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SUBMISSIONS
The SFRA Review encourages all submissions, including essays, review essays that cover several related texts, and interviews. If you would like to review nonfiction or fiction, please contact the respective editor.

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News Items:

The Official Frederik Pohl website is looking for contributions, including brief scholarly essays suitable for a wide audience, book reviews, brief synopses of works by Pohl, appreciations, reminiscences, .gif or .jpg (picture) files, suggested links to other sites / permission to link to your website, and study guides. Send suggestions, articles and permissions to <erlichrd@muohio.edu>.

The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, which will move to Seattle to become part of the Science Fiction Museum, has announced this year’s inductees, including Brian Aldiss, Harry Harrison, E.E. “Doc” Smith, and Mary Shelley.


The Fourth Annual Sunburst Award nominees have been announced: Blind Lake, by Robert Charles Wilson; The Bone House, by Luanne Armstrong; Initiation, by Virginia Frances Schwartz; Oryx and Crake, by Margaret Atwood; A Place So Foreign and 8 More, by Cory Doctorow.

SFRA BUSINESS

Editor’s Message
Christine Mains

You’ll all have noticed a couple of things about the front cover of this issue. First, of course, is the new logo, which actually debuted on the cover of the 2004 Directory. The second thing you’ll have noticed, since the Table of Contents appears on the cover, is the dearth of nonfiction reviews in this issue.

Getting each issue of the SFRA Review into your hands requires a complicated dance with many partners. Reviewers have to complete their reviews, and submit them to either Fiction Editor Philip Snyder or Nonfiction Editor Ed McKnight. Then they do their bit, and send the reviews along to me. I have to do some editing and some formatting, then transfer everything into a page layout program to create a printable file, which then goes to the Managing Editor Jan Bogstad. Then Jan has to co-ordinate everything with the printer, who unfortunately but understandably places a higher priority on campus-related print jobs than on the Review. Such a complicated dance requires impeccable timing, and if one partner misses the beat, everything falls apart.

So, everything starts with the reviewers. People get busy with other projects or, at this time of year especially, with vacations and personal stuff. So the book reviews slide a little lower in the to-do pile. And after speaking with the Reviews Editor for another journal who informs me that sometimes, she can’t get some reviewers to complete the job at all, it’s hard to complain when some people take a little extra time. But it’s very frustrating when we’re getting down to the wire, when I’m nagging Ed and Phil and they’re nagging you guys, and nothing’s happening. This actually happens quite often, and normally it’s not a big deal to delay a few days, but sometimes, that dance requires much more precise choreography. Like this summer. This is, literally, the last second for me. Tomorrow morning, I’m on a plane to Britain for the conference on the Commonwealth of Science Fiction hosted by Farah Mendlesohn, Andrew M. Butler, and Andy Sawyer. I’ll be away for two weeks. By the time I get back, Managing Editor Jan Bogstad will be away. And by the time she gets back, her printer will be hip-deep in higher priority print jobs. So either the Review goes out now, even though no one seems to be responding to Ed’s pleas for reviews, or it waits for several weeks.

Long story short: Please get those reviews completed and submitted. Without you, we’re just a bunch of wallflowers.

SFRA BUSINESS

President’s Message
Peter Brigg

SFRA owes a real debt of gratitude to Beverly Friend and Elizabeth Anne Hull for hosting SFRA Skokie. We ate, drank, socialised, held an annual meeting and, oh yes, a flood of scholarship was on tap as well as readings by a host of voices led by Guest of Honour Connie Willis, Gene Wolfe, and Fred Pohl. Edward James scooped up the Pilgrim Award, although I can feel him cringe (empathy over 18,930 km) from Dublin to Christchurch at the word “scoop.” Ah! well. Historians are forced to exist in the same world as English professors. At Skokie, some matters about the future emerged of general interest to you, the members of SFRA. Dave Mead broke some big news: Ursula K. LeGuin’s return to SFRA conferences as Guest of Honour at SFRA 2005 Las Vegas, Nevada, at the Imperial Palace Hotel and Casino, June 23 – 26. See sfra.com for further details. This should be a very special conference indeed. Plan to be there.
On show at Skokie were draft designs for a new logo for the Association. After listening to members’ voices at the General Meeting your Executive has finalised a selection and you will see its first use on the cover of the 2004 Directory, which, as I write, Chrisse Mans is just about to send to Jan Bogstad for printing. It will gradually appear on stationery, the web site, SFRAR, and in the tri-fold brochure which we hope members will request from the Executive and hand out to anyone who might be a candidate to join SFRA (the brochure will be forthcoming once the new Executive is elected). As with all such design exercises, I expect some objections to the change, but to please all of the individuals and institutions on our membership list (292 was our count Dec. 31, 2003, so we are up a tad) is a task beyond mortal undertaking.

With our eye to membership matters, the General Meeting passed the amendment making the Vice President of the Association responsible for recruitment and membership, and the meeting passed the other amendments that were proposed. You should look for these in your 2004 Directory.

This issue is the one that gets dropped in the pool or buried in the sand. Enjoy your summers (I’m in midwinter in Christchurch, 25 F at night and Kiwis have no inkling what central heating is) and write those wonderful papers for me, then a relaxed Past President of SFRA, to listen to at Las Vegas next June.

**SFRA BUSINESS**

**Minutes of Business Meeting**

Janice M. Bogstad

Minutes: SFRA Annual General Meeting

9 a.m. June 6, 2004

Hospitality Suite/Doubletree Chicago/Northshore Hotel, Skokie, Ill

Present: Members attending the 2003 SFRA Conference

Call to order 9:04 a.m.

