested in frittering away more time on projects that don't happen. I directed in the theatre and don't really want to do that again. If any of my movie projects happen, I'd probably want to take some sort of executive producer credit.

GW: What's your favourite movie?

KN: My favourite movies are *To Have And Have Not*, *A Canterbury Tale*, *The Searchers*, *Kiss Me Deadly* and many others that vary from day to day.

GW: The worst?

KN: I've seen an enormous number of dreadful films, but I probably hate blah pictures like *Betsy's Wedding* or *Dying Young* more than the most inept Z-features, though I despise Troma's output. Anything by Joel Schumacher is likely to get on my nerves.

GW: You decided to choose one the more popular Alternate Histories, a German invasion of England during WWII, for your next project with Eugene Byrne. Why was that?

KN: Having done *Back in the USSA*, which was an alternative history of perhaps limited interest, we wanted to do something with a broader appeal, that 'real people' might get something out of without feeling excluded by the ton of inside knowledge and weird sense of humour needed to appreciate the earlier collection. The Nazis winning the war is still the big 'what if' most people have had to think of at some time in their lives, and WWII is still very much a current issue (look how many Spielberg films have WWII settings). We also wanted to do a generation-spanning soap opera, on the model of *Heimat*, and the Nazi theme was there for the taking. Though there have been many books and stories on the theme, no one has ever taken the long view: we want to do a book in each decade from the '40s to the 2000s.

GW: Am I right in thinking that you said somewhere that you more interested in how culture is affected in alternative history than in wargaming?

KN: Yes, that sounds like me. I was probably reacting to the number of WWII alternate histories that just shift armies around and play with Nazi toys.

GW: You started as a kazoo player and cabaret performer, co-editing *In Dreams,* a book of short stories themed around the 45rpm single*,* and musical personalities such as Buddy Holly in *In The Air* appear in your work. To what extent does popular music influence your work?

KN: I have a fairly shallow interest in pop music, like everyone else, but it's certainly part of the cultural stew – along with movies, TV, comics, pulps, serious literature, visual arts, politics, scandal, media studies, true crime, etc – that feeds a lot of my work. I have a very eclectic CD collection.

GW: I mention the Beatles in passing in my article.

KN: The Beatles are certainly the first pop music I can remember beyond what they used to call 'children's records'; however, if I were to pick a '60s UK pop group who embody the kind of things I'm interested in doing in my work it would be the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band.

GW: What's next?

KN: I've just finished a draft of a novel called *An English Ghost Story*, which is just what it sounds like. Currently, I have *Life's Lottery*, a choose-your-own-adventure novel, and *Millennium Movies*, a study of end-of-the-world movies, in the shops, and coming soon in the UK will be *Dracula Cha Cha Cha* (*Judgment Of Tears: Anno Dracula 1959* in the US), the third in the series, and a collection called *Seven Stars*, which concentrates on pulp adventure stories (a slightly weightier lot of tales will be coming out as *Unforgivable Stories*). Also due immediately is *Andy Warhol's Dracula*, a chapbook novella which fits into the *Anno Dracula* series after 'Coppola's Dracula', and will be a chunk of a novel I might do next called *Johnny Alucard*, set in Hollywood in the '70s and '80s. And a BFI Classic booklet on *Cat People*. There's also a collection called *Where The Bodies Are Buried* in the works. And I suppose I ought to get round to *Something More Than Night*, the turn-of-the-century England/wartime Hollywood, horror-mystery novel I've been thinking of for years.

TWO YEARS AGO WE CONDUCTED A POLL TO DISCOVER WHAT, ACCORDING TO THE READERS OF VECTOR*, WERE THE BEST BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS OF THE LAST FIFTY YEARS. THE RESULTS APPEARED IN* VECTOR 201. *AT EASTERCON 1999 THE BSFA HELD A NUMBER OF PANELS TO DISCUSS THE RESULTS AND THE MERITS OF THE CHOSEN NOVELS. THE FOLLOWING PIECE IS AN EDITED AND REVISED TRANSCRIPT OF THE SECOND OF THESE PANELS.*

The Best of British II: The 1960s

Andrew M. Butler: Colin Greenland, can I ask you to begin by, broadly speaking, defining the New Wave?

Colin Greenland: The New Wave was never really there. 'New Wave' is such a bad phrase. It suggests a concerted movement, a unanimous group of writers getting together and deciding what they

were going to do – in the way that the Pre-Raphaelites, Impressionists or the Surrealists did in painting. That wasn't what happened.

What happened was, in 1964 Michael Moorcock took over *New Worlds* magazine, with the intention of shaking it up a bit, wanting to stretch the boundaries to include work which was not merely generic, but individual, ambitious, idiosyncratic; which made its own rules. A great deal of formal experimentation started happening, or started being printed. Maybe it was going on already. Jimmy Ballard seems to believe it was. The important point was, now there was an organ for it.

Then people who were familiar with science fiction looked at *New Worlds* and saw something they didn't recognise. They needed a name for it, and the best they could come up with was the 'New Wave', which was what cinéphiles had called a group of innovative French directors at the end of the fifties, people like Jean Luc Godard and Alain Resnais. It wasn't a term that the writers took for themselves.

Paul Kincaid: It's worth pointing out that around this time, the early 1960s, in America Judith Merril was producing her *The Year's Best SF* anthologies, which drew on a whole host of sources which were not purely genre science fiction; you had a lot of mainstream writers in. This opening of science fiction to the influences of a wider range of literature wasn't purely British – it was something that was happening in science fiction in general at the time.

> The New Wave was never really there.

AMB: Indeed. Looking at the top three of the period, in at number three was Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), which is coming at sf from the other angle, from the mainstream for want of a better term, and using sf to do what Burgess wants to do.

CG: Which was social criticism, highlighting the alienation of youth, and at the same time experimenting with language – it's all there, very much like what was in *New Worlds*, but discovered by someone whose heritage and background were different.

PK: At the same time, I don't think Burgess was being influenced by anything within science fiction, but I suspect that Burgess was *influencing* science fiction. *Clockwork Orange*, because it was experimenting with language, because it was concerned with social criticism, was actually doing an awful lot of what the 'New Wave' found itself doing in the later years of the 1960s. I wonder how influential Burgess was.

CG: As soon as you say that, you can see John Brunner, can't you, with a first edition of *A Clockwork Orange*, underlining bits and sending off long letters to Anthony Burgess about Russian derivations. The genre boundaries seemed to be softening, and there was a great deal of communication back and forth. A lot of the formal experimentation in *New Worlds* was an attempt to adopt prose techniques developed by Russian modernism in the 1920s and 1930s, and to apply them to science fiction.

PK: Look at the top of our list: *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968). I sometimes think John Dos Passos should have sued, it was so close a reworking of *USA* (1930-36), even down to small elements of the use of language. *USA* is one of the models of modernism; I don't know why because it doesn't coincide with a great deal else of what was being written. But it *is* one of those key texts and Brunner brought all of that, wholesale, into science fiction.

AMB: It's an interesting comparison with modernism – maybe it's true of all literary movements. You could try to define modernism as something which roughly happened within a period, that whilst there were people who came up with manifestos there was no sense of forcing people to write in a certain way, but there were people like Ford Madox Ford and Ezra Pound providing a space for these things to be published. It's the same kind of loose coalition of people who knew each other, respected each other.

CG: Michael Moorcock as Ezra Pound and J G Ballard as T S Eliot?

Audience Member: But what would you do with a writer, say, Alfred Bester, who predates the New Wave and is *Count of Monte Cristo*-meets-James Joyce?

CG: In his early editorials, Moorcock was busy jettisoning as much classic science fiction as he could over the side.

AMB: But that's what you always do with the previous generation.

CG: Yes, so Asimov was out and Heinlein was out, Clarke was out. But Bester was in, Bester was sanctified, Bester was exactly the kind of writer that Moorcock admired and wanted to encourage.

Moorcock may have been jettisoning much of the science-fiction tradition, and working in the way that other enabling editors did, like Ford and Pound, but he was nevertheless drawing strongly on the tradition that the science-fiction magazine was a place where experiments could be done. Maybe the experiments were of different kinds now, but things could be tried, could be put in print, could get a response from readers. Moorcock could print something, and of course that might stimulate other writers to try other things. Looked at that way, a science-fiction magazine *is* a rolling communal project.

PK: Let's not forget that a lot of what Moorcock published in *New Worlds* was rubbish. There's a lot you read now and you cringe, because there's no way you can conceive of someone wanting to write them, let alone publish them. But they were part of trying something new. It's what Beckett says: 'Fail. Fail again. Fail better.'

CG: It was also a time when it was a virtue to be new and original. Unlike today, when publishers are nervous of anything too unfamiliar. In 1965, the younger and more different you were, the more likely you were to get your novel published by Jonathan Cape or John Calder.

PK: The Sixties was something that happened to two hundred people in central London, the New Wave that happened to about twenty people in and around Ladbroke Grove. It's actually a very small microcosm, and it was very much infected with the spirit of London in the 1960s: it was a social phenomenon, it was trying to do the same thing in fiction as was happening in the world around it. It was all tied up in the spirit of experimental music, bright clothes, youth orientation, optimism: they were the guiding spirits.

AMB: The other novel which made the top three was Keith Roberts's *Pavane* (1968). How does that fit into what we've been saying?

CG: Is there anything in it that couldn't have been done ten years before?

PK: No, and at the same time it could have been done ten years later, and still have seemed of that time. It's not a novel very closely tied to the age in which it was written.

CG: Is that an effect of the parallel world form? What you write is automatically detached from a contemporary context, however it reflects or comments on it.

PK: It might be. But it's not as simple as a parallel worlds story tends to be. You've got the fairy influence in there as well. I think that's part of what loosens it up; it's timeless because it's dealing with something on a more mythic level.

> I remember Moorcock complaining about British writers sending him stories written in a mid-Atlantic dialect, where people called each other 'Mac' and drank a lot of martinis.

CG: That's another part of the 'New Wave' project, as much due to Aldiss as Moorcock: the establishment of a distinctively British voice in science fiction. I remember Moorcock complaining about British writers sending him stories written in a mid-Atlantic dialect, where people called each other 'Mac' and drank a lot of martinis. You can see it in Carnell's *New Worlds*: British writers trying to imitate what they saw as an American product. and picking up a tone and a set of concerns,

like Cliff Richard starting out by imitating Elvis Presley, but also because the magazines they had to sell to were American. The New Wave was trying a different voice, perhaps a more European voice.

PK: A British voice distinct from the voice of the 'Cosy Catastrophe' – that is, the Cosy Catastrophe as it was conceived to be rather than it actually was. There was this image that British science fiction wrote nice middle class stories about nice middle class people surviving an analogue for the war and re-establishing their nice middle class lives. A lot of what was happening in the 1960s was deliberately going against that image. Roberts started writing with *The Furies* (1966) which was following that agenda precisely, but then he almost instantly changed to *Pavane* which was very much against that agenda.

AMB: Perhaps he needed to get it out of his system before he could find his voice.

PK: He actually needed to get into print. He said to me that when he wrote *The Furies* he got a letter from the publisher saying 'This is lovely, can we have one of these every six months, please?'

AMB: We've talked about the top three, but which other books from the 1960s should we remember?

PK: We have to say that talking about a selection of the best science-fiction novels of the 1960s is misleading, because a lot of the best work was being done by necessity in short fiction, because that whole sense of literary experimentation works better in short form. There's more opportunity to fail, which is key to the process. The key works of the 1960s were actually short stories, more than novels. The novels are simply those that tend to get reprinted more readily.

AMB: Often when those short stories got expanded into novels, it was a sense of dilution, rather than a continuation of the same thing on a large scale.

PK: I think in Aldiss's case, *Greybeard* (1964) and *Barefoot in the Head* (1969).

CG: *Barefoot in the Head* is difficult to remember. It's so noisy.

PK: But it was so much of the period, it was the most sixties novel in science fiction. Maybe that's why it's not remembered now.

AMB: Was it one which had been written before and had to find its market?

CG: No, that was *Report on Probability A*. He wrote the first version of that in 1962, as a direct response to Robbe-Grillet and the French *nouveau roman*, but he couldn't get it published until six years later.

PK: I actually think it's too slavish, just as Brunner was too slavish of Dos Passos.

CG: I could imagine myself rereading *Report on Probability A*, but I couldn't imagine myself getting all the way through *Barefoot in the Head* now. In its own way, *Greybeard* is a cosy catastrophe, isn't it?

PK: But a lot of the 1960s New Wave novels were cosy catastrophes, but jazzed up in some way. That goes on into the 1970s, with Chris Priest's *Fugue for a Darkening Island* (1972), Mike Harrison's *The Committed Men* (1971).

AMB: Colin, what would your favourite books of the period be?

CG: I'd go for *The Drowned World* (1962) or *The Crystal World* (1966), because it's a finer piece of writing. The hallucinations in *The Crystal World* are just staggering. *The Drowned World* is still a bit crude in some ways. At the time nobody knew what he was talking about. I've always said that somewhere, not very far away, there is a parallel world where Ballard is recognised as the major British writer of our time and the whole of our national literature re-organised itself around him and what he was doing.

PK: It came close to that around the time of *Empire of the Sun* (1984)

CG: But that was too late. That was Ballard dispensing with formal experimentation – in fact, dispensing with science fiction altogether to attempt a barely fictionalized autobiography. It's a fine book, and I'm delighted that it got so much attention, but that was from all the people who would never have spoken up for *The Atrocity Exhibition* or *Crash*. I think there was a major cultural shift going on in the pages of Ballard's experimental fiction, that could have reshaped everything, but was never actually allowed to. It makes more sense now. *Crash* makes much more sense now than it ever did in 1973.

PK: That's possibly true of a number of the books of the time.

CG: Yes, the later Jerry Cornelius stories, with mini Rolls Royces and the revival of musicals in the West End – twenty years ago, those were absurd things to suggest.

AMB: There's a sense of New Wave science fiction being better at prediction than the rest of science fiction.

CG: Much better than logical extrapolation. You'd find far more keys to the 1990s in 1960s Moorcock and Ballard than in Larry Niven.

AMB: One of the things that has come out of the criticism of cyberpunk and postmodernism is that Ballard is returned to again and again as the point that science fiction becomes respectable, becomes literary (ignoring Bester, of course).

PK: But he wasn't, not at the time.

CG: He was nasty.

PK: He only became respectable in retrospect, after *Empire of the Sun* when everyone said, 'We know what he's writing about, and everything else is really spiffy, but we didn't say so at the time, because it would have been *infra dig.*' At the time *nothing* was making science fiction respectable. *New Worlds*'s finest moment was publishing Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron* (1969) and getting questions asked in the House.

AMB: It's not certain who asked the question, and what the answer is, no one ever gives any evidence. Joseph Nicholas did some research and found that, 'the question was not asked on the floor of the House; instead, it arose in an exchange over Arts Council spending priorities during an enquiry into this then relatively new body by one of the then select committees (or whatever they were then called). *New Worlds* was mentioned as an example of the sort of magazine about which the questioner had doubts; but no specific story was mentioned'. Any more books from the 1960s?

CG: In science fiction, as in pop music, most of the sixties actually happened in the seventies.

PK: A lot of the things you remember from the 1960s turn out to be the 1970s. Drawing a nice chronological line is not that easy.

AMB: That's why there's a difference between the way the panels divided and the list of top threes: you are suddenly looking at a long 1960s.

To leap ahead, as 1960s culture in some ways became the mainstream, that in some ways perhaps we're paying the cost for, in terms of the society we're in now, with lifestyles as commodities, drugs, AIDS, fragmented families, run-down estates and so on, has the New Wave had a lasting effect for good or for ill? Has it changed things?

PK: A lot less than we thought it would at the time.

CG: But a lot more than it seems on the surface. When you start a revolution, you say, 'We're going to change the world, we're going to make everything better'. You don't, of course. In the end, entropy takes over, the distributors cancel your magazine, and the world rolls on, oblivious. Inevitably, though, you do have an effect. The most noticeable effect of the New Wave was to make science fiction self-conscious, which I think takes a different form now. Science fiction has become very professional, very specialised.