Approval of agenda: Moved by Elms, Seconded by Sims.

Minutes of 2003 General Meeting, as published in *SFRA* #265, moved by Elms, seconded by Richard Erhlich. Farah Mendlesohn asked for clarification concerning the minutes, specifically the definition of “a reasonable response” in regards to the policy of sending out a follow-up letter to non-renewals. Dave Mead clarified the numbers; thirty registration renewals came in from the process last year. Farah Mendlesohn noted that *Foundation* stopped sending out follow-up letters as they didn’t justify the expense, but David Hartwell disagreed, noting his experience with sending out renewal notices monthly for the NYRSF for 22+ years, arguing that such notices are the way to get the steadiest and largest number of renewals. After this discussion, the minutes were unanimously adopted with amendments as revised.

Officers’ Reports:

Past president: Mike Levy set up the election. Information was published in last *SFRA Review*. A slate of office candidates was listed. There was a call for more nominations, and a request to attendees to notify Mike Levy if they wanted to nominate themselves or someone else (with permission) by June 1. Ballots will be going out August 1, and are due back by October 1.

President: Peter Brigg thanked the Executive Board as he has been in New Zealand since January and exec board has taken care of email inquiries. This was especially helpful because files got deleted in N.Z. that he could not replace until he gets back to Toronto.

Vice President: Jan Bogstad has mostly been concentrating on the *Review* and her school is happy to take it on, which is nice for all.

Secretary: Warren Rochelle (in absentia, reported via email). He performed


The Mythopoeic Fantasy Award will be announced at the banquet during Mythcon XXXV, to be held in Ann Arbor, Michigan, from July 30th-August 2nd, 2004. Nominees:Adult Lit-


Treasurer: Dave Mead reported on finances. $35965.48 as of end of May, $16,651.19 in checking but may be less now since checks have been written for the conference and a few other expenses. This does not take into account our indebtedness to journals, but it looks like we will end the year in the black. We added paypal as an option for payment and use only by persons who have real issues with currency exchange, such as non-US members who don't have U.S. dollars accounts. The association pays $1-2 per use but this makes more possible internationally and old members rejoin more easily. As of the end of May, SFRA has 282 members. This is close to last year at end of 2003 and this does include honorary members who do not pay dues.

Agenda:

1. Logo: The Executive Board selected possibilities and got feedback from the comments from members who checked out the logo choices in the book room and have incorporated a new logo with a planetscape. Martell Spignier, a graphic designer and owner of a production form company in Corpus Christi, Texas, did the job on spec without promise of payment and we will arrange the payment when we make the final decision.

2. Recruitment/Information Brochure: Dave Mead noted we are also redoing the tri-fold brochure and will make it available to all. Farah Mendlesohn commented that Foundation didn’t get members form brochures; but gets more members through using old issues of Foundation as an incentive. We are also using old copies of the SFRA Review; calls for conference papers. We put an advertisement in the ICFA Program. Hull commented that she thinks the brochure is useful, as it’s portable and inexpensive. Briggs commented that the idea was bandied about last year’s meeting and feels these should be useful at things like the MLA regional seminars. They function like a business card in other situations. They are handed out; they are not left on “freebie tables.” Friend stated she felt the brochures would have been useful at WisCon. Briggs stated that we can make just a few - and the brochure can also be put on the website so members can download it and copy as needed. Swigert asked if a new member could be asked, when we acknowledge their membership. “How did you find out about SFRA?” with the choices being: Convention, brochure, website, or word of mouth. Dave Mead felt this would complicate his job far too much. It was noted that the webpage is not very helpful. WebPages are not well organized and addresses and names of contacts sometimes are hard to find. The Website is set up for low maintenance, but it is designed to help membership. The Web manger is a non-voting member of Executive, but he is very busy. There may be others who can help.

3. SFRA Review will now be quarterly, and sent out in the second month of the three-month period. It is getting harder to get copy; so attendees were asked to please consider sending notes on teaching, etc., if they are doing some teaching or research of interest—such as research in progress. or if interviews, notes and queries, send them in. Classic scholarly papers are not being looked for. Willis’ speech was given as an example. Now that things are on track, a database will be set up to keep track of books that arrived and so forth. SFRA would like to extend a vote of confidence to Christine Mains for her work on the Review.

Old business:

1. SFRA 2005. It will be held June 23 through 26 at the Palace Casino. Rooms are an average of $65 per night. The conference details will be formally announced soon. The cost will be $125 for registration with a reduction for graduate students. We aren't planning a great deal of entertainment and will spend the funds on the Pilgrim banquet. The guests are Le Guin, Barnes and Johnson.
Others may be added. Lowentrout is co-chair with Dave Mead and will start setting out this information on the website very soon.

2. Bylaw change for review. SFRA Review will be published quarterly, as proposed at Guelph but it must be proposed and voted on after the proposal (see New Business).

3. Colors for the Logo: when color is possible or useful, it should be considered. Probably two colors is the maximum allowed. It would be good to have colors, especially for the website. We get stationary printed each time we get a new executive board. The stationary should also be downloadable so board members can print their own. This will reduce reprinting. Colors were discussed in terms of the size of the Logo, location, how to use the first color in headings and a secondary color so that it is visible on the web and when printed from.

New business

1. Bylaw changes. Hartwell moved, Mendlesohn seconded, that we accept the first article 8 section 2 - a change from bi-monthly to quarterly for the publication schedule of the SFRA Review. The motion was unanimously approved.

2. It was requested that we print the schedule for the conference at least 21 days before the conference because the precise schedule, especially when we start on Thursday and end on Sunday, depends on the number of papers. It was also suggested that we could advertise in a number of places but specify one where it would ALWAYS be found. Swigert moved and Hull seconded this amendment on notification of the conference schedule on the website 21 days before the first day of the conference. The motion was unanimously approved.

3. Amendment to Article Five, Section Three was moved by Swigert and seconded by Hartwell. The amendment to the duties of the Vice President will specify that the Vice President take on the responsibilities of recruitment. This amendment was unanimously passed.

4. An Amendment to Article Five, Section Seven, specifying that the treasurer can serve more than one consecutive term, was moved by Hartwell and seconded by Friend. Hartwell, citing IAFA’s experience, recommended this very strongly. The longer an experienced person is in place the better the organization is served. Whoever does it has to master an accounting and database program. The software takes a while and there are safeguards, such as requiring the president and some other person as the second signatory. This helps in emergency situations. Generally the treasurer continually updates the president so there is little chance for peculation. Brigg commented: “I’ve only had one treasurer work for me and he has done such a good job.” The amendment unanimously approved.

5. Awards: It is difficult to get volunteers, and get appropriate volunteers. The juries are three-person juries. People serve for three years, first year as junior, second as middle- and third year as chair. This provides for historical continuity. The one current exception is the Mary Kay Bray Award. The Clareson is described in the directory. It was requested the list of awards and people who are chairs of the committees be on the website so that people can recommend award candidates. Nominations were taken from the floor and can also be sent to: President Brigg; Hartwell for Pilgrim; Mendlesohn for Clareson; Mihalyova for the Review award, the Mary Kay Bray; Pioneer: Kincaid is on the jury, and we need two people for next year.

6. Future Conferences: Next year, 2005, is Las Vegas with Dave Mead and Peter Lowentrout in Charge. Subsequently, we’ve had an offer from Poland. Pavel Frelik had expressed continuing interest and said he’d be at the conference with plans but has not been heard from for 2 months. There is some question as to whether we would like to go abroad again so soon. Dublin, Ireland, was suggested for 2008. Irish fandom is really strong there are a lot of fan critics in Britain.

The John W. Campbell Memorial Award for best science fiction novel of 2003 was awarded to Jack McDevitt for Omega. The Theodore Sturgeon Award for best science fiction short story of 2003 went to Kage Baker for “The Empress of Mars.”

Neal Stephenson’s Quicksilver has been named the winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award.

The second annual Robert A. Heinlein Award has been given to Arthur C. Clarke.

Recent and Forthcoming Titles:


Recent and Forthcoming Titles:
It feels proper somehow that this tribute to the service and work of Pat Warrick comes in written form out of a cold cabin in Northern Michigan, about four hours north of where Pat herself lives and has been living as long as I have known her. She lives near Green Bay, and the man who supplies propane to the cabin I am writing from happens to be in Chicago till tomorrow afternoon while the May weather here in the U. P. has turned bitter cold as usual. Joe kindly will read this to you because I cannot get down to Chicago myself this spring. Neither can the man Clareson himself was originally a Wisconsin boy, and all of us know a lot about his determination and resourcefulness. I understand that Tom Clareson himself was originally a Wisconsin boy, and all of us know a lot about his determination and resourcefulness.

Those are the qualities that I will emphasize as we the committee (Joe, Neil Easterbrook, and I) present the Clareson Award for 2004 to Pat. In a strange way, also, these qualities are associated in my mind, as I think of Pat, with a certain separateness and isolation. I argue that these are, therefore, genuine attributes for the Clareson Award even though we usually think more of their reverse in these presentation tributes. But the isolate frontier person ought not to seem alien to this award from this association. Other awards in SFRA delight in similar connotations. We award pioneers. We award pilgrims. Tom Clareson himself was both, in all respects. So this year, it seems to me, our winner embodies her considerable talents and has long devoted her efforts to the study of science fiction. I was the treasurer on her executive committee during a crucial period in our history when initiatives were undertaken to transform SFRA into a more solid tool for the study of science fiction. I was the treasurer on her executive committee in 1983-84, and I still carry sharp memories in my head of how she wanted me to be a maker of budgets and not just an English teacher. She was a firm president, and
She knew also how to pass out praise when I finally got the job right. She was our first woman president, and she was very good at that pioneer role.

The second instance is Pat as editor and aggressive businesswoman for science fiction. She and Marty Greenberg, her colleague and neighbor, conceived and brought to fruition the first SFRA Anthology that was published shortly after her presidency. Dave Mead tells me that this enterprise is still generating revenue for the association, which I think is remarkable. Pat was a fine steward of our work during the Reagan years.

Her greatest service, however, and my third specific instance is closely related to her vision for the anthology. It is her steady and longterm work on the cybernetic imagination and on P. K. Dick. Pat's scholarship has not been flashy and self-promoting. Rather it is solid and suggestive work situated at the edges of where SF thinking has been at any given time. This work is immensely useful and of real service to those who follow. I see especially her 1980 book from MIT Press cited over and over as the field becomes more cyber conscious. And this is work, also, that was early encouraged by Clareson himself and originally published in his early collections. It is as though Tom knew clearly what considerable service Pat would contribute. He nurtured her work.

I have not seen Pat for many years, but I think of her often and clearly would like to call her a pioneer – only that is another of our awards. But whatever label we apply, and it is nice to think of Tom Clareson’s name as a label of quality now, Patricia Warrick is long overdue this recognition for service to the study of science fiction.