Andy Sawyer: It's a sense of knowing your market, writing for a niche, which is what's happening now – very much the reverse of what people were trying to do back then. That's one of the ways in which we can't see the project as a success.

CG: I was looking at Brian Aldiss's collection, *The Moment of Eclipse* (1970), which is a mixture of different stories and different styles, science fiction, fantasy, with other stories that aren't anything of the kind. That sort of book was possible then, but is not possible now. The genre boundaries have hardened again with a vengeance, because that's the way the industry's developed. Everything's more defined and marketed and targeted.

We became conscious in the 1960s of what this stuff called

'science fiction' actually is, what it can be, what its limits are. The way we learned all those things was by trying to break down the forms and assumptions. What those writers were saying was, 'It doesn't have to be about spaceflight, or about the future; it doesn't have to have a beginning, middle and end; plot is an old-fashioned idea, that can go. Naive literalism, that can go – let's throw out all these old conventions and see what we've got.'

Since then, a lot of the old stuff has come back. We understand plot, what plot does and why you need it, and we're a great deal better at character. In his condensed novels Ballard was trying to get rid of what he called the 'the great tide of conventional narration', all the *he said*'s and *she said*'s, and people opening doors and going in and out rooms. It wasn't until Ballard went all the way back and reinvented retrospective fiction, and wrote his Second World War novel, with a beginning, middle and end, that anyone really took any notice of him.

AMB: And then we suddenly use it to understand all his other fiction. It became the lost key, that we didn't realise we'd lost.

CG: The other thing that the New Wave did was raise the standards of writing. There's still bad writing in science fiction, but I'd venture to say that it's not *nearly* as bad as it was before.

Audience Member: Self-conscious also in matter of style, like Gibson and Sterling in cyberpunk, another non-linear movement; it's much more stylistically aware. I think that the New Wave made that concern legitimate in science fiction.

PK: A parallel effect was also an openness. Science fiction is very conscious of itself, but it's also more conscious that there are things besides itself, that there are other literatures, other ways of presenting it. There are films, comics, much more than just science fiction on the page. It's become bigger. You still get the core genre writer, who tries to make science fiction very big in scope, dealing with huge planets or vast ships, but very small in scale in that it's dealing with things core to science fiction. But there's an increasing number of writers moving outside that core where the ground is getting fuzzier and fuzzier.

AMB: That's starting in the 1960s, where Aldiss writes in an article essay 'Judgement at Jonbar' in *SF Horizons* #1 (1964) that: '[T]here is no sf novel that is purely an sf novel. At some stage all sf novels turn into something else' (p. 22). It's always detective fiction or western fiction or romance fiction as well.

PK: It's maybe just an exaggeration of what was there before, but it's due to what people were prepared to do in their writing and their reading. If you look at the book reviews that appeared in *New Worlds*, they were not just reviewing the latest science-fiction novel, they were reviewing a range of literature.

CG: They reviewed sociology books, new social theory, art criticism too. They rubbished most of them, but they thought it was part of their remit to examine them.

AMB: We've looked at where it succeeded, but where did it fail?

PK: Probably in exactly the same things we said it succeeded in. It didn't open up science fiction as brashly, broadly and enthusiastically as it expected.

AMB: It still remained predominantly white and male, in terms of who was writing in *New Worlds*.

PK: At the start of the sixties there was Naomi Mitchison, *Memoirs of A Spacewoman* (1962), in the late 1960s you have the early works of Angela Carter; there was the beginning of what would later become feminist science fiction. It's worth noting that it was starting. But that was almost totally unrelated to *New Worlds*.

CG: *New Worlds* missed it completely.

PK: Apart from Pamela Zoline.

CG: *New Worlds* published 'The Heat Death of the Universe' (1967) in their first large format edition. That's a story that goes on just reverberating. The implications were much bigger than they realised at the time.

PK: But she didn't actually write much more after that, there was only one collection, *Busy About the Tree of Life and Other Stories* (1988).

AMB: She perhaps used all her ideas up in one story: Taoism, the East versus the West, all the world turning into California – Microsoft and Disney taking over the world echoes that – using earlier equivalents of chaos theory, entropy as a metaphor for understanding everyday life, the numbered sections, lists, the whole arsenal of New Wave literary weapons.

CG: Alienation, schizophrenia, the Laingian view that inner space was more real than the outside world...

AMB: And there's the domesticity – what's more 'cosy' than a woman preparing a birthday party for her children? It's another catastrophe story.

CG: We haven't exhausted that story yet. It was probably the most important story that *New Worlds* ever published. It's strange that one of its most important themes was hardly recognised at the time, and didn't really make it onto the agenda, which was that there could be a sexual politics.

AMB: Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* was 1968, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* was 1970; the third wave of feminist consciousness (after Wollstonecraft and then the suffragette movement) was very late 1960s, into the 1970s, it was very much in the air at that time.

CG: But it really wasn't one of the things the *New Worlds* writers were listening to.

Andy Sawyer: It's perhaps inevitable that you say you're going to change the world, and it does change, but never as you envisaged it.

CG: You have an effect, but not the effect you wanted.

AMB: Butterflies in the rain forest again.

Christopher Priest: I was around during the New Wave, and although I don't disagree with a lot of what you've said, one of the good things the New Wave did was to bring across to Britain writers who weren't doing so well in America, who found a voice in Britain and then exported themselves back – Disch and Sladek, for example, Spinrad less so.

There's something I disagree with Colin about. He said that the New Wave had an impact and it went on for years, but that it didn't really appear until *New Worlds* went into large format. I think the impact began before that. I was a frequent visitor to Ladbroke Grove in the mid-1960s, before *New Worlds* went large-format (which was in 1967). It wasn't like cafe society, but what was developing was very much a series of in-group attitudes about what was OK and what wasn't OK about pre-New Wave sf. Some writers were deemed OK, like Alfred Bester or Philip K. Dick or Bob Sheckley, but if you were like Philip E. High or Don Malcolm you were cast out into the outer darkness. I personally disliked that because it threw out a lot of writers, not only these, who I felt were potentially interesting.

Finally, the British New Wave seemed to create a new way of writing, which was seized upon by the lesser lights of American sf as a new way of writing the old stuff: Stephen Goldin, David Gerrold, Harlan Ellison, etc., began writing all these awful experimental stories and producing 'new wave' anthologies that no one wanted to read.

PK: The thing about the American New Wave was that, however much it might have taken the British New Wave as a starting point, it was in no way the same phenomenon. The British New Wave was distinguished by an air of formal experimentation, an expansive air that there was more going on than just science fiction. The America New Wave was very much more taken up with iconoclasm as a religion. It can be summed up in the agenda of *Dangerous Visions*: breaking taboos. And it didn't matter whether it was done in experimental or traditional ways, in interesting ways or uninteresting ways, breaking the taboo was all you had to do.

AMB: They're skittles, you knock them down.

CG: Which is perhaps where self-consciousness starts to turn into professionalism. Sf turns back into a venue, a thing to be written,

Time and memory are every bit as important as space and action.

rather than a set of options for a writer.

I'm not sure I take Chris's point about the manifesto or lack of it, though. What he's describing is a set of attitudes, the ethos of a coterie, but that's not the same as saying: 'This is the way we are all going to write now.'

Christopher Priest: You were talking about movements like the Pre-Raphaelites and the Dadaists, who fomented theories about art and issued manifestos. The New Wave in England wasn't like that. But just because there wasn't a formal manifesto doesn't mean there wasn't a manifesto in mind. The Jerry Cornelius stories were pure manifesto writing, and people were joining in, like Maxim Jakubowski and Norman Spinrad.

CG: But anyone was allowed to join in. To me, the funny thing is the way it got turned around. Moorcock had created Cornelius, and the proposition was that anyone could write a Cornelius story. For a long time writers known and unknown routinely submitted Cornelius stories to *New Worlds*. Langdon Jones and Moorcock put together *The Nature of the Catastrophe* (1971), a collection of Cornelius stories by other writers. But by the end of the seventies, Moorcock had taken Cornelius back again. 'It's my ball, and I'm going home.' The point of the ball, initially, was that it was for everyone, to play with however they liked, but when they did he decided he didn't much like their games.

AMB: There's public rules and private rules, and you never know when which are operating.

CG: I don't really know how else *New Worlds* could have been, though. A magazine isn't an infinite archive. Some writers would have to be in, others would have to be out. According to Mike, a lot of the editorial decisions were negotiated co-operatively. He would be enthusiastic for a particular story, so that would go in, then Lang or Jim Sallis or Tom Disch or whoever might be all for something else, so that would go in too, even if it was something Mike didn't care for very much. But some things would have to be rejected.

Before the end of the Carnell *New Worlds* a group of writers had emerged, regularly publishing in the magazine. Robert Presslie, Don Malcolm, John Phillifent, and others. After the change, they almost all vanished completely, they ceased to publish.

PK: Some of them did other things – Phillifent did a load of *The Man from UNCLE* books in the late 1960s.

Christopher Priest: I feel sorry now for Don Malcolm, who was really crushed by it. He was a young writer, whose work perhaps wasn't very good but he cared about what he was doing and his stories were improving. The *New Worlds* lot just laughed at him. That's the downside of it.

AMB: This sort of thing is probably true of all 'movements', the creation of an other to demonise.

PK: Sterling in his Vincent Omniaveritas columns was doing much the same in *Cheap Truth*.

Maureen Kincaid Speller: Listening to the way that you've described it, it struck me that there are parallels with the cyberpunk movement and those who attached themselves to it, to the extent that I could predict what was going to happen next.

PK: We shouldn't forget that the New Wave wasn't all of British science fiction of the 1960s. There was a very strong traditional science fiction being written at the time which was as strong, as popular, as effective, as the New Wave. It was appearing in *New Worlds* and elsewhere, in *New Writings*, *SF Impulse*. There was a lot of science fiction outside *New Worlds*, there was a lot of science fiction outside Ladbroke Grove.

Andy Sawyer: My own attitude, as a very distant reader, was a more inclusive one, perhaps erroneous: I could identify the Moorcock/Ballard/Aldiss axis around *New Worlds*, but what I would have called New Wave would have included Compton, Cowper, Roberts, as people who were writing fiction which I could identify as something new.

PK: There was a very distinctively British style of writing which was developing in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in Roberts, Compton, Cowper, Coney, Priest, in a distinctively English voice.

AMB: How would you define that voice?

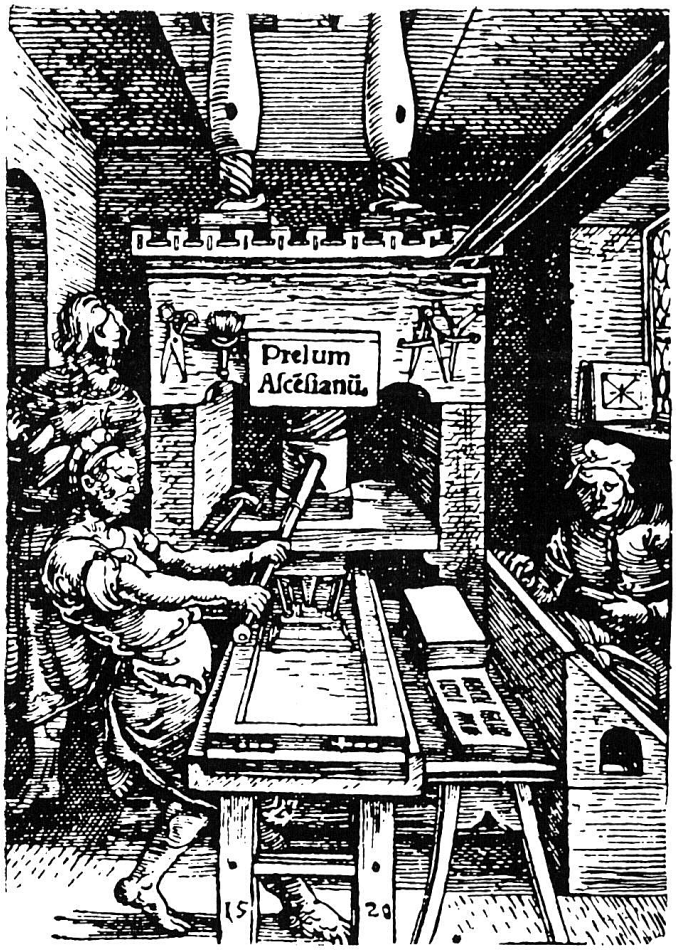
PK: Read the books and you can see it.

CG: Oh, I think we can say something more than that. It's ironic, isn't it? It's informed with a sense of literary tradition, not simply spinning out words and racking up pages. It feels the tensions and connotations of language, so it's richer in history, and mood, and atmosphere, and the shades of character. Time and memory are every bit as important as space and action.

PK: It's being aware of the landscape.

AMB: I'm afraid we've run out of time, but given that we've said that so much of what we see as 1960s actually was published in the 1970s, we'll return to the subject of landscape when we talk about that period. In the meantime, many thanks to Paul Kincaid and Colin Greenland.

Many thanks to Chris Priest, Andy Sawyer and others for their contributions from the audience.



First Impressions

Book Reviews edited by Steve Jeffery

Note: All novels marked: 🕮 are eligible for the 1999 BSFA Award for Best Novel. All collections and anthologies marked: ✎ contain stories that are eligible for the 1999 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

Poul Anderson – *Operation Chaos*

Tor Orb, 1999, 256pp, $12.95 ISBN 0-312-87242-9

Reviewed by John D. Owen

Alternative worlds where magic instead of science predominates are no new thing in the blurred world of sf & fantasy, as this reprint of Poul Anderson's *Operation Chaos* demonstrates. Consisting of four stories woven together into one 'novel', the first part of this book dates back to 1956, the last to 1969, with the linkages installed to turn the quartet into a single entity in 1971. It just about works as a novel, though is of necessity a rather episodic one.

The storylines centre on Steve Matuchek and Ginnie Graylock, a werewolf and a witch in a world where magic is dominant over science. Anderson's cleverness is in depicting a world that is recognisably 1950s America, with just enough things changed to power a quartet of plots. Those things taken for granted in 1950s America (the car, the TV, the technology, etc) are all replaced by their magical counterparts. The magic is systematic, substituting for science. The step beyond is the literality of the Judaeo-Christian mythology; there really is a Heaven and a Hell, and they do interact with Earth in various ways. The four plotlines feature encounters with an afreet (a Moslem genie), a fire elemental and an incubus (the slightest of the four plots) before a final climactic encounter taking place in Hell itself.

Where *Operation Chaos* shows its age is in the characters. While Ginnie Graylock is a thoroughly modern lady (for the late fifties), she's very much a wish-fulfilment character of the gorgeous, brainy and brave variety so common in fifties sf. Her modern equivalent would probably only find a place in a Piers Anthony fantasy novel. The hero is similarly single-dimensional: brave to a fault, incredibly lucky and lacking in any motivation other than defending his turf. Well, he is a werewolf, so maybe that is understandable. The two interact (by the third story they are married) in ways predicated by 1950s mores, and seem terribly dated and flat as a result. Still, *Operation Chaos* makes for an interesting if uninvolving read.

William Barton and Michael Capobianco – *Iris*

Avon Books, 1999, 436pp, $6.99 ISBN 0-380-73038-3

Reviewed by Scott T. Merrifield

If there is one thing I dislike more than humorous fantasy and sf writers it is novels written by more than one author, as the quality varies tremendously from chapter to chapter, even page to page. *Iris* is no exception, it begins badly and finishes pretty much how it began.

The book cover is littered with praise from the science fiction community; *Locus* called *Iris* "intriguing... disorienting... a fine novel... Barton and Capobianco prove themselves a team to watch for", *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* wrote that it is "masterful... complex... unique and strange". I really would have to disagree.

Iris is, briefly, about a group of software developers, artists and scientists who are on their way to Titan, aboard the Deepstar, to set up a new colony. Things do not turn out the way they wanted them

to, then they discover an alien space-faring vessel and... and... I won't continue with the synopsis of the plot as it is pretty much standard sf fare, incorporating traditional themes which have been handled by more accomplished writers such as Kim Stanley Robinson and Arthur C. Clarke.