CLARESON AWARD
Acceptance Speech
Peter Brigg for Patricia Warrick

Patricia has asked me to accept the Clareson Award for her. After her long active period with SFRA she suffered a severe fall at her cottage and is today a quadriplegic with, as she points out, the time to read that she always wanted, but without the capability to come here to receive her award. She has asked me to thank the jury and all her friends in SFRA.

PIONEER AWARD
Acceptance Speech
Maureen Kincaid Speller channeling Andrew M. Butler

I’d like to begin with two apologies: first I am not Andrew Butler. Nor for that matter am I Andrew M. Butler.

Secondly, I, which is to say Andrew and/or Andrew M Butler, channelled for now via Maureen Kincaid Speller, am sorry not to be with you at this conference, because I would very much have liked to receive this award in person – in part because it might be the very first thing I’ve won.

Actually, I might be lying, I have this dim memory of a school sports day, where I led the field in the egg and spoon race.

Then there was the occasion when I came second in the Science Fiction Foundation raffle, and won a pile of signed Neil Gaiman comic books. First place went to John Clute who, if I recall correctly, won a Happy Meal at a major burger chain. I think I got the better deal.

But I did plan to be with you today. It appealed to my sense of humour that evening when I received an email about the award from Paul Kincaid, who lives some twenty minutes away from me, giving me news that meant we both needed to fly a few thousand miles and across several time zones to shake each
work of Guest of Honor Rudy Rucker, Guest Scholar Damien Broderick, Special Guest Writer John Kessel, and Special Guest Poet Albert Goldbarth. As always, we also welcome proposals for individual papers and for academic sessions and panels on any aspect of the fantastic in any media.

SUBMISSIONS: Abstracts for 20 minute papers and panel proposals should be sent to the appropriate Division Head; a listing is available on the website.


INFORMATION: <www.iafa.org> for continually updated information.

WHAT: Atwood Panel: Twentieth Century Literature Conference
WHO: The Margaret Atwood Society
WHEN: Feb. 24-26, 2005
WHERE: University of Louisville

TOPICS: any aspect of Atwood's work for presentation

SUBMISSIONS: Send 250-330 word proposals (as part of email message, hard copy, or fax, no attachments)

CONTACT: BOTH: Dr. Karen Macfarlane, Department of English, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, NS Canada B3M 2J6, karen.macfarlane@msvu.ca AND Dr. Cynthia Kuhn, Department of English, Metro State, CB 32, PO Box 173362, Denver, CO 80126 U.S.A. kuhnC@mscd.edu

WHO: Left or Right? Ideologies in Horror Fiction.
WHAT: 2005 conference of the Northeast Modern Language Association
WHEN: March 31 - April 2, 2005
WHERE: Cambridge, Massachusetts

TOPICS: This panel explores the extent to which horror fictions (in literature and film) perform an 'ideo-
we both ended up stealing from each others' drafts, and it must have been those bits that swung the award for me.

I've learnt so much from so many of you, and I'm constantly struck by the excellence of the science fiction academic community, as scholars and as friends. Thank you all.

And now thinking back, I can remember more details of that egg and spoon race. It would have been 1975 or 1976, and it was actually my birthday. Think of me being five or six and in short trousers. I presume I'd already demonstrated my prowess by coming a distant last in everything I'd entered, but for some reason I went in for the egg and spoon race in which you had to balance an egg-sized ball on a spoon over fifty yards, without the aid of glue or your thumb. I turned out to be good at this, and in fact was leading the field. The crowd were cheering me on as everyone else was dropping their eggs all over the place. I was a good dozen yards ahead of whoever was in second place, if I could only keep my nerve and my balance ... Five yards. Four yards... Three... Two... And then I looked back to see how far ahead I was. Disaster! I dropped the egg. By the time I'd scooped it up, everyone else had crossed the line. Later that day I had retire to bed with sun stroke or heat exhaustion.

There's a moral there, I suspect.

So this is the first thing I've ever won, and I'm flattered and flabbergasted and honoured beyond words to receive it, even in absentia. If you do find yourself in Canterbury (especially if you picked up a bottle of Laphroig in duty-free), do drop in so I can thank you in person.

Thank you.

GRAD STUDENT AWARD

Acceptance Speech
Sarah Canfield Fuller

Thank you, and I will keep this very brief. I would like to thank the SFRA for this award. I would like to thank my husband, Rob, for repeatedly listening to drafts of my paper to help me make it more understandable! I only wish I had saved it for this year's conference—as some of you may remember, I was unable to keep a straight face while reading it last year. Bram Stoker is funnier than you might expect. Once again, thank you, and I recommend that all the graduate students here send in their papers!

GUEST OF HONOR ADDRESS

"WHY DO YOU LIKE CHOCOLATE?"
THE REASONS I WRITE SCIENCE FICTION
Connie Willis

The question I get asked the most is, "Why do you write science fiction?"

People ask me other questions, too, like, "Where do you get your ideas?" and "Have you ever been abducted by aliens?" and "Why isn't your novel done yet?" (my editor asks that one a lot.) But the one I'm asked most is, "Why do you write science fiction?"

My first reaction is to think, "What a dumb question." It's like asking someone, "Why do you like chocolate?" Or lilacs. Or E.F. Benson's Mapp and Lucia novels.

My second reaction, however, is that it's a legitimate question. Why would someone stay in a genre where you're routinely asked, "Have you ever been abducted by aliens?"
The winning entry will be published. The best essay will be selected and should not have been previously published. The essay should be double-spaced, typed in 12-point font, and should not exceed 14 pages in length.

Papers double-spaced typing in length.