Iris is literary hybrid, and an ugly one at that, and reads like a poor man's version of Robinson's 'Martian Chronicles'. Which is basically what *Iris* is, only far worse. Characterisation is 'psychologically in-depth' but the characters are still one-dimensional and uninteresting.

Characterisation is basically confined to the problems of sex and who is sleeping with who on board the Deepstar. The novel abounds with graphic depictions of sex – which are neither erotic nor funny, just annoying: "he'd had only intermittent success at having sex with women... sex was awkward and uncomfortable... Pammy was even harder to fuck than most other women" (p98) and "her orgasm came as a squirming, high-pitched outcry, then his own injected semen deep into her body and they were still" (p417).

Iris is basically colonisation-by-numbers, and lends nothing new to science fiction and isn't even a fresh re-working of traditional themes. It would seem originality in sf has gone forever.

Baxter, Macleod, Lovegrove, Furey, Cadigan, Brown – *The Web 2028* 🕮

Avon Books, 1999, 436pp, $6.99 ISBN 0380730383

Reviewed by Penny Hill

This is the second series of shared-world 'Web' stories. The first series, *The Web 2027*, dealt primarily with the idea of a malevolent 'Sorceress' exploiting and distorting the virtual reality web. This series now takes on the idea of an alien race who choose the Web as the means of first contact.

Having reviewed the last two stories of this volume when they were published separately (see *Vector* 206) I was curious to see how they fit in the overall context. Once again I disliked the jargon generated for the series. Each author did their best to fit them into their stories, but there was no real sense of ownership of these terms.

Steve Baxter's *Webcrash* suffered most from this, leading to a stilted writing style. I also had trouble suspending my disbelief in VR Vikings who would build a wooden spaceship under the guidance of a teenage girl. That aside, this was a well-paced story touching on some profound questions of self-awareness and consciousness.

Ken Macleod's *Cydonia* investigates the conspiracy theory café mentioned in the first series. The patrons of the café are a wonderful mix of bizarre eccentrics and potential terrorists. Macleod treats with nicely-judged irony these characters, who disbelieve every official report. All the best conspiracy theories props are aired here, as the chapter titles make clear: 'Fake Moon Landing', 'The Lone Gunman' and – my favourite – 'Men in Black'.

Computopia by James Lovegrove explores the idea of a rival to the 'Web', the 'Net'. The salient feature is 'Davy Jones Locker', a zone for people to take out their real-life frustrations and aggression on VR objects and people. The catharsis argument is examined but ultimately rejected in a story which comes closest to examining the unsavoury side of what we would choose to use VR for.

Maggie Furey's *Spindrift* expands on the ideas of self-awareness and consciousness raised in the Baxter story by having a romantic lead who is computer-generated and self-aware. This is very well done but is sadly compromised by her decision to re-incarnate the 'Sorceress' from the first series as one of the good guys. This simply didn't work, and I kept expecting the revelation that she was still evil.

Re-reading Pat Cadigan's *Avatar* and Eric Brown's *Walkabout* was a delight. They both stood up very well to the treatment. Seeing the Eric Brown in its proper setting, as the finale to the series, enhanced my appreciation of this story.

Overall, the stories fit into a cohesive whole, with understated links between them. The individual authors' voices come out strongly but do not overpower the sense of a single overall world.

Joanne Bertin – *Dragon and Phoenix*

Earthlight, 1999, 540pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-684-86051-1 & Tor, 1999, 540pp, $25.95 ISBN 0-312-86430-2

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Dragon and Phoenix is the sequel to Bertin's *The Last Dragonlord*, which I remember being positive about when I reviewed it last year (*Vector* 206). This volume is somewhat chunkier than the last – which is pleasing if it's as good.

The Dragonlords Linden Rathan and his soulmate Maurynna Kyrissaean have had but a brief respite since their adventures in the first book. Unable to change to her dragon-form and not knowing why, she is being over-protected by all the other Dragonlords who fear for her sanity. Stifled, and keenly feeling the loss of her previous life as captain of her own ship, Maurynna is getting desperate as there seems to be no answer to her alienation by her Dragonsoul.

Far away in Jehanglan, a city more legendary than real because of its inaccessibility and distance, a dragon has been imprisoned and horribly ill-used. The dragon's magic is used to shackle the Phoenix, for it is said the Phoenix Emperor shall rule for a thousand years as long as the Phoenix protects Jehanglan. Strange omens are occurring though, and it is becoming apparent that the Phoenix Crown is beginning to slip.

Things change drastically when a friend from Maurynna's childhood arrives at Dragonskeep with a stranger said to have fled from slavery in Jehanglan. He bears tidings of a dragon in chains, and following a meeting between True and Weredragons and an aborted rescue attempt by the Truedragons, a party (which naturally includes Maurynna and Linden) are despatched to effect the rescue. However, the stranger who accompanies the group back to Jehanglan has an itinerary all of his own.

This second volume is vaster in scope than *The Last Dragonlord,* and actually negates the title of that first book by the end. Jehanglan is a city based on ancient Chinese society and a whole second cast of characters form an intriguing backdrop as two factions strive against each other to either continue or end control over the Phoenix. The legendary Phoenix must rise from the ashes of its own death every 1000 years, and it is getting restless.

Having read some excellent fantasies with an eastern or oriental setting, one can't help feeling that Bertin uses this setting more as a way of presenting a totally different society than as an in-depth and well thought-out scenario. Although the characters' interactions are intriguing and often complex, Jehanglan itself has a somewhat two-dimensional feel to it. Unfortunately the book is also fairly predictable at times. It is always difficult when the reader knows that someone is a spy, and more than irritating when the good guys plod ever onward into the yawning jaws of a trap because they are too plain stupid to put two and two together until it is too late.

This book is actually an entertaining enough read to while away a few hours, but I'm a little disappointed that an author who showed so much promise in her first book seems to have slipped already into what appears to be predictable fantasy fare. It's not a waste of money, and Bertin may well continue her original promise in future books, but this one is a bit of a disappointment.

Damien Broderick & David G Hartwell (eds) – *Centaurus: The Best Of Australian Science Fiction*

Tor Books 1999, 525pp, proof copy $29.95 ISBN 0-312-86556-2

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

This collection was published in time for the 1999 Worldcon in Melbourne, to showcase the diversity and quality of contemporary Australian science fiction. All the stories in it are reprints; but very few of them will have previously been seen outside Australia. Reprinting guarantees a certain level of quality (because the material was good enough to publish the first time), but some of the choices are nevertheless odd.

The first story is by the late George Turner, the Worldcon's guest-of-honour – but one so untypical of him that I found myself checking every few pages to confirm the authorship. As the introduction to the story advises, he was most concerned by 'overpopulation, the widening gap between rich and poor, and the ambiguity of the state that controls most people's lives – and the possibility of a catastrophic human dieback caused by pollution, war and/or disease'; but what we're offered instead is a first contact tale with an alien from a vegetable species engaged in a long-running war with with an animal one not unlike our own. The editors tell us that Turner's short fiction 'was often the kernel of one of his novels'; but it's difficult to believe that this slight and somewhat silly scenario could have been extended much further.

Turner is immediately followed by the even later Bertram Chandler, with a story from the interminable Commodore Grimes sequence; something which could scarcely be described as contemporary, given that it was first published in 1971, and was old-fashioned even then. But worse is to come: the longest story in the book, by Hal Colebatch, is a sharecrop set in Larry Niven's 'Known Space', from the collection *Man-Kzin Wars VII* (a title which says almost everything one needs to know of its contents). Such a contribution may demonstrate the range and versatility of Australian sf writers; but what does the fact that it borrows someone else's imagination rather than exercising its own say about the health of Australian science fiction?

The curious thing about this collection, in fact, is how little of a perceptible Australian identity it conveys. Hartwell remarks in his introduction that he 'did not ancipate' finding 'anything essentially Australian about Australian science fiction, any special aesthetic that separates it from literary production in other geographical locations', but this is a comment which rather undermines the whole point of the anthology: why make geography the main criterion of selection if the results don't reflect it? The authors are Australian; but their stories reflect little of Australian culture and history. After all, British SF is characterised by its ironic narrative voice, mild technophobia and concern for landscape, and US science fiction by its technophiliac and more outwardly-oriented tone; shouldn't Australia's literary output similarly capture something of its particular culture and history? But the only story in the collection which could be said to be clearly Australian, because of the regard it displays for the impact of the Australian landscape on its characters, is from Terry Dowling's 'Tom Rynosserus' series – although Dowling's main influences are in fact Jack Vance, Cordwainer Smith and J.G. Ballard's 'Vermillion Sands' period.

The absence of identifiable Australian referents is therefore disappointing, and blunts the collective impact of what, individually, are some very fine stories. Irrespective of their authors' nationality, Damien Broderick's 'The Magi', Terry Dowling's 'Privateer's Moon', Chris Lawson's 'Written in Blood', Rosaleen Love's 'The Total Devotion Machine', Philippa Maddern's 'Things Fall Apart', and Lucy Sussex's 'My Lady Tongue' are excellent and engaging stories, but why bring them together in an overtly Australian collection if not to more clearly assert that nationality? I acknowledge the risk of the stories appearing more parochial, and that the smallness of the domestic market requires a more international appeal; but an opportunity nevertheless seems to have been missed.

Yet despite these caveats, consideration of this collection only raises the question of why the authors named above are not more well known outside Australia. Many of them, and the other writers here, have made sales to (primarily US) markets; but only Greg Egan (represented by the over-anthologised 'Wang's Carpets'), the late George Turner and Bertram Chandler, and (just) Cherry Wilder have any sort of international recognition. Which means, in the end, that Tor Books deserves full marks for publishing this collection of contemporary Australian science fiction. I hope that there will be more of them; and that they will appear in the UK as well.

Andrew Cartmel – *The Wise*

Virgin Worlds, 1999, 471pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-7535-0373-5

Reviewed by Chris Amies

Andrew Cartmel is a former *Doctor Who* scriptwriter and has written novels using characters from that universe. *The Wise* is a standalone thriller involving deviant psychology and magic. Juliette Race, a psychiatrist, is called to attend a strange and charismatic patient who claims to be able to bend reality via subconscious communication. Delusions, thinks Juliette, but after a while starts to believe there may be something in it.

Humorous and engaging to begin with, the novel gathers darkness and pace as the extent of the threat becomes known. Cartmel's characters are well enough drawn that the reader engages with them and their story right through until the end. Some are very irritating – and not just the villains.

The action shifts halfway around the world almost exactly halfway through the book; southern England is left behind for the American Southwest. Such a major change should detract from the story, but the reader is encouraged to keep pace. In the second half, it really is earthquake weather; there is a distinct touch of Tim Powers about it, and how cool is that? (Very.) Some of the good guys do get killed, which is what you need; it tells the reader none of the protagonists are indispensable. All the same, it isn't a bloodbath, which wouldn't be the point either. Nor is Cartmel afraid of changing the world a bit by the end of the story: this is definitely not the stock serial universe where everything has to be put back nicely as it was by the end. It's changed but not destroyed, which is encouraging.

Is it then a Doctor Who novel with the serial numbers filed off? No. The cover is ultra-cool in blue and silver, and does, improbably though it may sound, illustrate a scene from the book. It's a paranoid parallel world, scary and funny and engaging. A good one.

Deborah Christian – *The Truthsayer's Apprentice*

Tor, 1999, $15.95, 396pp. ISBN 0-312-86516-3

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Not a first novel by this author it seems, but the start of a fantasy series titled 'The Loregiver Series'.

Young Dalin, grandnephew and apprentice to the Turakemi Truthsayer Granmar Keljornik, leads a quiet but hard life on a lonely mountain known as Kodanit's Spire. His world is turned upside down when the Truthsayer is senselessly murdered by a group of Nimmians led by a Turakemi Runemaster. Dalin, who secretly witnesses this event, sets off in pursuit of the band in order to gain justice for the death of his granduncle, and to retrieve the Truthsayer's robe of office – stolen by the Nimmian murderers.

When Dalin is discovered tracking the group by Hanno the Runemaster, Hanno binds him and leaves him for dead without realising exactly who Dalin is. This proves to be a constant fly in the ointment for Hanno as he and his band head for the Tura-Kem capitol, Etjorvi, where Hanno, self-exiled from Etjorvi for many years, plans to install himself as first advisor to the Selkie-King,

Hammankarl II. His band plan to return to Nimm with their prize, the Truthsayer's robe.

Naturally, lying on a mountainside bound and near death, Dalin needs rescuing, but are the band of Elves who fulfil that purpose his friends, or yet another self-seeking bunch of rogues simply using him to further their own ends? Dalin has to work this out for himself whilst coming to terms with his granduncle's death, his elevation from apprentice and heir to the title of Truthsayer, and the slow discovery of his own powers of divining truth.

Deborah Christian has written the first in a series that is not only reminiscent of Robin Hobb's 'Assassin's Apprentice' series, but seriously rivals it. Without the large cast Hobb employs, Christian manages to put enough twists and turns into what is, basically, not an entirely original plot, and makes the whole a riveting and page-turning read. Fantasy as a genre may suffer from too many novels where youngsters are suddenly pitched into a voyage of self-discovery, but there is always room for another when it is as well-written and involving as this one. Highly recommended!

Arthur C. Clarke – *Profiles of the Future*

Gollancz, 1999, 213pp, £18.99 ISBN 0-575-06790-X

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

The recent profile of Arthur C. Clarke has been remarkable, with interviews popping up all over the place, a new collection (*Greetings, Carbon-based Bipeds!*) and this revised "Millennium edition" (er, *who* has been telling us for years that the Millennium begins on January 1st 2001?) of one of his best-known non-fiction works. Forecasting the future is common enough, and after a while such forecasts all sound the same – a mixture of naiveté, gullibility and technocratic populism. One could do worse than to compare *Profiles* with a book Clarke mentions, though not by name: M. Vasiliev and S. Gouschev's *Life in the 21st Century* (1959: translated 1960). Its mixture of propaganda and techno-utopianism makes depressing reading now. Clarke, though, has never been afraid of sounding naïve if overtaken by enthusiasm and is too sharp a thinker to be unaware that Clarke's First Law can be amended thus: When a distinguished and elderly futurologist says that predictions of the future are only provisional, he is almost certainly right. If he hints that his predictions are to be taken seriously, he is almost certainly not speculating wildly enough.

Why do we need another edition of *Profiles*? Partly so that Clarke can take us through his visions and show us where he was wrong, where he overlooked trends, misread signs or was simply unaware that someone somewhere was working on a tool or process that would change the world. So he revisits earlier enthusiasms – such as his insistence that 'Ground Effect Machines' would be the next transport revolution – with some wryness. The new *Profiles* – revised several times over the years – now refers to DVD and microchips (which word replaces the earlier 'waveguides': if I knew what that was I've forgotten). The "few hundred feet of tape" on which the *Ninth Symphony* can be stored becomes 'a small silvery disc'. Some chapters are extensively revised. 'Ages of Plenty' (Ch 12) contains interpolations referring to space elevators and the carbon-atom structure known as 'Buckminsterfullerene'. Chapter 11 ('About Time') discusses Frank Tipler's 'Omega Point' theory (although it's interesting to see the original chapter discussing essentially the same idea.) If libraries buy the new edition, I hope they refrain from jettisoning the battered earlier copies because what that gives them is a record of the *process* rather than the immediate action of the speculative games to be played with science. It's actually important to know that things Clarke wrote about with such apparent authority 40 years ago never came to fruition, while others (the telecommunications revolution, for example) happened considerably quicker, although in different form, than Clarke imagined. The reason why is not so that we can dock him merit marks for forecasting wrongly (no planetary colonies, artificial intelligences, understanding of Cetacean languages), or award him bonus point for his undoubted shaping of parts of our present, but so that we can understand the reasons for his authority when he tells us that the future is still open.

What's fascinating – even slightly sad – is that many of the wilder speculations of today were firmly embedded in the original edition. von Neumann-type 'replicator' machines, downloading consciousness, cyborgs – all part of today's sf and popular science – are 'big ideas' today but they were 'big ideas' then. Is there anything new? Perhaps the most obvious – and most depressing – 'uncharted' change since the '60s is the coming struggle between humanity and the viruses and bacteria which have shrugged off the defences supposed to create a disease-free world. But in a sense, the jury is still out. We're now living in the world which Clarke *knew* would be transformed in ways beyond his speculation. But he has also been instrumental in popularising and forming this change and the most interesting speculation of all might be to wonder if our present might be different if *Profiles of the Future* had never been published in the first place.