The essay topics may include: Wells and utopia; Wells and science; Wells and women; Wells and the social novel; Wells and colonialism; Wells and his contemporaries; and Wells and the World State. Essays should not exceed 14 pages double-spaced typing in length and should not have been previously published.

The winning entry will be published. The essay will be selected and should not have been previously published. The essay should be double-spaced, typed in 12-point font, and should not exceed 14 pages in length.

So why do I write science fiction? Well, to begin at the beginning, I fell in love with it. How it happened was this way: I was thirteen and shelving books in the junior high library, and I picked up a yellow book — I can still see it—with a guy in a spacesuit on the cover. The title was Have Space Suit, Will Travel, which I thought was hilarious, (I was thirteen, remember) and I opened it and read:

“You see, I had this space suit. How it happened was this way: “Dad,” I said, “I want to go to the Moon.”

“Certainly,” he answered and looked back at his book. It was Jerome K. Jerome’s Three Men in a Boat, which he must know by heart.

“I said,” Dad, please! I’m serious!”

There’s a scene at the end of Star Wars. The Death Star has cleared the planet, and Luke Skywalker is going in for one last run. Princess Leia is back at command headquarters, listening intently to the battle. All the other fighter pilots are dead or out of action, and Darth Vader has Luke clearly in his sights. All of a sudden, Han Solo comes zooming in from left field to blast Darth Vader and says, “Yahoo! You’re all clear, kid. Let’s blow this thing.” Now when he does this, Princess Leia doesn’t look up from the battle map or even change her expression, but my daughter, who was eight years old at the time leaned over to me and said, “Oh, she’s hooked, Mother.”

And when I opened that yellow book and read those first lines of Have Space Suit, Will Travel, I was hooked. I took it home with me and read it straight through the night. And then I checked out Citizen of the Galaxy and Time for the Stars and The Star Beast and Tunnel in the Sky and The Door into Summer and everything else Heinlein had ever written. And when I had finished all of those, I started on Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury and The Year’s Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction short story collections and every other book with the little rocket and atom symbol on the spine that I could find. I was completely hooked. Which explains why I started writing science fiction, but not why I’m still writing it, or why, forty years later, I was still so under its spell that I wrote a book called To Say Nothing of the Dog about time travel and those same three men in a boat.

Especially since most people don’t take science fiction seriously. They consider it children’s literature or no literature at all. After explaining that my novel Passage is about death, loss, and achieving immortality, someone invariably says, “I have a little nephew who would like that.” So why am I still in this pathetic genre after all these years? Because I think science fiction is very important for several reasons. And the first one is precisely that no one takes it seriously. Not that literature shouldn’t be taken seriously. It should. But there are times when it flourishes best when no one’s paying any attention. And the writers have no idea that what they’re writing is Art. Like Raymond Chandler and Damon Runyon and P.G. Wodehouse and J.R.R. Tolkien and Dorothy Sayers and Philip K. Dick and Jerome K. Jerome. He always wanted to write a serious Victorian novel, an important novel. He did. Charlotte Yonge and Marie Corelli and other Victorian authors have long since been forgotten, but Three Men in a Boat, Jerome’s hilarious tale of Harris and George and the cheese and the swans and the tin of pineapple and the Hampton Court Maze, to say nothing of the dog, has never been out of print since he wrote it in 1889. Precisely because he wasn’t trying to do something important. He was just messing around.

Science fiction is a great genre for messing around in. It lets you do almost anything you want—invent new forms or ring new changes on tired old forms, like the Western and the 1930s screwball comedy, and write about anything at all. Over the years, I’ve written stories about orangutans, Fred Astaire, coincidences,
bellringers, butlers, near-death experiences, chaos theory, recreation vehicles, Emily Dickinson, alien invasion, time travel, the Titanic, the D-Day invasion, nuclear war, and Robert E. Lee’s horse. About free will, and faith, and falling in love, duty, and dreams, and disaster, and death. And hula hoops, and those insufferable newsletters people send you at Christmastime, and Malibu Barbie.

Which brings me to the second reason I think science fiction is important. It doesn’t take itself seriously. Science fiction’s sense of humor was one of the first things I liked about it. In Have Space Suit, Will Travel, Kip tries to get to the moon by writing silly slogans about Skyway Soap for a soap contest but he doesn’t win the all-expense paid two-week trip to the moon. Instead, he wins a secondhand NASA space suit, and when he puts it on and goes out in the backyard to try it out, a spaceship lands on him and carries him and a smartaleck ten-year-old girl genius who can fix anything with a wad of chewing gum off to, you guessed it, the Moon. And into big trouble.

Science fiction has always known how to laugh at itself. From the very beginning, authors like Ron Goulart, Robert Sheckley, Kit Reed, and Howard Waldrop have poked fun at pomposity, pretentiousness, and the many and varied forms of extremism. In Thomas Disch’s “The Santa Claus Compromise,” the five-and-under crowd demand their civil rights, resulting in a journalistic expose of the jolly old elf and a Broadway musical called “I See London, I See France.” In Howard Waldrop’s “Night of the Cooters,” the Martian invaders have the bad luck to land in Texas. And in “One Ordinary Day, with Peanuts,” Shirley Jackson finally makes sense of all those people out there talking on their cell phones while driving. I have always loved the screwball comedies of the 1930s, with their sophisticated humor and snappy banter and sly social commentary. I found science fiction a perfect place for writing screwball comedies, and I’ve been happily setting them on overcrowded L-5s and in seminar-mad corporations ever since. And there are just so many things to poke fun at, like the end of the world. In “Why the World Didn’t End Last Tuesday,” I did my own version of Armageddon, with a committee of archangels consulting their dayplanners and juggling their schedules while they try to plan to the Second Coming. In “Even the Queen,” (a story Gardner Dozois refers to as “a period piece”) I got to poke fun at radical feminism, vegetarians, and the ridiculous idea that “the curse” is a phrase men came up with. And in my novel Bellwether, I poked fun at virtually everything that had ever irritated me—people who don’t signal before they change lanes, and bread pudding, and badly behaved children, and smoking bans, and salesclerks who don’t wait on you because they’re talking to their boyfriend on their cellphone and when you say, “Excuse me? Want to buy something,” they toss their heads and roll their eyes and sigh. In this world, where everyone is deadly serious about everything from the environment to politics to carbohydrates, we have never more badly needed to laugh at ourselves. And to take a good hard look at ourselves.