Estelle Daniel – *The Art of Gormenghast*

HarperCollins, Jan 2000, 160pp, £14.99 ISBN 0-00-257156-0

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

As I write this, the BBC have just screened the second episode of their adaptation of Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* [see Paul Billinger's preview in *Matrix* 141], taking us to the end of the first book in the trilogy, *Titus Groan*, and confounding many of the critics who solemnly declared Peake's grotesque and strange masterpiece 'unfilmable'. Not least Graham Greene, whose brief, discouraging letter to Peake's wife, Maeve, is reproduced in facsimile in the Frontispiece to this book, or the myriad cries of "unconditional faith and unbridled optimism" that Stephen Fry notes greeted the announcement of the BBC series: "Impossible... Madness... Can't be done... Are you out of your bloody mind?"

The BBC have spent a reputedly enormous amount on publicity for the series, so it's not unexpected that the tie-in books are starting to flood the bookshelves. Hopefully no-one will be so crass and misguided as to attempt a 'novelisation' based on the series.

The subtitle probably gives a more accurate flavour of the book, 'The Making of a Television Fantasy', along with the fact that Estelle Daniel is the series producer. 'Art' is used in a fairly liberal sense; the generous full colour illustrations include both Peake's inimitable (and hence, as Anthony Burgess wrote in his introduction to *Titus Groan*, "frequently imitated") illustrations and pages from the original manuscript, to the sets, costumes, jewellery, working drawings and storyboards for the BBC adaptation. Daniel's accompanying text is full of detail, not just on the making of the series and the problems of finding a rare and (marginally) actor-friendly white rook to play Mr Chalk, but includes details of Peake's life, his career as an illustrator and war artist (he was at Belsen in that capacity shortly after its liberation) together with a producer's diary during the filming and interviews with many of the principal and supporting members of the cast. The book concludes with a generous Afterword by Peake's son, Sebastian, a brief chronology of the life of Mervyn Peake and a full cast and crew list for the production.

I keep coming back to dip into this book, in between episodes of the series and re-reading *Titus Groan*. It's understandably difficult to disentangle this book from the series itself. Half-way through, on the cusp between *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* , I think, with immense relief , "Yes, this is actually going to work."

Dave Duncan – *The Gilded Chain: A Tale of the King's Blades*

Avon Books, 1999, 396pp, $6.99 ISBN 0 380 79126-9

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

This is far closer in style and spirit to Dave Duncan's earlier series, 'The Seventh Sword', than his more original work of 'The Great Game'. For the most part the novel follows the life of Durendal from when, at fourteen, he is presented as a possible candidate for Ironhall until his return to Ironhall in his sixties. Ironhall is a training institution that produces the King's Blades. The Blades are superb swordsmen who at their 'graduation' are magically bound to a Ward: an individual who then becomes the focus of their loyalty and devotion. Their first loyalty however is always to the King to whom the binding is primary. The first section of the novel is court-based, and seems somewhat like 'the adventures of a young musketeer'. In contrast the middle section strongly evokes echoes of Rider Haggard. In it, Sir Durendal is sent off to an unknown continent to find the secrets of immortality and the alchemists' secret of producing gold. In the final third the story builds nicely to a logical and satisfying dramatic finish. Within the novel there is a recurring theme on the nature and extent of loyalties. This is considered in the early conflict between loyalty to the King and to his Ward; in the conflict between loyalty to a woman and duty to the King; in the pull of loyalties between old and new allegiances; and finally, and most dramatically, as the extent to which the King's Blades should or do give up the right to individual conscience in favour of obedience and loyalty. I enjoyed *The Gilded Chain* as a well-written fantasy adventure and can recommend it to fans of that sub-genre.

Michael Faber – *Under the Skin* 🕮

Canongate, Jan 2000, 296pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-8624 1 927 1

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Michael Faber has one other published work, a collection, *Some Rain Must Fall* (Canongate, 1998). This, then, is his debut novel and it comes from a somewhat unexpected source, a publisher not normally featured in these pages. So is it science fiction? It is, very much so. Not just the subject matter, but in its approach, the way the story is told through its mysterious protagonist's eyes, and a couple of subtle, almost throwaway, references ("slan"?) convince me that Michael Faber has both a definite sf sensibility and some familiarity with the genre. "I tend to approach my fiction from two angles," Faber says in an interview in *The Bookseller* (22 Oct, 1999). "I take you to somewhere familiar, but present it in a strange light that you think, 'Oh, I though I knew what this place was about, but I don't': or I take you to strange places, but with people who are so familiar that you almost feel you belong there."

I'm looking for comparisons, points of reference. The ones that spring to mind are Patricia Anthony, Gwyneth Jones, Ian McDonald, Karen Joy Fowler and, almost inevitably, Mary Doria Russell. Good company; can Faber live up to it? What Faber shares with these is that *Under the Skin* is a First Contact novel that only gradually reveals its disturbing strangeness, and when it does, and reveals what has been deemed necessary to achieve it, evokes memories of the horrific mutilation of *The Sparrow*. (And, indeed, of one other disturbing scene in that book.)

A simple revelatory plot synopsis would ruin the book. Indeed, the central premise, when it arrives, is rather unbelievable. What makes the book is the slow unfolding towards it; the mystery of why Isserley, a young woman with scarred skin, peering myopically through huge thick-lensed glasses, drives up and down the East Coast A-roads of the Scottish Highlands looking for hitch-hikers. They must be male, well-built and most importantly they must be unattached, with no commitment to family or friends. If she's satisfied, she will take them home. It's her job; she is good at it, and she is very, very careful. Her pick-ups, ignoring her disconcertingly huge eyes behind her glasses, her long scarred wrists and oddly short legs, and transfixed by a pair of improbably pneumatic breasts above a low cut top, are equally happy at first.

There are oddities: the reason Isserley goes to great pains (and sometimes prodigious feats of mental arithmetic when buying things) to avoid having to handle change, paying for everything in multiples of £5 and £10 notes, is never fully clear. I have one theory, but other parts of the book might seem to contradict it. And there are some delightful moments of humour, as in the John Martyn fan Isserley picks up on his way to a gig, whose impersonation of Martyn's slurred, drawled delivery of 'May You Never' elicits a wonderfully puzzled response from Isserley.

Catch this one while it's hot.

Mary Gentle – *A Secret History: The Book of Ash #1*

Avon, 1999, 424pp, $6.99 ISBN 0-380-78869-1

Reviewed by Iain Emsley

A Secret History is the first book of the Ash cycle. Historian Pierce Ratcliffe is trying to reconstruct a fourth edition of the life of Ash, a mercenary leader of the late Middle Ages, with his editor, Anna. Written from a variety of perspectives, the unfolding story manages to beguile the reader and lay doubts concerning the facts of Ash's life and of history itself.

Ash finds herself caught up in court intrigue when, expecting a monetary reward for her services, she is appalled to find herself pledged to wed Fernando del Guiz by a whim of the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick. As a highly successful military leader, the male court feels threatened by Ash's presence and tries to box her into the arranged marriage.

Barely escaping an ambush whilst escorting a Visigoth ambassador to the court, Ash returns to tell the Emperor that a Visigoth invasion has started. The injured ambassador is returned to the Holy Roman court and, to demonstrate the strength of the attacking forces, extinguishes the sun, plunging the Empire into weeks of perpetual night. The court is overrun and Ash finds herself (again) on the losing side, wanted by the Visigoth's female general, the Faris, who bears a startling resemblance to Ash herself. In their interview, Ash (whose advising 'voices' she has always believed to be those of the saints) becomes disturbed when she learns more about the Stone Golem, a military genius – almost amounting to a tactical computer – that the Faris is reputedly in constant touch with.

Ash's position is constructed by Gentle with a brutal reality that shows the violence on all levels which surrounds her. Hints that Ash is related to the Faris, who was part of breeding programme linked to the Golem, and that Ash is able to overhear the Stone Golem, add further to the complexity of the main character.

Gentle balances the forms of historical evidence so that serious uncertainties are developed with little hope of quick resolution. In the email exchanges between Anna and Pierce, she constructs a confusion in which Burgundy disappears into legend while meanwhile archaeological evidence suggests that the Stone Golem existed. The increasing panic as both sets of truth cancel each other out overshadows Pierce's translation of the Ash texts, and calls into question the idea of historical 'fact' which is developed through the increasingly fraught relationship between Pierce and Anna.

Mary Gentle has written a novel that amazes in its splendour. She hints at the Hermetic principles that underpinned *Rats and Gargoyles* whilst developing a feminist Fantasy of History, which rarely shies away form the violence surrounding Ash's life. The story developed here offers so much for the future.

Steven Gould – *Blind Waves*

Tor Books, 2000, 350pp, $23.95 ISBN 0-312-86445-0

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

There's an odd excitement about receiving your first book with the publishing date '2000' in it, like seeing 'MM' on the end of BBC programmes instead of the lengthy old string of letters. I was really hoping *Blind Waves* would set a high initial standard and it does, sort of.

Some time in the near future sea levels have risen by 100 feet. In Gould's novel, North America, at least, is coping better than you might expect with the aftermath of such a catastrophe. The Immigration and Naturalization Service has grown to become the USA's second biggest branch of the armed forces, dealing with the impossible numbers of refugees all heading for the high ground.

Patricia Beenan is one of the lucky ones, rich, propertied and with a head full of the Bard, until she stumbles across a sunken freighter with a hold full of bodies. Commander Thomas Becket is a scarred but principled investigator for the INS Criminal Investigation Department, keeping a troubled eye on corruption and political extremists in the service.

It's not an unpromising start and I was impressed by the assurance of the writing. Gould writes with mild understatement in a free-flowing and easy style that I found delightful. The two central characters are very well presented and their blossoming romance is handled with a rare delicacy that makes the whole affair seem so very natural and just... lovely. Gould could teach Mills & Boon a lesson or two!

But what lets the book down is the rather tenuous story that the love affair is draped across. The individual scenes are handled well, whether action, romantic or gustatory, and the background is well thought out – in fact I wish we'd learnt more detail about the oft-mentioned 'Deluge' – but the plot is ultimately almost irrelevant, a seemingly rushed 'whodunnit' which does a grave disservice to Gould's writing style. This is annoying because I was enjoying *Blind Waves* for the most part, until I suddenly realised I'd almost finished it and that aside from a (very well realised) grand finale, nothing much else of any consequence was likely to be revealed.

I'm going to read some more of Steven Gould's books because I'm in no doubt that he's a very good writer, but *Blind Waves* is just a little bit too thin on plot. And one final beef - *enough* Shakespeare quotes and untranslated Spanish dialogue, Mr Gould!

Simon R. Green – *Haven Of Lost Souls*

Millennium, 1999, 616pp, £6-99 ISBN 1857989007

Reviewed by Mat Coward

According to the cover this is *Hawk & Fisher I*, but in fact it's an omnibus containing *No Haven for the Guilty* (1990), *Devil Take The Hindmost* (1991), and *The God Killer* (1991).

Haven is a sword-and-sorcery city, full of murder and magic, political corruption and monsters. Hawk and Fisher are a husband and wife team of City Guards; they are, of course, the only honest cops in the whole place. "Hell Street Blues," the blurb calls it, but it's more like hardboiled PI fiction with added succubi; the first chapter sees the Captains Hawk and Fisher locating and discombobulating a vampire.

Green handles the 'cri-fi' aspect of the book reasonably well, and successfully (albeit with no great originality) creates a mean streets atmosphere. Ironically, it's the fantasy element that doesn't really work, being for the most part rather ordinary and predictable. This is often a problem with attempts at sf/hardboiled crossovers – we get the familiar basics of both styles, with little in the way of fresh development. The result is that neither side of the genre marriage really comes alive.

That's not to say that I didn't enjoy the book. Green seems to be a writer who is rarely bored, and therefore rarely boring. Humorous dialogue is not usually a strength of fantasy fiction – especially the stuff that's actually marketed as humorous – but with Green the laughs come easily, while the plot is not often found dawdling.

It's a fun read overall, but I do wish that when sf writers decide to flirt with crime, they would sometimes be a little more adventurous in their choice of 'cri-fi' template. The film noir has done enough damage to its own genre; sf could do without its stultifying influence. Have you ever read any Lawrence Block, Mr. Green? Or Margaret Millar, or Reginald Hill? Or, really, any crime fiction at all from the last twenty years? Simon Green writing an sfnal treatment of Inspector Frost – now that I would pay money for.

Joe Haldeman – *Forever Peace*

Millennium, 1999, 351pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85798-899-X

Reviewed by Chris Hill

Julian Class lives two lives. For twenty days of thirty he is a physics researcher, working on the giant particle accelerator being built around Jupiter. For the other ten days he is a conscripted mechanic, a driver of remotely controlled military machines called 'soldierboys', fighting in a long-lasting war against guerrilla groups of various nationalities.

Then a discovery is made: if the Jupiter Project succeeds in recreating the conditions during the early part of creation, then a new Big Bang will be started, destroying huge reaches of the galaxy. So how do you stop a fanatic pulling the trigger, now the technology exists?

In some ways *Forever Peace* reminded me of several Gregory Benford novels, particularly in its depiction of the scientific community. But whereas one feels that Benford comes up with the concept first and then the supporting story, Haldeman is far more interested in the people first. Julian is a well-drawn character – a reluctant soldier and a potential suicide driven over the edge by the accidental killing of a young man.

The solution to the problem of how to stop someone using the inadvertently-created doomsday weapon is to *condition* the humans to be incapable of harming anyone else except in self-defence. By a credulity-stretching coincidence, it is discovered that this can be achieved through the use of the same mechanical telepathy that links together a squad of soldierboy mechanics.

There are many examples of sf where the human race *decides* to become more peaceful, but Haldeman seems to be saying that the only way to curb human violence is by technological intervention (technology could be said to be both the hero and villain of this novel). This is an interesting approach to take, though in some ways it reads as quite old-fashioned; a throwback to the times when sf was more overtly technophilic.

However this is the point at which my suspension of disbelief becomes a little unwilling. How do you know if you have pacified everyone (after all, it is pretty easy for people to disappear if they really do not want to be found)? How do you control the 1 or 2 percent of people that cannot be successfully processed (surely a mostly-pacified populace is highly susceptible to oppression)? How do you define self-defence? What about future generations? All this is without even getting into the morality of the solution and the human rights implications.

Having said all that it is always easier to talk about a book's faults than its good points. Overall this was a novel that I thoroughly enjoyed, much of the time managing to forget that it was for review. But in the end I found it a rather tall tale.

Robert A. Heinlein – *The Fantasies of Robert A. Heinlein*

TOR, 1999, 352pp, $27.95 ISBN 0-312-87245-3

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

The Fantasies of Robert A. Heinlein collects eight stories; the first six are from the forties, the last two from the fifties. The jacket contains some interesting points: "The Golden Age of SF was also a time of revolution in fantasy fiction, and Heinlein was at the forefront. His fantasies were convincingly set in the real world, particularly those published in the famous magazine *Unknown Worlds*". That blurb might have mentioned that the editor of *Unknown Worlds* was John W. Campbell, who was also the godfather of a lot of hard sf, including Heinlein's; but it might also have pointed out as bibliophiles will know that *Unknown Worlds* was simply *Unknown* when Heinlein began contributing, and that some of these stories were published under his pseudonym "Anson MacDonald". The jacket notes which also quote David Pringle's tributes from The *Encyclopaedia Of Science Fiction* also fail to point out that Pringle identifies as fantasies other Heinlein works not collected here.

Although Heinlein recognised a continuity in his fantasy fiction – this is not the first collection of his fantasies – I doubt if his contemporary readers who could not see through his pseudonyms would have recognised a continuity. There are two, probably three styles, in these eight stories, and it possibly says something about me that having grouped them, I like those in a certain style far more than the others.

'– And He Built a Crooked House –' (1940) is set in a quite real Laurel Canyon on the edge of Los Angeles, where a futuristic architect is allowed to build a house in the style of a tesseract (a three dimensional figure extended into four dimensions), and in which the new occupants find themselves trapped. As the characters walked from one room through the ceiling into another, I was helped by thinking of an M. C. Escher picture. And the final story, 'All You Zombies–' (1959), where a man in a bar reveals he is his every relation through a series of time paradoxes, is a similar fantasia on a mathematical theme. The titles of both have become bywords, but both are really inappropriate to their contents.

The three long novellas, 'Magic, Inc.' (1940), 'Waldo' (1942), and 'The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag' (1942), all share another feature of Heinlein's work: the ability to go completely off the track. 'Magic, Inc.' would have called up suggestions of Luck Luciano's 'Murder, Inc.' – it starts with an attempted squeeze by a protection racketeer on a shopkeeper whose goods are held together like many of his fellow's by magic. As with so many parts of America – in labor unions and better business bureaux – the mob is attempting to take over. But what then happens is that everything is done through legislation, and the whole kit and caboodle head-off for the state capital, and we are buried in composite motions, and smoke filled rooms consolidating voting blocks. Magic almost goes out of the window – this is maintaining reality with an unhealthy conviction. 'Waldo', too, is a strange story, as the eponymous inventor discovers that magic works with an even stronger force than his prostheses. (It was through this story that Heinlein invented the word for a prosthetic device).

Oddly, the one story, that stands out is one that I have never found anthologised: 'They –' (1941). It is simply a tale of paranoia justified. And just one word in the middle of the story reveals what the conclusion will be. Fantastic.

Brian Herbert & Kevin J. Anderson – *House Atreides: Prelude to Dune* 🕮

New English Library, 2000, 604pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-340-75176-2

Reviewed by Andrew Seaman

From the viewpoint of both its publishers and the majority of the sf-buying public a book like this is essentially critic-proof. Millions of copies of the original Dune novels are in print, and a significant number of existing fans will need no prompting to re-visit the justly famous far-future universe created by Frank Herbert, whatever reviewers may say. But what exactly will they be getting for their money?

The good news is that the book is no rushed rip-off job. From conversations with his late father and unpublished working notes, originally intended for a seventh Dune novel, Brian Herbert has conceived this prequel, set several decades before the events of *Dune* and following the early careers and adventures of several major characters featured in that 1965 masterpiece. A great deal of time and love has clearly gone into the planning and execution of the project, although involving Anderson, more familiar for his many media novelisations, as co-author may strike some as an odd choice. Not having read any of his previous work it's difficult to determine the extent of his impact on the finished article.

Technically speaking, although it lacks the sweep and grandeur of Herbert Senior's prose, Herbert Junior and Anderson's writing is wholly adequate for the task intended, and viewed in isolation *House Atreides* would be a perfectly acceptable contemporary sf novel. Inevitably, however, it suffers from comparison with its illustrious predecessors. What was fresh and inventive in Frank Herbert's hands risks becoming somewhat tired and formulaic thirty years down the line. In aspiring to the cinematic the narrative occasionally descends to the level of travelogue, while the authors, obviously anxious not to alienate first-time visitors to the Dune universe, too often let lengthy exposition stand in the way of storytelling, diluting the sense of mystery that was one of the strengths of the original novel(s). Some judicious editorial intervention might have solved some of these problems, but would still leave unaddressed the real question of whether we actually *need* a prequel to one of the most famous sf novels ever written.

If *Dune*, with its emphasis on ecology and mysticism, was very much a work of its time, it also ushered in the modern era of the genre novel as bestseller and commercial product. *House Atreides*, and forthcoming sequels, simply represent another step in the relentless commercialisation of sf over recent decades. Despite the good intentions of the authors, and however respectfully and competently the project has been undertaken, it's hard not to see this book as yet another cynical publisher's attempt to restore life to an ageing franchise at the expense of new talent. There *is* much to enjoy within its pages, but the truth is that, sadly, sometimes you just can't go home again.

Tom Holland – *The Sleeper In The Sands*

Abacus, 1999, 428pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 349 11223 1

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

Capsule description: an H. P. Lovecraft version of a tale from the Arabian Nights, concerning the Nameless Horror that lurks in Tut-ankh-amen's tomb... The frame story for the book's main narrative is of course Howard Carter's rediscovery and opening of this tomb in the 1920s, and the overall style and flavour of the whole book has an attractively dated feel. The period detail is all completely convincing, and the author has obviously researched his subject thoroughly and in depth, but not excessively. The central story is an exploration of both well-known 'curse of the Pharaohs' material (where exactly did they get to, in their search for immortality?) and of the monotheistic religious revolution of the Pharaoh Akh-en-Aten (father of Tut-ankh-amen) and its subsequent complete obliteration. (The 'Arabian Nights' narrative is obviously much concerned with this, a hot issue from an Islamic perspective). Much use is made of the story-within-a-story-within-a-story, nesting narratives technique, which both evokes the style of the genuine *Arabian Nights* narratives, and creates a curiously dislocated, hypnotic atmosphere. Fans of 'shock horror', who expect entrails to be used pretty much as punctuation, will be disappointed. Connoisseurs of menace, oppression, and the slow revelation of Unspeakable Deeds motivated by Decadent, possibly even Diabolical Passions, will

however be delighted. A book to savour, not one to gulp down in a hurry.

Tom Holt – *Snow White and the Seven Samurai*

Orbit, 1999, 308pp, £15.99 ISBN 1-85723-898-2

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Once upon a time, a wicked queen stood before a mirror and asked the traditional question. "Bad Command or Filename," the mirror responded, "Abort, Retry, Ignore?"

This what happens in a magic kingdom running on a kludged version of Mirrors 3.1. At least it used to until the system was hacked by three (colour) blind mice named Sis, Carl and Damien who manage to bring the whole system down and completely corrupt the database that kept the various stories from getting tangled up in each other. Which is not much fun for a big bad wolf who, used to demolishing increasingly sturdy dwellings built by three little pigs, is suddenly seized by a desire to dress up as a grandmother, and finds himself transformed into a frog and then a handsome prince. Or why (because one of the teenage hackers is more interested in action adventure stories than fairy tales) you can only find A Dwarf With No Name, an elf and a leprechaun, and Snow White is living with seven sword-wielding Japanese gentlemen in a small cottage with little messages tacked around the place like: "Spring winds stir the willows. A distant star flickers. Empty the dustbins."

Somewhere in a cellar in the bowels of the kingdom is an accountant who is supposed to be keeping all this from happening, but the most of the backup copy of Mirrors – in a bucket of still water – has got spilt (with an army of animated brooms caught in an endless loop trying to mop it up). His secretary has used part of what's left to make the coffee.

For the most part, Holt manages to keep most of this just on the right side of manic, scattering anachronisms and tangled references from everything from Goldilocks to an inverted Beauty and the Beast, and with some nicely turned jokes. Towards the end, though, it does all get a bit much as everything comes together (pretty literally) in the obligatory fairy-tale castle just at the point Holt drops a *deus* (or software engineer) *ex machina* into the middle of the chaos to try and sort everything out. That provides one of the weaker, and rather too obvious puns, although it does lead to a brief and chilling moment amongst the cartoon violence.

I enjoyed this. It's not great literature, but it's fast, fun and it definitely has its moments. However, the notion that a 'Mirrors 2000' upgrade can be downloaded into the same sized bucket that holds 'Mirrors 3.1' has to be sheer fantasy.

Stephen Jones (Ed.) – *Best New Horror: Tenth Anniversary Edition*

Robinson, 1999, 489pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84119-064-0

Reviewed by Chris Amies

The introduction to this volume is a comprehensive overview of the written and visual Horror field in 1998, a field which seems to have had a resurgence in that year; we are told a near-record number of genre books appeared in the USA, though the number published in Britain was at its lowest for nearly a decade.

The book contains nineteen stories chosen as the best of their year. Some of the stories feel like classics even if they've scarcely seen the light of day; 'The Boss in the Wall' by Avram Davidson and Grania Davis uses a scientific rationale to present a story of a strange mythological figure which proves far from myth, and told with Davidson's characteristic wit and fluency. Peter Straub, whose natural pace seems that of the nineteenth-century, presents a grand guignol version of Melville's 'Bartleby' that turns even nastier at the end in 'Mr Clubb and Mr Cuff'. This story abandons the supernatural to report matter-of-factly on the indignities that humans inflict on one another. The same is true of Ramsey Campbell's 'Ra*e', which opposes the suburban obsession with security to its disregard for personal safety. These suggest that the form of the Horror story may be a joke with indignity, often death, as the punchline.

Any genre has themes it returns to, and these days it seems best to pre-empt the reader by referring to their classic examples openly when they become evident. So any self-respecting quest fantasy mentions *Star Wars*, and here Neil Gaiman's 'The Wedding Present', a kind of modern 'Portrait of Dorian Gray', has its characters discuss just that story. 'Mr Clubb and Mr Cuff' conveniently bring in a copy of 'Bartleby' to that story. Kim Newman's 'A Victorian Ghost Story' is almost Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, with one important difference: in *A Christmas Carol* Scrooge Learns Better. The curmudgeon of the first page is a generous and considerate man on the last due to his supernatural visitations. In 'A Victorian Ghost Story' – a story tangential to Newman's 'Anno Dracula' books – Ernest Virtue does not change a whit. He is still blinkered and dismissive at the end and stomps off into the night oblivious.

This may give us a clue as to the nature of Horror, this and the notion of the story as a joke with indignity as the punchline. Where Fantasy, including Horror, is fiction about loss, generic Fantasy tends to let the loss (quest object, love, happiness, etc.) be regained. In Horror fiction the catastrophe remains and the loss is not redeemed. This allows for the inclusion in this volume of such at first unlikely stories as Chris Fowler's 'Learning to Let Go', where the loss is that of an innocent suburban childhood world of the 1950s, destroyed by property speculation and the motor car, and Chaz Brenchley's 'The Keys to D'Esperance', whose protagonist cannot break the hold of a moral code the modern reader sees as not only outdated but actively destructive. "Horror" does not have to imply the supernatural, and this volume's cover picture, a classic vampire trope, is hardly helpful as a guide to the contents. What the book does contain is a broad range of stories in many styles by a variety of authors long-established and relatively new, and anyone interested in the genre should read it.

Peter Layton – *Skip Trace Rocks*

Hilltop Press, 1999, 20pp, £2.70/$6.00 ISBN 0-905262-25-2

Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

The enigmatic title of this collection of 28 poems could have different meanings according to whether words are taken to be nouns, verbs or adjectives. A pedantic approach, you may object, to the work of this West Coast poet who (as Steve Sneyd observes in a Foreword), in order to "unfold the reality of felt experience", follows the mind's working by "juxtaposing ambient present and flash-back past, here and there, outer data input and inner meaning". Fine, when this works; but a poet is in the business of communicating. If technique shifts poetic expression so far in the direction of his "inner meaning" that communication is lost, the exercise fails. Here, for me, it sometimes fails, other times wholly or partly succeeds. To be less abstract, here are extracts from a poem ('Lee Asp 5150 T-Snark'). The bizarre cosmographic imagery of the opening lines does communicate:

> stream towards the dog
> star its vermilion red
> light the Universe as
> a hard formica round
> table...

After that, the poem goes snark-shaped, mixing images of food-heating technology with the anatomy of an ancient car – all deep

within the poet's imagination, but too deep to access mine, and ending:

> ...drive gear on
> neutron auto, nerfs
> past line graders, cold
> skulls into everyday
> new hologram futures

No contact. Nevertheless, after reading the collection several times, much sparks through, and an overall message grows – that a machine-pawn's life out elsewhere would be just as tough as on Earth. "NASA has called Mars knows/the similar tainted struggle". And yet there is wonder, as in:

> striped giftwrap Jupiter, whose intricate
> boilings speak of
> its closedin violent moods its
> snared offspring
> and my nitelite.

Marc Matz – *Nocturne for a Dangerous Man*

Tor, 1999, 495pp, $25.95 ISBN 0-312-86935-5

Reviewed by Stephen Deas

OK, who came up with this title? And the cover art, get him too. This looks for all the world like a very bad zero budget post-apocalyptic video set in a sandpit. And I have to read this? No, please, god, nooooo...

So much for first impressions, because it's not like that at all. This is a slow, complex... something. I want to say thriller; it never quite managed that, but at least it's well removed from the cardboard characters and the sub-zero intelligence I'd been expecting.

Gavilan Robie is an ageing anti-thief, specialising in recovering stolen art treasures in the near future. A loner, a man of aliases, a man who can appear and disappear at will. A man with money and a murky past. A West Coast Simon Templar. Only sometimes, instead of recovering art, he can be persuaded to recover people. Enter Siv (or rather, exit Siv), a lady of enhanced intellect, prized possession of the Tourraine corporation, and in exchange for returning his anonymity, Robie takes the case.

Hardly inspired. The plot revolves around complicated trades and trickery between terrorists and multinationals, and it may be clever and complicated, but there's nothing new here. Robie is a little too twee, the early flashbacks and reminiscences are distracting, the world-weary posturing and angst slips into occasional tedium, lacking the venom or the wit to be truly engaging. And for all Robie's vaunted anonymity, we're halfway through the book before he meets someone who doesn't know exactly who he is.

The lengthy reminiscing, the web of friends and contacts expands, each with its own history; there's more to making an interesting character than ladling on more and more background, but Matz refuses to give up. And, I have to admit, eventually it begins to work. Nothing actually changes, but if you've made the effort to get halfway, the atmosphere starts to work through sheer bloody-mindedness, and through the same weight of numbers, the incidents from Robie's past finally make a man out of him. It's almost as though you're actually seeing him flesh out, layer after layer. Only trouble is, there's nothing to act as a counterweight; his past becomes a weight, a black hole, sucking everything else into it and denying the other characters a chance to shine for themselves.

The plot and the pace are slow and complex and so is the background and so is Robie. Ponderous or luxuriant, depending on whether you like that sort of thing or not.

L.E.Modesitt, Jr – *Gravity Dreams*

Tor, 1999, 399pp, $24.95, ISBN 0-312-86826-X

Reviewed by John D. Owen

Gravity Dreams probably qualifies as a rite-of-passage novel, even though the main protagonist is rather older than your average 'rites' character, enduring an ordeal of transition between child and adulthood. In the case of Tyndel, L.E.Modesitt's hero, the rite he has to undergo is to cast off the past and accept that his future is going to be very different indeed.

Tyndel's Earth is a divided world, between those who have stepped back from technology and created a conservative, rigidly structured religious culture, and those who have embraced technology and subsequently made their way to the stars. Tyndel is a teacher of Dzin, one of the conservative religions, who falls foul of a vindictive fisherman and is infected by a nanotech virus. The effects of the virus are rapidly apparent, and make Tyndel a hunted man in his own community. He has to run for the border, to be rescued by his former enemies, the Rykashans.

Tyndel's education into Rykashan ways is a slow process, even for one carried out using nanotech. Tyndel's problem is his inability to let go of his past, and his early antipathy to Rykashan ways. This makes him pass up the opportunity to begin training as a starship pilot, a job for which the Rykashans quickly realise Tyndel is peculiarly suited by virtue of his Dzin training. Instead, he has to take menial work as a labourer on a space station far away from Earth. But it is there that the necessary changes to Tyndel's point of view take place, which set up the events in the rest of the book.

Modesitt's writing and plotting throughout are excellent, with a lot of very nice touches. Both sides of Tyndel's world are well-imagined, and the society of Rykasha in particular is an intriguing blend of utopianism and libertarianism. *Gravity Dreams* isn't a great book (its pace is a little too slow and Tyndel's progress just a little too easy), but it is a fascinating one, with enough ideas in the mix to keep the interest up to the very end.

John Newsinger – *The Dredd Phenomenon*

Libertarian Education, 1999, 99pp, £5.95, ISBN 0 9513997 7 2

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

Subtitled 'Comics and Contemporary Society' this brief pamphlet is a left-wing overview of *2000AD* and in particular the Judge Dredd stories. It goes onto discuss the rise and fall of the 'mature'/adult comics such as *Crisis* towards the end of the eighties, then highlights the careers of some of our more radical comic writers like Alan Moore and Garth Ennis who, Newsinger argues, lacking the opportunities in this country, have had to work for American comic companies.