Which brings me to the third reason I think science fiction is important—its ability to make us see ourselves. Its form makes it particularly well-adapted for this: It can make ideas visible. It can make the abstract actual. It can create not only stages on which to act out philosophical or religious or political ideas, but whole worlds. It is probably most famous for the political cautionary tale — Metropolis, “Harrison Bergeron” 1984, On the Beach — and justifiably so. Their impact is everywhere. I’ve seen the word “Orwellian” in a dozen editorials over the last year, and if you want to give yourself an unsettling jolt, reread Brave New World and substitute the word “Prozac” for “soma.”

But it’s much more than politics. Science fiction also has a lot to say about big business — Eileen Gunn’s “Stable Strategies for Middle Management” — computers—William Gibson’s “Burning Chrome” and Gordon Dickson’s “Com...
Heinlein and his contemporaries; History/overview of Heinlein criticism; Pedagogical approaches to teaching Heinlein; Heinlein as satirist; Heinlein as (counter)cultural icon; The Future History and World as Myth novels; Heinlein and the armed forces; The juveniles.

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cont'd
all these years. The reason I have, and the reason I think science fiction is vitally important, is that it is the one place where anything is possible. Any number of people have written about science fiction's "sense of wonder," that feeling of stumbling into a marvelous new universe where you can go to the Moon or Mars or the Lesser Magellanic Cloud or to the battle of Waterloo or the End of the World or worlds that never existed. A universe where an alien tries to sell you the Brooklyn Bridge and a ten-year-old tries to save the planet. Where religions are based on grocery lists and the speed of light no longer applies and androids dream of electric sheep.

There's a scene in *Have Space Suit, Will Travel*, where Kip's been hijacked and taken to the aliens' planet. He looks out the window at a bunch of stars, trying to spot a constellation he knows to figure out where he is, and then, as he says:

"I heard Peewee gasp and turned around.
I didn't have strength to gasp.
Dominating that whole side of the sky was a great whirlpool of millions, maybe billions of stars. You've seen pictures of the Great Nebula in Andromeda—a giant spiral of two curving arms, seen at an angle. Of all the lovely things in the sky it is the most beautiful. This was like that.

Only we weren't seeing a photograph nor even by telescope; we were so close (if close is the word) that it stretched across the sky twice as long as the Big Dipper as seen from home—so close that I saw the thickening at the center, two great branches coiling around and overtaking each other. You could feel its depth, you could see its shape."

That's how I felt when I first stumbled into the world of science fiction. It's how I feel now when I begin a new story by James Patrick Kelly or Paul Maruchek or Karen Joy Fowler. Or when I set out on a new story of my own about Satchel Paige or a time traveller at Dunkirk or a robot who wants to be a Rockette. Why am I still writing science fiction after all these years? Because I love it. Because it can break down the reader's defenses and the writer's. Because it can tell stories nobody else can, serious stories, and still not take itself seriously. Because anything is possible. Of all the many fascinating things in science fiction, time travel is my favorite. I love the stories that play with the past like Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* and the movie *Sliding Doors* and the stories that play with the paradoxes of time travel like Harry Harrison's "The Man Who Murdered Mohammed" and Charles Harness's "Child by Chronos." I love the stories that play with the ironies of time travel like Michael Moorcock's "Behold the Man" and Henry Kuttner and C.L. Moore's "Vintage Season" and Philip K. Dick's heartbreaking, "A Little Something for Us Tempunauts." And I love writing about time travel. It's not just the history—I love the history—anyone who loves fiction has to love history. It's the best, most complicated, most romantic, thrilling, heartbreaking story ever written. It's like something written by Dickens only magnified a million-fold, with amazing coincidences, hairsbreadth escapes, stunning reversals, and absolutely no idea what's going to happen next.

But it's more than the history. In the time travel story, you can look at the past and the present at the same time, at the Middle Ages or the Victorian era or the London Blitz and our own technological time, and see them through a kind of parallax vision in which each illuminates the other. The first time I saw St. Paul's Cathedral I fell in love with it, the way I fell in love with science fiction, and I've been writing about it ever since. My new novel, *All Clear*, is about St. Paul's in the London Blitz, but it is also about St. Paul's on VE-Day, filled with cheering crowds and on a hopeless Sunday afternoon St Paul's ringed with fire on December 29, 1940 and destroyed by a pinpoint bomb and indestructible.

Thanks to time travel. Thanks to science fiction.


These are two attractive books, Ellen Brinks’ with its cover photograph evocative of German Expressionist films, and particularly Peter Garrett’s with its clever use of a grainy period print of Lacock Abbey, somehow more clearly visible upside-down in ostensibly reflection, just as literary criticism does not reveal reality about its subject, but does provide, ideally, a perspective from which that subject may be mapped and understood. And given the subject, this immediate appeal to the aesthetic sense is entirely appropriate.

Ellen Brinks does not treat Gothic texts, but “highly gothicized narratives” (11), and those narratives are not by writers in the genre, with the possible exception of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. That being said, this study will still be of interest to students and scholars of the Gothic for the ways in which it traces the permeation of Gothic tropes across a wider culture, from the expected (Coleridge, Keats, Byron) to the unexpected (Hegel, Freud). Her focus here is not the Gothic itself, but rather how the Gothic becomes “the place for unacceptable desires” (13), the site of fears of dispossession and “distressed masculinity” (11). Brinks traces a historical shift from masculinity as public reputation, to subjective self-possession, a shift complicated by the perverse dynamic of masculinity only being known negatively, through its loss or absence. I would argue that this formulation simplifies the dynamics of masculinity and subjectivity in the eighteenth-century and earlier, and might have been reformulated. Nevertheless, it is a useful scaffolding.

Brinks’ “Gothic” is extremely wide in scope. She argues that Hegel used the Gothic in his otherwise rational discourse to indicate dispossession, and disruption of cultural inheritance. Keats’s Hyperion and The Fall of Hyperion, the subject of the second chapter, is more recognizably Gothic; Brinks describes it as homoerotic S&M, the masochistic election of the submissive poet into a punishing all-male community through which Keats “dramatizes his dispossession” (69). The third chapter reads Byron’s cross-dressing characters in The Giaour and Lara, the first and last of his Oriental Tales, as “transgender encoding” (77) that “preserv[es] and recuperat[es] otherness” (90). The chapter on Coleridge is of particular interest. Brinks recalls how Coleridge attacked Matthew “Monk” Lewis for depravity, but then represented a similar “depravity” in “Christabel,” particularly with its evocation of same-sex desire. She positions Coleridge’s poem as in some sense parodic of the Gothic, a text which calls for the voyeuristic collusion of the reader. The final chapter, which treats the correspondence between Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Pleiss (of the infamous Emma Eckstein business), plays on the Gothic nuances of the “hidden doors” in therapy. Certainly interesting in itself, this chapter stretches both the definition of the Gothic, as well as the chronology of the study, perhaps more than is comfortable. I wonder if this project might not have been better served by a series of articles. The texts Brinks studies are connected by their evocations of various feminized male figures, but it is after all a loose connection. One misses a conclusion to draw them closer together and perhaps make some larger points. This is where the dissertation shows through. I would also maintain that the subtitle is somewhat misleading: neither Hegel nor surely Freud, the only Germans treated, can be said to represent “German Romanticism.”

This is a rich study, despite its shortcomings, and it is well worth reading for those working on any of these writers, or on theories of masculinity, particularly in Gothic or Romantic literature. But it does not engage enough with questions of genre; those whose primary interest is the Gothic itself should perhaps look elsewhere.

To Peter Garrett’s book, in fact. Garrett writes about the Gothic in a sophisticated way; he interrogates the clichés and positions the genre in the context of wider literary culture; he demonstrates that the Gothic is part of that culture and not “a horrible wonder apart” (215). He also argues against the recuperative formulation of the Gothic as subversive, and instead positions it as part of a whole, engaged in a reciprocal relationship with realism. In the excellent introduction Garrett rehearses Walpole’s argument that the Gothic, in response to the Enlightenment, resists Reason, as well as the more contemporary formulation of the genre as political and oppositional, but only in order to make the counterclaim that the Gothic is in fact “a
well-rehearsed drama” with its own “institutional stability” (2). He argues that it is a reflexive mode, positioned between the comic self-consciousness of the eighteenth century and post-modernism.

Garrett’s writing is eloquent and persuasive, with many memorable formulations and felicitous turns of phrase. The breadth of his enquire is evident throughout, as in, for example, his wonderful segment on the process of reading in the introduction: densely learned and yet evocative. His consideration of the complicated contexts in which these texts were produced appears effortless, and the range of theorists to whom he refers only slightly less so.

His focus throughout is on narrative, and on the ways in which the Gothic “enables self-conscious reflections on the form and function of narrative itself, the individual acts and social transactions through which fiction exerts its force” (3-4). The text is in three parts: the first section discusses texts, by Poe, Walpole, and others, in which the narrative frame evokes confrontation between extremes and the norm. The second section treats “monster stories” — *Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Dracula* — and how “each shows through its formal complexity the ways narrative itself serves as an arena of struggle and an instrument of power” (28). In the final section he turns to three nineteenth-century realists, Dickens, Eliot, and James, in order “to show how Gothic infiltrates the more realistic social representation that predominates in mainstream Victorian fiction” (28). This choice is deliberately ironic given that Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” was rejected by an editor who maintained that Dickens had “given the final death blow” to “tales of [that] wild and terrible class” (33). His reading of the Gothic resonances in Eliot’s representation, in *Middlemarch*, of Dorothea Brooke’s subjectivity is particularly fine. He concludes his study by suggesting that “[s]uch Gothic reflections offer one way, though only one among many, of recognizing the unresolved tensions that persist in these novels and qualify the effect of multiple perspectives converging on a shared social reality” (222). *Gothic Reflections*, densely argued but eminently readable, has important things to say about the Gothic, its place within literature, and how it works.

**NONFICTION REVIEW**

**Classic and Iconoclastic**

**Ed McKnight**


In his introductory essay to this fascinating volume, Chapman offers a chronological breakdown of the alternate history genre into three periods: the playfully experimental early years (1926-1945) of Murray Leinster and L. Sprague de Camp (among others); the post World War II era (1945-1968) when “serious alternate history fictions were offered as cautionary tales to an optimistic and morally assured Great Britain and America” by such writers as Ward Moore, Philip Dick and Keith Roberts; and the more problematic “post-modern” era (1969-) characterized by Robert Coover and Joanna Russ (whose work is discussed elsewhere in this volume) as well as by Peter Ackroyd, Terry Bisson, Kim Stanley Robinson, and numerous others.