Starting with a scathing (and justified) attack on New Labour, which *2000AD* recently wickedly satirised in its B.L.A.I.R.1 strip, Newsinger goes on to argue that to a large extent *2000AD* has been a radical reaction to ravages of Thatcher's government. With *Crisis* and some of the others this cannot be argued against as they explicitly had a radical agenda, but *2000AD* has always been a 'broad church' and has many other influences and interpretations, and Newsinger has been selective in what material he chooses to support his arguments.

Newsinger devotes a large part of his work to examination of the Dredd stories. This I feel is a mistake because although Dredd has become a major iconic figure in British comics, and to some extent beyond, there were always more interesting and innovative stories in *2000AD*, certainly in the more contemporary work of Moore et al. which Newsinger only skirts over. Although not without merit

and with a strong vein of satire, Dredd has tended to continuously repeat similar stories with minor variations over the years.

Minor quibbles include the lack of an index and the proliferation of exclamation marks! There is nothing wrong with enthusiastic writing but this is ridiculous! Also given the limited room here Newsinger can do no more than outline his arguments.

Interesting rather than exceptional, it is a pity it could not be more substantial. It does provide, however, obsessions with Dredd aside, an overview of some exceptional and radical work in a sorely neglected medium.

Marco Palmieri (ed.) – *Star Trek: The Lives of Dax*

Pocket Books, 1999, 347pp, £8.99 ISBN 0-671-02840-5

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

This is far and away the best *Star Trek* fiction I have read in a long time, and one I thoroughly enjoyed, so much so that I read it in the space of two or three days; compulsive reading, you might say.

The concept is a simple one: take Dax, one of the major characters on *Deep Space Nine*; take nine authors (or pairings of authors), and ask them to write a series of stories about Dax and his hosts over the long years of his existence. The result is a collective masterpiece, written with sensitivity and an understanding of character that you don't often see in Star Trek novels or anthologies.

From the moment I encountered Ezri Dax, the most recent incarnation, lost in one of the hologram suites while on a date with Julian Bashir, I was hooked. The first story, 'Second Star to the Right…', has Ezri being befriended by a hologram, who asks her for her story, and this leads into how she became joined with Dax; something she never wanted, and also something she was unfit for. However, events take an unexpected turn and Ezri, as the sole surviving Trill on the ship transporting Dax back to the Trill homeworld, becomes the new host for the symbiont. Having told her story thus far, she decides to tell the stories of her past "lives". And so we meet them all: from Lela Dax, the statesperson, to Curzon Dax, the ambassador, and all the incarnations in between: mother, father, engineer, scientist, serial killer and Starfleet officer.

But this collection is not just about Dax; in the course of these stories we meet several other Star Trek characters at different stages of their lives and careers, including one particular person who has always been a favourite of mine – T'Pau, as an emissary from Vulcan long before she became a member of the Vulcan High Council. Also featured are Admiral Kirk, Doctor Leonard McCoy, and a young Benjamin Sisko. And we get some insight, in several stories, of Trill civilisation on their home planet.

I cannot fault any of these stories, and would be hard-pressed to select any one favourite, but possibly 'Allegro Ouroboros in D Minor', an unusual version of the Jack the Ripper legend, would be the one.

Andre Norton – *Wind in the Stone*

Avon, 1999, 280pp, $23.00 ISBN 0-380-97602-1

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

A rare thing in fantasy nowadays is the single novel, and Andre Norton, an acknowledged award-winning master of the genre, is adept at not only having a tale to tell, but telling it all in one go.

In the valleys of Styrmir, life is quiet, peaceful and simple. A land once challenged by the dark, its people have forgotten their heritage and now live in peace with the land. As always though, that peace is about to be shattered.

In Valarian sits the place of learning, and the dwindling scholars are keepers of an ancient knowledge and the wards that bind the Chaos of Dark after its defeat by the Covenant of Light. Few go to Valarian to study, but one such, a bitter young man named Irasmus, abuses that learning which the scholars offer. Sneaking around, stealing scraps of forbidden knowledge wherever they can be gleaned, Irasmus prepares for an unholy alliance with the dark.

The story is in two parts, the first half of the book ending in the birth of twins who have very different roles to play in the forthcoming battle against the dark. The boy (Fogar) is stolen at birth by the renegade mage, Irasmus, and used to enhance his dark powers. The girl (Falice), born within minutes of the mage stealing the boy away, is adopted by elusive forest dwellers without Irasmus knowing of her birth. As the years roll by and Irasmus's command of the dark grows ever stronger, it is up to Falice to discover her heritage and foil Irasmus' evil plans.

I've felt before that Norton's style is a little clumsy and inaccessible at times, and she often tries too hard to make a story convoluted enough to hold the reader's interest. This book again leaves me with that feeling, and although it's an entertaining tale well told, there's just something about it that makes it a good read – rather than one not to be missed. While *Wind in the Stone* does no harm to Norton's reputation as a master of storytelling in the genre it doesn't particularly enhance it. It's an engrossing read, and probably a must for fans of her writing.

Severna Park – *The Annunciate*

Avon Eos, 1999, 294pp, $23.00, ISBN 0-380-97737-0

Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Billinger

According to the dust-jacket this is a "tale of first contact and human evolution", and given the fact that the central characters of the novel discover a new life-form, and inadvertently precipitate a change in the nature of the inhabitants of that planetary system, then it's hard to argue with the description. For me, however, it created expectations which were confounded.

The Annunciate is set in a future in which it seems that the lower caste of humans are living in a warring medieval society, whilst the elite, though under threat from the lower castes, wander the system in spaceships, equipped with nanotechnology. Eve, Corey and Annmarie are three such elite, who are protecting themselves and their income by addicting as many people as possible to Staze, a drug no-one else can make.

Life becomes more complicated for the three when Eve falls in love with a member of a lower caste and finds her loyalties changed, and Annmarie and Corey become obsessed with the analysis of an unknown being they discover on an otherwise uninhabited planet. These actions have far-reaching consequences for the entire planetary system, but Park, wisely, keeps her focus on just a few individuals and their changing relationships.

Unfortunately, the characters she examines in detail are entirely unsympathetic and unlovable. They are selfish, mercenary, sometimes stupid, and willing to betray or kill any of the others in order to gain advantage for themselves. It seemed hard to care about Eve, Corey and Annmarie, and that in turn made it hard to care about the fate of the human race, which is where the confounding of expectations comes in: thinking of first contact and evolution I expected an ultimately upbeat story of discovery and co-operation, of humans acquiring exciting new potential. Instead this is a story about seedy characters in an unpleasant corner of the universe who create conditions in which an alien entity is set to annihilate the human race.

Severna Park writes very well, but I feel she lacks something as a story teller, leaving me wondering why I should care about her characters or their world.

Diana L. Paxson – *The Book of the Cauldron*

Avon Eos, 1999, 180pp, $10.00 ISBN 0-380-80547-2

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

This is the third book in *The Hallowed Isle* sequence, in which Paxson retells the Arthurian legend. In this book she focuses on three women of the story: Arthur's mother Igierne, here identified with the Lady of the Lake, her daughter Morgause, and Guendivar, Arthur's queen. The cauldron of the title is the healing vessel of the Lake priestesses, and takes the place which is held by the Holy Grail in a different Arthurian tradition.

I have to confess to a personal impatience with neo-paganism and Goddess worship as applied to Arthurian legend. As far as I know, the first writer to treat the legend in this way was Marion Zimmer Bradley, but she has been ill-served by her fans and followers who assume that this is the 'real' Arthur. Paxson acknowledges her debt to Bradley, and while I wouldn't argue with her right to include what aspects of the legend she chooses, I don't feel that she has added anything new.

When I reviewed the previous book in the series, I felt the main problem was that it was too short to accommodate what the writer was trying to do. I feel the same here. Large areas of the action are summarised instead of being fully dramatised with dialogue and interaction between the characters, and so the reader is never fully involved with the story and the world.

This is all the more frustrating because of the book's potential. The relationships among the three women, particularly that between Igierne and Morgause, are fascinating, and would have borne a much deeper analysis. There's a touch of transcendence in the writing when the cauldron reveals itself to the court at Camelot, and yet the search when it goes missing – the equivalent of the whole Grail quest – is perfunctory. The healing power of the cauldron, particularly in the way it affects Morgause, is another idea which could have had devastating power, but fails to come over as strongly as it should, because we haven't had the chance to know the characters fully and understand how the cauldron affects them. I can only wish, as I did with the previous book, that the author had twice the space to do her story justice.

Geoff Ryman – *Unconquered Countries*

Voyager, 1999, 275pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-648347-X

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Samuel Delany, in his 1993 introduction to this collection, states, "The four extraordinary novellas comprising this book portray, each of them, the detail and texture of a life on the inside – an inside that is bounded by a distant and virtual outside which surrounds or defines it." It's a fair assessment, although it isn't – it cannot be, with a writer like Ryman – anywhere near the whole truth of what these stories are about. Delany perhaps comes closer when he observes that "what the reader encountering these tales for the first time is likely to notice is not an underlying structural similarity so much as a gripping range of affect, of subject matter, of meaning." And yet it is there; in the four stories of this collection, the central character, or characters, stand at a bridge or gate (literally in the case of Third Child and Rich) between the inside and outside world, past and future, fear and hope.

Three of these stories, in various versions, have appeared in *Interzone*, the magazine or in its first anthology ('O Happy Day!', 1985). 'The Unconquered Country' was published as *The Unconquered Country – A Life History* (1986) to extraordinary acclaim and a Nebula nomination. Both were written in 1984, a year in which, Ryman notes in his Afterword, "I could do no wrong." Both are stunning, shocking; they deserve to be read, not just by sf readers, but outside in the 'real' world, where they are as strong, as powerful, provocative and finely honed as anything that has been written in or out the genre. 'Fan', written from a more personal than moral anger, perhaps suffers a little in comparison, or maybe because it's us–the readers, addicts and consumers–that Ryman seems to be getting at as much as the hollowness of the celebrity system itself.

Which brings us to 'A Fall of Angels, or, The Possibility of Life Under Extreme Conditions' (a subtitle that could equally serve for each and all of the stories in this collection), an extraordinary tour de force of technique, almost a prose poem of galactic hard sf. And also a love story, a First Contact story, and one of betrayal, told in alternating epistolary episodes, recordings, history texts and passages from a project induction and training manual. The stories of the disembodied Angels, Z and B, redirecting the energies of stars in Humanity's religious drive to reverse entropy, and of researcher Raul Kundara, serving out a placement on the world of Hellespont, wind around each other until both are crushed by impersonal forces for whom the Universe is a thing to be codified and controlled, rather than to be joyously celebrated and gloried in.

It's rare thing to say of any work in the genre that you will be that less rich, that less moved, for not having read them. Ryman's work falls into this category; and this collection is definitely one.

Fred Saberhagen – *Ariadne's Web*

Tor, 2000, 412pp, $25.95, ISBN 0312866291

Reviewed by Robert W. Hayler

Second in what threatens to become a series this sequel to *The Face of Apollo* uses characters and events from the Greek myths, notably the story of Theseus, Ariadne and the Minotaur, as a basis for an irreverent romp full of romance, intrigue and spectacular clashes with the gods. Well, that's what Saberhagen and Tor think it is. In actual fact this book is an absolute disgrace. Without a redeeming feature, it is a failure in every respect.

Ungrammatical, repetitious and clumsy, the poor quality of the writing beggars belief. For example, at one point the male lead is described as 'a fledging immortal' and 'in mortal danger' *in the same sentence*! If I were inclined to charity a contextual rationale could be given for this howler but the disheartening and unrelenting shoddiness of this work confounds any attempt at kindness. The editors at Tor should be thoroughly ashamed.

The characterisation is a bad joke. To say they are cardboard is to besmirch the good name of robust wood-pulp composites. Despite the intriguing possibilities afforded by a rewrite of the Greek myths all imaginative potential is unfulfilled. That they share names with characters from legend seems mostly coincidental. Ariadne, who dangles off the arm of whichever male is in charge, is a cloying irritant. The supposedly sympathetic Minotaur is unintentionally hilarious: "I, Asterion..." he solemnly intones at the start of every section told from his point of view. That Theseus is not all he seems is boringly evident from his entrance, and besides, the *real* male lead has already been introduced in the second paragraph. Suffice to say that the wait for him to take centre stage is no fun at all.

The plotting starts at inept and gets worse from there until, at about three-quarters of the way through, Saberhagen appears to give up completely. During the misshapen conclusion cast members lurch in and out of scenes. Glaring gaps are left in the action to be inexpertly plugged a few pages later. Ariadne's special power, the ability to find stuff, is introduced only to prove laughable. There is no tension at all and not even much in the way of coherent narrative to hold the interest. Really, the average eleven year old dungeonmaster shows considerably more skill and gusto in orchestrating adventure.

I sincerely hope that no-one at all buys this book.

Jan Siegel – *Prospero's Children*

Voyager, 1999, 331pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-00-225835-8

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

The hardback cover price of *Prospero's Children* might lead one to believe that this is being marketed as a Young Adult title, and although HarperCollins claim that this due to its promotion as a lead title the story does appear to fall somewhere between a Young Adult and genre fantasy tale. What can't be denied is the publishing blurb's claim that "Jan Siegel is a natural storyteller"; this is a most impressive debut.

It is also, curiously, and – it has to be said – not entirely successfully, a book of two halves. It opens on an intriguing Prologue, in which a mermaid claims a drowning sailor from a storm-wrecked boat and with him a key, hung on a chain around his neck. Years later, the same mermaid is herself caught by a fisherman and bargains her life for her shiny 'treasure'.

The story then shifts to brother and sister, Will and Fern (Fernanada), whose father, Robin, has inherited a house in stuck out in the Yorkshire moors. The two are not exactly thrilled by the prospect of spending their summer holidays sorting out an old house in the middle of nowhere. Fern is even less pleased when, seeing it her duty to protect her bookish and somewhat unworldly father from 'unsuitable' girlfriends, the predatory Alison starts to move in – although whether she is more interested in Robin or the house is unclear until she arranges for Robin to go on an extended research trip to the States and things start to get a little spooky in and around the house. For a start, there is the mysterious stone-watcher, Ragginbone, out on the moors, and a companion she-wolf, Lougarry, both of whom seem to share Fern's mistrust of Alison. And there are other presences inside the house. Gradually, Fern discovers Alison is not what (or who) she seems, and is in fact a witch, Alimond, who is searching for something, a key, hidden in the house, in order to open a gate into another world. That Alimond succeeds only precipitates a greater crisis and Fern (in whom Ragginbone has recognised a nascent version of the Gift) has to cross into the world which Alimond has opened and close the Gate before both worlds destroy each other.

It's at this point the book splits to take on the mantle of epic fantasy, as Fern finds herself in Atlantis during the Last Days, with a different set of memories, and yet another witch-queen disastrously intent on opening a Gate to another world. The second half of the book largely abandons the undercurrent of tension and threat of the first for grand set pieces (the destruction of Atlantis by the storm), imprisonment and escapes, romance and adventure. It is also a very circular book. Remember that Prologue? It reappears again at the end, with a key being lost as a sailor goes down with a wrecked ship in a storm.

Despite the oddity of structure which makes it seem almost like two stories welded into one, it is a most impressive debut. I look forward to Siegel's next book and to see how she tackles it.

Norman Spinrad – *Bug Jack Barron*

Toxic, 1999, 254pp, £6.99 ISBN 1 902002-18-0

Reviewed by Colin Bird

Who can resist a book with the descriptive quote "...depraved, cynical, utterly repulsive and thoroughly degenerate" emblazoned on the cover? In fact, it's hard to believe the furore generated by the serialisation of this genre classic in *New Worlds* magazine back in the sixties. Back then W.H. Smiths banned the magazine, a cataclysmic blow to a small magazine – now they happily stock *American Psycho* and *Trainspotting*!

Bug Jack Barron concerns the struggle of a near-future TV shock-jock who helms the titular live confrontational talk show watched by a weekly audience of a hundred million. In a revealing display of Spinrad's misplaced sixties optimism, Barron is able to call up any public figure or business mogul on his vidphone and force them to answer tough questions on air. When Barron uncovers a juicy conspiracy, involving the shady Foundation which manages a group of cryogenic freezer facilities, he uses his TV show to investigate further.

It's hard to imagine Jack Barron being able to penetrate the layers of lawyers who protect modern tycoons like Bill Gates in the way he does in this book (no matter what the viewing figures of his show are). Even more misplaced is Spinrad's idea that ultra-conservative USA could *ever* legalise drugs. But if you take this novel as a journey into a parallel universe, where the sixties never ended, it becomes a more relevant piece of work. The prose is an effective blend of beat generation jive and melodramatic stream of consciousness.

Spinrad isn't really interested in speculation. He has crafted a cautionary tale; an angry polemic. Taken at face value *Bug Jack Barron* is a relic of that curious blend of cynicism and optimism which characterised the sixties (products of concurrent events such as the war in Vietnam and the lunar landings). Dig beneath the surface and the novel's barbed view of media brainwashing and politics controlled by big business is all too relevant today and I welcome the book's reissue.

Olaf Stapledon – *Star Maker*

Millennium 1999, 272pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-807-8

Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

Star Maker is one of the great narratory journeys of science fiction. It could alternatively be classified as a vision, fantasy, metaphor (Stapledon himself called it a myth), but its story-line is one of the quest for Babylon "yes and back again" variety, Babylon in this instance being the ultimate cosmos, and "candle light" the dying of galaxies. The journey starts, in a mood of partial disillusion, from home, a safe but vulnerable suburban nest, seen under the stars from a midnight hillside. In the Epilogue it finishes there; and for all the intervening revelations of that Spirit which embraces the endless endeavours and failures of being, and the final ecstatic 'Star Maker' theophany, the narrator's terrestrial end-scene, set under the same "cold light of the stars", admits only the challenge to humankind to strive for "some increase in lucidity before the ultimate darkness".

This SF Masterworks edition has appended Stapledon's typescript Glossary, not published with the 1937 edition. Definitions are supplemented by explanations and speculations which throw light on the ways in which his philosophical and (ambivalently agnostic) metaphysical ideas interconnect. It is useful to know that when he uses the word "spiritual" it is "to suggest activities at or near the upper limit of human capacity". I have described his stance as ambivalent: at times he sees "human capacity" as a mere spark destined to vanish as suns grow cold; at other times it is an aspect of, or a first step towards, a level of union or identity with the Star Maker, defined in the Glossary as the finite source of all existents, itself an abstract mode of "the eternal and absolute spirit". Such dual perceptions are characteristic of Stapledon – ambiguities which colour the multitudinous cultures and communities which the narrator-explorer encounters while Earth and present time are left behind: Ichthyoids, Arachnids, Nautiloids, Plant Men. The case of these last is well particularised. Their activity alternates between a rooted vegetable and contemplative existence by day and a busy, mobile, animal-like existence by night. Over the course of time each mode becomes an exclusive one, with resultant chaos. A rampant technology at extremes produces spiritual alienation: a reversion to perpetual contemplation leads to material disruption from which the culture

dies. Even so, Stapledon has it, future telepathic time research enables the race's finest achievements not to be lost but to be "knit into the texture of the galactic mind". That multivalent parable effectively epitomises *Star Maker*.

Brian Aldiss's valuable Foreword is a bonus. It contains a brief biographic and contextual profile and an appreciation of Stapledon's prose at its best, a counter to certain critical unkindnesses. He gratefully acknowledges Stapledon's influence on himself; and to such literary influences on Stapledon as Dante, Milton and Wells, he adds (and enthusiastically promotes) Winwood Reade's *The Martyrdom of Man*. Of *Star Maker* he says that "it remains light years ahead, something toward which the rest of us are still travelling".

Victoria Strauss – *The Garden Of The Stone*

Avon Eos, 1999, 485pp, $6.99 ISBN 0-380-79752-6

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

This novel is a worthy successor to *The Arm Of The Stone*, which I read some time ago (V200). Set in a world where the ordinary people live restricted lives, unable to use anything mechanical not permitted by a code of practice known as the Limits, any transgression is punished by the Guardians, who are Gifted telepathically and trained from an early age to take up the task of rulership. But all is not well: the Stone of the title, a mysterious artefact that has served as an icon for pilgrims over many years, has gone missing, taken by one of the Guardians, and a resistance movement has sprung up, run by a former Apprentice with the Gift of Prophecy.

The novel centres around Cariad, a member of the resistance, and Jolyon, enemy of Bron, who stole the Stone (he is Cariad's father). On a routine mission, Cariad, meant to be spying, has ulterior motives, and attempts to assassinate Jolyon. She fails, and is captured by him: he reads her mind and finds out about the resistance. At the same time, Konstant, another resistance member, has infiltrated Jolyon's inner circle, and been entrusted with a mission to find Bron, who has left his own world and gone into hiding. Konstant has an ulterior motive also, which is to bring Bron and the Stone back – part of the Prophecy foreseen by the resistance leader. But things do not go according to plan for him either.

Victoria Strauss has done an excellent job with this novel, describing an entirely believable world of her own creation, peopled with believable characters, against a well-constructed and logical background. Nor does she let us down when she takes Konstant out of his own familiar world and transports him to a world that could well be ours, but which she has portrayed through Konstant's eyes in such a way as to make it seem totally unfamiliar to us, and set you thinking about whether or not he is actually in our world.

In conclusion, Strauss has written a novel that not only has elements of fantasy in it, but works remarkably well as a mystery story. She has managed, successfully, to keep her characters and this reader off-guard all the time, with unexpected revelations for all. Most importantly of all, it stands alone, and I would definitely recommend this novel as an essential and hugely enjoyable read.

Martha Wells – *The Death Of The Necromancer*

Avon Eos, 1999, 538pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-380-78814-4

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

The accurate but dully-titled *Death of the Necromancer* is peppered with enconia like this one, by Robin Hobb:

> The vivid setting of a gas-lit city, equal parts decadence and elegance, would eclipse lesser characters than these. Character construction and setting are so deftly woven with the swiftly moving plot that the prose literally swept me away. The reader should be warned in advance, it is difficult to close the covers of this book.

Publishers have the understandable urge to precondition readership response by the blatant use of blurbery and selective press cuttings. When the book in question doesn't justify such hooha, however, I feel a bit cheesed off. *Necromancer* won't disappoint those people who like this sort of thing, but that's just about that.

Hobb did get the 'vivid setting' part right. Ile-Rien ('Nothing Island') wouldn't look out-of-place on *The Malacia Tapestry* or in some of Avram Davidson's more baroque metropolitan creations. And Martha Wells can paint a picture with words: "Under the cold dawn light... [The Philosopher's Cross] resembled nothing so much as a theatre after a long night's performance: empty of magic, with all the tawdry underpinnings of the stage exposed, and the hall cluttered with trash left behind by the audience" (p. 41).

But the 'character construction' is jerry-built, at its merely-functional best. The hero, Nicholas Valliarde, is a high-born Simon Templar figure who must avenge the judicial murder of his 'necromancer' father by Count Montesq. Madeline Denare makes like the Saint's girlfriend, Patricia Holm. I can barely tolerate the aristocratic balderdash that pleases both writers and readers of generic fantasy novels. Nobody does it with more ironic *élan* than Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, in her series about the vampiric Comte de Saint-Germain (*Hotel Transylvania*, etc).

The 'swiftly moving' plot reminded me of Damon Knight's remark that a rolling story gathers no meaning. Mechanical is the best word for it. If I weren't such a nice guy, I'd slightly misquote Robin Hobb: "The reader should be warned in advance, it is difficult to open the covers of this book." But I am, so I won't.

Susan Wright – *Star Trek: The Badlands, Book One of Two*

Pocket Books, 1999, $6.50, ISBN 0-671-03957-1

Susan Wright – *Star Trek: The Badlands, Book Two of Two*

Pocket Books, 1999, $6.50 ISBN 0-671-03958-X

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

I imagine, when Gene Roddenberry created the concept of *Star Trek*, that he would not have expected the tangents writers would travel along when developing stories in his universe, but I think he would have been pleased. He would certainly have approved of these two novels.

Susan Wright has taken as her main theme a volatile region of space, which Kirk's Enterprise, in Book One, is surveying, and it is Kirk who names the area of unpredictable plasma storms the Badlands. They are also awaiting further orders which, when they come, involves them in apprehending a smuggler. However, things become complicated by the appearance of a Romulan ship which, while pursuing them, gets hit by a plasma emission and explodes. This causes radiation poisoning, and things get even more difficult as the smuggler is a resourceful Romulan female who intends to pass information to the Klingons. Kirk prevents this, but not without some difficulty, and they eventually leave the Badlands with the prisoner and her smuggled information. They are in no fit state to take on the Klingon battle cruiser that appears, or discover the source of the radiation, and so the scene is set for future events.

The second half of this book deals with Captain Picard and his encounter with the Badlands. Aside from the effect of the radiation, Picard's life is complicated by an encounter with the Cardassians, and in particular one member of the Obsidian Order – think of the KGB in space and you will get some idea of what the Order is like – who imprisons Riker and Data, and who, while on the Enterprise, obtains information which could prove useful.

Book Two deals with Captain Janeway of the Voyager and Commander Sisko of Deep Space Nine and their respective encounters with the radiation zone. Their lives are made more difficult by the Cardassians (for Janeway) and the Romulans (for Sisko). Janeway discovers the source of the radiation – a prototype power source from the Romulan ship Kirk encountered – but the Voyager gets lost in the Badlands before she can successfully deal with it. Ultimately Sisko and his people dispose of the problem, though not without a few unexpected developments.

Susan Wright has done an excellent job of crafting four stories around a common theme. Both novels are enjoyable, and provide a good, fast-paced read.

Janny Wurts – *Grand Conspiracy*

Voyager 1999, 596pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-00-224074-2

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

In *Grand Conspiracy*, Janny Wurts continues her multi-volume fantasy ,'The War of Light and Shadow', that began with *The Curse of the Mistwraith*. The eponymous curse on the half-brother Lysaer, Prince of Light, and Arithon, Master of Shadow that they will always be at war with each other, their enmity threatening the very existence of their world of Athera, forms the background to the events that unfold in this, the fifth volume in the series and the second of 'The Alliance of Light' sequence.

The novel is fantasy on an epic scale, featuring the ambitions of kings and the machinations of sorcerers and enchantresses, the tale taking place in a world with its own millennia of history, and yet it is more subtle than much of its genre, being written in a style that that is both elegant and sensuous. Descriptions of locations and interiors are lavish and evocative, while major and minor characters leap vividly from the page, whether they are an unhappy princess, a drunken sorcerer, a young shepherd caught up in events against his will, his life threatened for reasons he cannot understand, or the Princes themselves. Prince Lysaer appears before his adoring and awed subjects dressed in white, glittering with diamonds. His charisma and charm are such that he has managed to form an Alliance of Light to oppose sorcery in general and Arithon in particular, successfully whipping up hatred against his half-brother throughout the continent of Paravia. Arithon is cast much more in the Byronic mould, being dark and sardonic. At the beginning of the book, his search for the Paravians, the three old races that inhabited Athera before Man, has taken him away from Paravia, the separation of the two brothers giving their world a respite from the threat of the Mistwraith's curse. The sweeping, panoramic action of the novel covers the next fifteen years, describing the activities of the various factions that have chosen to follow each of the Princes, particularly the plan of the Koriani enchantresses to lure Arithon back to Paravia, the actions of the Fellowship of the Seven, the keepers of the compact with the Paravian races that allowed men to settle on Athera, and the intrigues of Lysaer's royal court.

Janny Wurts has an enviable talent for making the magical episodes in the novel credible. Scenes such as that in which the sorcerer Asandir raises the forest of Caithwood to defend itself against Lysaer's soldiers, who intend to destroy it, or the same character's magical contention with Morriel, Prime Enchantress of the Koriani, are graphically described. Of course, volume five is not the best place to begin such a rich, colourful, many-stranded series, and it would be preferable to read the previous novel, *Fugitive Prince* (first volume of 'The Alliance of Light') before embarking on this book. That apart, I recommend *Grand Conspiracy* to anyone enjoys well-written high fantasy by an author who tells traditional tales in a contemporary voice.

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro – *Communion Blood*

Tor, 1999, 477pp, $26.95 ISBN 0-312-86793-X

Reviewed by Avril A. Brown

Forgive me, Father, for I have ....

Okay, I have a confession to make; this is the first time I've read one Yarbro's Count Saint-Germain novels. It's a series I've always meant to get around to, but somehow never did.

Communion Blood is not a tale of vampiric lore per se, rather it is a well-constructed and rather devious historical novel set in and around late 17th century Rome. I say devious, because although Yarbro appears to set out her characters' natures and intentions very early in the novel, in fact the book twists and turns quite competently.

Saint-Germain's lover, Atta Olivia Clemens, has died the true death. Mourning her, he has not visited his estates outside Rome for many years, basing himself instead in Transylvania, where he helps hold back the expansion of the Ottoman empire. However, Saint-Germain returns to Rome to assist his friend and fellow undead Niklos Aulirios in the legal battle over his inheritance from Olivia's will. This period in history was not kind to women; among the noble classes, marriages were brokered to purchase powerful allegiances, and women rarely had a say in the choice of husband. They certainly had no say in the ownership or disposal of property. Therefore, any challenge to a woman's will, whether legitimate or otherwise, was taken in all seriousness. Unfortunately, justice had to be seen to be done with a weather eye to the approval of the Roman Church.

Naturally, this brings Saint-Germain into conflict with the Church, and it takes all his long experience to hide his true nature, and to keep his friends safe from the all-powerful Inquisition. Saint-Germain has already had one experience in the care of the Pope's 'Little House'.

Saint-Germain is the perfect antithesis of the classic vampire. The horror in this book is not the schlock of the traditional vampire tales, but instead roils up from human greed and depravity. It is a rather delicious irony that this undead demonstrates far more empathy and humanity than the living who surround him.

For those who enjoy their fantasy with a healthy dash of realism, this is a rattling good read. I had some problems with Yarbro employing the phrase "making a leg" to describe the courtly bow of the time (oh, the images, the images), but at least the word 'preternatural' never rears its ugly head. Recommended.

Tom Arden – *Sultan of the Moon and Stars*
Gollancz, 1999, 518pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-575-06372-6

Third Book of The Orokon and sequel to *King and Queen of Swords* (reviewed by Mat Coward in V203) in a sequence that started with *The Harlequin's Dance* (reviewed by Andrew Adams,

V200). This volume moves the setting from an alternate/fantasy 18th century England, called Ejland, in the previous book to, as the title implies, an Arabian Nights world, as exiled Prince Jemany continues his quest for the lost crystals of the Orokon and is in peril from the demon Toth-Vexrah, who has burst free from the Realm of Unbeing.

Stephen Baxter – *Longtusk*
Millennium, 1999, 292pp, £9.99 ISBN 057506858
Stephen Baxter – *Silverhair*
Millennium, 1999, 277pp, £5.99 ISBN 1857988493
The second book (*Longtusk*) together with the mass market reissue of the first book of Baxter's young adult fantasy 'Mammoth' sequence. *Silverhair* was reviewed by John Newsinger in V205, who thought the premise, of a group of mammoths surviving undiscovered into the present day, wholly implausible, and rather rergetted Baxter's excursion into the admitedly popular 'talking animal' sub-genre. *Longtusk* follows the eponymous young mammoth 'hero' on a solitary odyssey, sixteen thousand years before the birth of Christ, into an alien culture and capture by the pale predators, the Lost , and eventually into legend and a central place in the long story cycle of the mammoths

Greg Bear – *Hegira*
Millennium, 1999, 222pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85798-902-3
Greg Bear – *Eternity*
Millennium, 1999, 470pp , £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-901-5
Greg Bear– *Strength of Stones*
Millennium, 1999, 221pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85798-903-1
Three early Greg Bear reissues (*Eternity* was first reviewed as far back as V150) following on from Millennium's other re-releases of early works by both Egan and McAuley (see Particles, V208). The selection is curious in itself. Why *Eternity* and not also *Eon*? Both *Hegira* and *Strength of Stones* were previously issued as part of Gollancz's VGSF series.

Kirsten Britain – *Green Rider*
Earthlight, 1999, 504pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-671-03303-4
Reissue of a debut novel by Britain, previously reviewed by Sue Thomason in V206. Expelled from school, Karigan, a merchant's daughter, is returning home when she encounters a dying messenger, one of the Green Riders, who charges her to complete deliver a message to King Zachary. Taking his horse (which she names 'The Horse') she sets off on her journey which takes most of the book, until she eventually delivers the vital message, allowing evil to be vanquished, but not so completely that it doesn't leave room for a few dangling plot threads to hang a sequel on – including whether Karigan will be allowed to become a Green Rider.

Jonathan Carroll – *The Marriage of Sticks*
TOR Books, 1999, 270pp, $23.95 ISBN 0-312-87193-7
Reviewed in UK Gollancz hardcover by Paul Kincaid in V207, this handsome Tor edition sports an attractive Tom Canty cover and design. Paul Kincaid thought this could be one of the finest fantasy novels of last year. "It is a sad story about joy, or perhaps a joyous story about sorrow. It is about loss, and how we cope with it, how life can be good even if it is not the life we wanted". Carroll's forté is to poise his characters between the magical and the everyday, to suggest an imminent erruption of magic into ordinary lives that may be as much psychological as supernatural, and whose potential may be equally threatening and transformative.

Storm Constantine – *Thin Air*
Warner, 2000, 314pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-7515-3032-8
Previously reviewed in B-format trade paperback by Maureen Kincaid Speller in V207. Constantine's closest approach to a contemporary mainstream novel, set in the independent music business, but veers off in the second half of the book to take on a more supernatural tone that lies somewhere between a ghost story and a fantasy conspiracy novel. The story concerns the sudden disappearance of rock star Dex at the height of his popularity, which throws both his record company and his partner, music journalist Jay, into confusion. Then, months after Dex has been assumed dead, another victim of the rock and roll lifestyle, rumours grow that he has been seen again.

Stephen Donaldson – *Reave the Just and Other Tales*
Voyager, 1999, 482pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00 651171-6
A collection of eight stories, reviewed by Jan Malique in V203, "ranging from the fantastical to the ironically humorous, tell of heroes (of both gender) embarking on great journeys, both inner and outer, of ancient mage wars and of love and hate". The title story is a tale of suggestion, in which fantasies of love and delusions of power exact a terrible revenge. Other stories include 'The Djinn Who Watches Over the Accursed' in which a young man is cursed to become an angel of death for all those whose paths he crosses. Another curse strikes the protagonist-victim of 'By Any Other Name' in which a necromancer gradually strips him of home, possessions and identity. Obsession and breakdown is the focus of 'The Kings of Tarnish Shall Bring Gifts' while 'What Makes Us Human' changes the mood to show the survival of human hope and spirit against crushing odds.

Kate Elliot–*The Burning Stone*
Orbit, 2000, 916pp £7.99, ISBN1-85723-976-8
Volume three of the 'Crown of Stars' series and sequel to *Prince of Dogs* (reviewed by Vikki Lee in V204). Things have fallen into an uneasy truce between the various rival factions of the kingdom of Wendar as the king moves to declare Prince Sangalant, his bastard son, as heir. Sangalant has other things on his mind, notably Liath, the young woman who saved him from captivity.

Dave Garnett – Bikini Planet
Orbit, 2000, 344pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85723-950-4
This carries possibly the most garish and deliberately tacky cover seen outside an *Austin Powers* movie poster. Inside, Mr Garnett has threatened, blackmailed, bribed and otherwise cajoled his friends, colleagues and debtors into providing puffs for his latest sci-fi epic. "Dave Garnett has done it again. I warned you. I warned everyone!" – Christopher Priest. "If science fiction's founding father H.G. Wells were able to read this astonishing book, he would be alive today" – Dave Langford. "No self-respecting feminist should miss this book. Take Aim. Fire!" – Lisa Tuttle. With friends like these... Somewhat sad to report, these and the other blurbs culled from sf's glitterati are often funnier than the novel itself, in which Las Vegas cop Wayne Norton, who stumbles onto what is an apparent gangland execution, is dumped into a cryogenic freezer and awoken 300 years later with a massive storage debt that leaves him indentured to GalactiCop Inc.

Mary Gentle–*Ash: A Secret History*
Gollancz, 2000, 1120pp, £14.99 ISBN 0-575-06901-5
The publication details surrounding Mary Gentle's 'Ash' sequence is so convoluted – the UK edition to be released in a single massive volume by Gollancz in April, while the first part has already been released by Avon in the US (reviewed in this issue's First Impressions) with the final volume due in September – the differences of titling, division and framing text between the editions almost mirroring the deliberate uncertainties of provenance raised within the text, that one begins to suspect that an obscure joke is being played. Here, though (just to complicate matters further) is the first half, or first two parts, of *Ash: A Secret History* in bound proof, taking us up to p.571 with the end note that Part 2, *Ash: The Wild Machines*, is to follow, to complete this hugely intriguing and ambitious "alternate history counterfactual".

Andrew Harman – *The Surburban Salamander Incident*
Orbit, 2000, 338pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85723-733-1
When Laurel Mires, part-time eco-terrorist, doing a stretch for ostrich rustling, is visited by her estate agent with the keys for 13 Merryvale Avenue, followed by her sudden release from prison, she thinks her luck has turned. Then, when a bunch of salamanders start partying in her coal effect fire, she starts wondering why someone wants her to have the house so badly.

Frank Herbert – *Dune*
Gollancz, 1999, 447pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-575-06856-6
"New Illustrated edition" with both a cover and interior colour plates by John Shoenherr, who provided the original covers and illustrations to Herbert's classic when it was first serialised in *Analog* in the 1960s. Other than that, this is a fairly straight edition, no Introductions or Forewords, just a straight launch into the title page, text and the several Appendices of the 1965 original. Can there be anybody who hasn't read his? Forget the dodgy film, which massively compromised the wheels-within-wheels complexity of Herbert's novel for some over-budget FX, and go back to the original and its sequels.

Oliver Johnson – *The Last Star At Dawn*
Orbit, 1999, 440pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85723-723-3
Third, and presumably concluding, book of 'The Lightbringer Trilogy'. The first volume, *Forging of the Shadows*, was reviewed by Vikki Lee in V191 and the second, *The Nations of the Night*, by Kathy Taylor in V203, neither of whom, it must be admitted, were exactly bowled over. Having retrieved the sword Dragonstooth and the invincible Bronze warrior, Thalassa, the Lightbringer, and Urthred, the priest of Flame, must recover the third ~~plot coupon~~ magical artifact, The Rod of Shadows, from the fortress of Iskiard, guarded by an army of undead, in order to fulfil the prophecy and defeat the powers of darkness.

Stephen Jones and David Sutton (eds) – *Dark Terrors 4: The Gollancz Book of Horror*
Millennium, 1999, 349pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-894-9
19 stories from such names as Matheson, Fowler, Gaiman, Brite, Tuttle, Baxter, Schow, Campbell, Joel Lane and Michael Marshall Smith. As the editors point out in their introduction, both the first three anthologies of this series and a number of stories from those volumes have been nominated for both the British and World Fantasy Awards, and stories from *Dark Terrors* have been selected for reprint in *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* and *Best New Horror*.

Jane Lindskold – *Legends Walking: A Novel of the Athanor*
Avon , 1999, 404pp, $6.99 ISBN 0-380-78850-0
A second volume of the 'Athanor', shapeshifters who take on the forms out of myth and legend – satyrs, merfolk, unicorns– ruled by Arthur the King. Now Changer, the immortal eponymous

hero of the first volume, has two problems to deal with: his wayward daughter, Sharazad, and the resurgence of a plague introduced into the world by someone who may or may not be one of the athanor, Shopona, onetime God of Smallpox. I get the feeling this may not be an entirely rigorous treatment of mythology and the Matter of Britain.

Charles de Lint – *Moonlight and Vines*
Tor, 1999, 461pp, $6.99 ISBN 0-812-56549-5
Mass market reissue of de Lint's third collection, reviewed by Janet Barron in V206, in which de Lint returns to his bohemian urban setting of Newford, a place where art, dreams and magic collide. Collecting 23 stories drawing on the same place like this does, as Janet pointed out, have a downside, in the narrow social stratum from which de Lint draws his characters: poets, musicians, artists and storytellers, often living at the margin of society. The effect, and perhaps intention, is sometimes reminiscent of the characters of Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*, while the magic that intrudes into their world is that of Gaiman or Carroll, in which promise and threat are entwined.

Ken MacLeod – *The Stone Canal*
TOR Books, 2000, 304pp, $24.95 ISBN 0-312-87053-1
US publishers have taken a while to catch onto MacLeod (interviewed in V208 by Andrew M. Butler), so one hopes that this is quicky followed by the remaining novels of MacLeod's highly-regarded and politically astute quartet. *The Stone Canal* (reviewed by Joseph Nicholas back in V192), the story of Jonathan Wilde, architect of a renewal of Earth's space endeavour and now newly reborn on Mars, forms both prequel and sequel to the events of MacLeod's debut *The Star Fraction* and sets things up for an exploration along divergent near and far future timelines in *The Cassini Division* and *The Sky Road*.

Julian May – *Orion Arm*
Voyager, 1999, 364pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-00-224714-3
Second volume in a "rip-roaring space opera yarn" wrote Andrew Adams, reviewing this in hardback in V209. Following on from *Perseus Spur* (in which our hero's beach house was devoured by a giant sea toad), Asahel ('Helly') Frost is dragged back into a world of scheming mega corporations, skullduggery, and boardroom battles that spill over into kidnapping, assassination and space battles. Park your search for deep enquiries into the meaning of life at the door: "...if you're looking for a rollicking good time with a book you won't want to put down then this is for you".

Elizabeth Moon – *Once a Hero*
Orbit, 1999, 400pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85723-953-3
Fourth volume of 'The Serrano Legacy', the first two of which, *Hunting Party* and *Sporting Chance*, were reviewed by Chris Hill in V207. A third volume, *Winning Colours*, precedes this. Here the focus switches to Esmay Suiza, a junior-grade lieutenant, who surprises herself and everyone else by becoming the youngest and lowest ranking officer to win a major space battle but in the process ending up the senior surviving officer in a mutineering ship and landing herself on a court martial charge of treason.

Ricardo Pinto – *The Chosen*
TOR Books, 2000, 494pp, £24.95 ISBN 0-312-87208-9
First book of the enigmatically titled *The Stone Dance of the Chameleon* trilogy, this was reviewed in the Bantam edition by Kathy Taylor in V204 and also selected as reviewer Vikki Lee's fantasy Book of the Year. Strange, dark, often brutally graphic, the "Chosen" of the title are a ruling elite who go masked and cloaked to protect their bodies and blood (in which runs the ichor of the Gods) against contamination by the world, even extending to the gaze of lesser races (which offense is punishable by death). Pinto constructs a world and culture bound and circumscribed by rank and ritual, in which blood purity (upon which is constructed a strict and complex hierarchy) is paramount. Intriguing.

Terry Pratchett – *City Watch Trilogy*
Gollancz, 1999, 759pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-575-06798-5
A hardback omnibus that includes *Guards! Guards!*, *Men At Arms* and *Feet of Clay*, presumably cunningly released in time for Christmas, but welcome nevertheless, and a bargain (though it will do serious damage to your wrists) if , like us, you have lent one or more of these out and despair of ever getting them back.

Alison Sinclair – *Cavalcade*
Millennium, 1999, 299pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85798-564-8
If the aliens arrived, and announced that if you gathered by the shores on a certain day they would take you with them, would you go? In Sinclair's novel, for their own reasons, tens of thousands do. But when they awake, they don't find themsleves among friendly, gentle aliens out of *ET* or *Close Encounters* but alone in vast artificial and organic environment and where any electronic devices they have bought with them have crumbled to dust. Thrown back on to basic survival skills, groups and factions form along religious, cultural and political lines, some communal and inclusive, others separatist or fundamentalist, as they try and work out why they are here. And why their hosts, or captors, appear to have let loose a deadly alien disease into their environment. This got Janet Barron's recommendation in V204.

Robert Silverberg – *The Book of Skulls*
Millennium, 1999, 222pp £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-914-7
H.G. Wells – *The Time Machine & The War of the Worlds*
Millennium, 1999, 274pp £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-887-6
Daniel Keyes – *Flowers for Algernon*
Millennium, 2000, 216pp £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-938-4
Philip K. Dick – *Ubik*
Millennium, 2000, 224pp £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-853-1
The latest crop of Millennium's excellent SF Masterworks series turns up trumps yet again, from Silverberg's story of four students who discover through a manuscript the existence of a sect of immortals, to Wells's two sf classics, Keyes deeply affecting and beautifully constructed story of an experiment in artificially enhanced intelligence that all-too-poignantly succeeds, to Dick's paranoid (of course) masterpiece. Excellent stuff. If you've kept up with the whole series so far, your knowledge and enjoyment of sf will be immeasurably richer, and your bank balance some £180 poorer.

Vector 210 – Index of Books Reviewed

Book of Horror [P] .....
Daniel Keyes – *Flowers for Algernon* [P] .....
Peter Layton – *Skip Trace Rocks* [KVB] .....
Jane Lindskold – *Legends Walking: A Novel of the Athanor* [P] .....
Charles de Lint – *Moonlight and Vines* [P]
.....
James Lovegrove et al – *The Web 2028* [PH] .....
Ken MacLeod – *The Stone Canal* [P] .....
Ken Macleod et al – *The Web 2028* [PH]
.....
Marc Matz – *Nocturne for a Dangerous Man* [SD] .....
Julian May – *Orion Arm* [P] .....
L.E. Modesitt, Jr – *Gravity Dreams* [JDO] .....
Elizabeth Moon – *Once a Hero* [P] .....
John Newsinger – *The Dredd Phenomenon* [GW] .....
Andre Norton – *Wind in the Stone* [VL] .....
Marco Palmieri (ed.) – *Star Trek: The Lives of Dax* [LH] .....
Severna Park – *The Annunciate* [EAB] .....
Diana L. Paxson – *The Book of the Cauldron* [CB1] .....
Ricardo Pinto – *The Chosen* [P] .....
Terry Pratchett – *City Watch Trilogy* [P] .....
Geoff Ryman – *Unconquered Countries* [SJ] .....
Fred Saberhagen – *Ariadne's Web* [RWH]
.....
Jan Siegel – *Prospero's Children* [SJ] .....
Robert Silverberg – *The Book of Skulls* [P]
.....
Alison Sinclair – *Cavalcade* [P] .....
Norman Spinrad – *Bug Jack Barron* [CB2]
.....
Olaf Stapledon – *Star Maker* [KVB] .....
Victoria Strauss – *The Garden Of The Stone* [LH] .....
Stephen Jones and David Sutton (eds) – *Dark Terrors 4: The Gollancz Book of Horror* [P] .....
Martha Wells – *The Death Of The Necromancer* [GA]
.....
H.G. Wells – *The Time Machine & The War of the Worlds* [P]
.....
Susan Wright – *Star Trek: The Badlands, Book One* [LH] .....
Susan Wright – Star Trek: *The Badlands, Book Two* [LH] .....
Janny Wurts – *Grand Conspiracy* [LB] .....
Chelsea Quinn Yarbro – *Communion Blood* [AAB]
.....

Reviewer's Key: AAB – Avril A. Brown, AS1 – Andy Sawyer, AS2 – Andrew Seaman, CA – Chris Amies, CB1 – Cherith Baldry, CB2 – Colin Bird, CH – Chris Hill, EAB – Elizabeth A. Billinger, GA – Graham Andrews, GW – Gary Wilkinson, IE – Iain Emsley, JDO – John D. Owen, JN – Joseph Nicholas, KT – Kathy Taylor, KVB – K.V. Bailey, LB – Lynne Bispham, LH – Lesley Hatch, LJH – L. J. Hurst, MC – Mat Coward, PH – Penny Hill, P – Particle, RWH – Robert W. Hayler, SC – Stuart Carter, SD – Stephen Deas, SJ – Steve Jeffery, ST – Sue Thomason, STM – Scott T. Merrifield, VL – Vikki Lee.