The essays, written by more than a dozen different contributors, are arranged to reflect Chapman’s chronological scheme, with the greatest number devoted to the post-modern era. In fact, apart from Chapman’s introduction, only Joe Sanders’ cleverly-conceived “Taine and Leinster and the Origins of Magazine Alternate History: If Only . . .” discusses works written prior to the second World War. Interestingly, this essay indulges in its own allohistorical speculation about the direction the genre might have taken had the early work of Eric Temple Bell (writing as John Taine) inspired the development of alternate history decades before it actually came to prominence.

The middle period is better represented by Robert Geary’s “The Ironical Mysteries of Time: Ward Moore’s Classic *Bring the Jubilee*” and Howard Canaan’s “Metafiction and the Gnostic Quest in *The Man in the High Castle*: Dick’s Alternate History Classic After Four Decades.” While a book devoted to alternate history would obviously be incomplete without essays on these two novels, it is also gratifying to find Carl B. Yoke’s essay on John M. Wall’s (writing as Sarban) lesser-known (and far more disturbing) *The Sound of His Horn*.

The most significant works of alternate history published in the last three decades that are discussed here are Kingsley Amis’s *The Alteration*, Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man*, and Orson Scott Card’s *Alvin Maker* series. Tom Shippey approaches “Kingsley Amis’s Science Fiction and the Problems of Genre” through the mainstream critics’ confused responses to *The Alteration* as well as to *Russian Hide and Seek*, responses that Shippey argues might have been less confused had they been
informed by a greater familiarity with the science fiction genre. Karen Hellekson brings her deep understanding of alternate history to “Alternate History and Dislocation in Joanna Russ’s The Female Man”, arguing that this novel’s complexities can be made somewhat clearer by means of Hayden White’s distinction between the eschatological, genetic, entropic, and teleological models of history. Steven Kagle’s “Alternate Views of Time and History in Orson Scott Card’s The Tales of Alvin Maker” provides some insight into Card’s fiction by means of the author’s religious background, a background that, Kagle argues, requires the reader to seriously reconsider our conventional understanding of history.

While this group of essays provides a thorough (if prismatic) examination of the main body of alternate history fiction, the book is at its most refreshing when it reaches beyond the limits of the Anglo-American “text-only” tradition. Darren Harris-Fain provides a glimpse outside of this tradition in “Authentic History, Alternate History, and Alternate Future History in Superhero Graphic Novels, 1986-1996”, as does Claire-Antoinette Lindenlaub in “Gallic Paradoxes: The Great Implosion, A French Alternate History.”

A recurring theme throughout the volume is the continuing need for a systematic poetics of alternate history, or at least a thorough taxonomy of the genre. This need is illustrated by the title of William Hardesty’s “Toward a Theory of Alternate History: Some Versions of Alternative Nazis”, and stated explicitly in Chapman’s introduction. Karen Hellekson’s The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time (Kent State, 2001) represents a solid foundation for such a poetics, as does Chapman’s identification of the three developmental stages of the genre in his introduction to this volume. As a whole, this group of essays represents significant progress toward that goal. It also offers a number of intriguing glimpses—from a variety of angles—into a fascinating genre.

FICTION REVIEW ESSAY

Frek and the Elixir

Eric Drown


Rudy Rucker is best known as the author of Software (1982), Wareware (1988), Freeware (1997), and Realware (2000). These short, fast-paced, counter-culture-inflected novels take the postmodern premise that our social realities are absurd and malleable, especially when radically transformative technologies escape the confines of the laboratory and, in the hands of hackers and hucksters, become wildly recombinative. As such, he inherits the stylistic and thematic mantles of such past masters as Philip K. Dick (Martian Time Slip, 1964 and Ubik, 1969), John Brunner (The Shockwave Rider, 1975), and John Sladek (The Muller-Blonnec Effect, 1970). A trained mathematician and recently-retired computer science professor at San José State University, Rucker has also written picaresque tours of the mindscapes of major mathematicians and scientists. White Light (1980) riffs on Georg Cantor’s Continuum Problem searching for personal transcendence in transfinite set theory. Spaceland (2002) follows the lead of Edwin Abbot’s Flatland (1884) and imagines what our 3-dimensional world looks like when seen from 4 dimensions, even while skewering the cultural pretensions of Silicon Valley. And, while I suspect few readers actually learn set theory or come to a deep understanding of extra-dimensional space, the impression gained from reading Rucker’s novels is that our physical and intellectual realities are at least as absurd as our social ones.

Frek and the Elixir is the story of a 12-year-old boy whose desire to reconcile with his absent father is entwined with a special destiny to negotiate a deal for the exclusive rights to branecast the Earth on the Humanity Channel. Along the way, he develops qualities to redeem his father, save humanity from the mental slavery of the mass media, and repopulate the Earth’s biome. At the start of the novel, Frek’s Earth is beset by a “Monoculture” perpetuated by big government (embodied in sentient tyrannical pinworms), big business, and big media. Though the monoculture works against their interests, middle class consumers are complicit with it. They trade their intellectual and cultural freedoms for the convenient commodities produced by NuBioCom, the global corporation that crashes the Earth’s biome to guarantee the success of its bioengineered “kitters” (living organisms that double as appliances, recreational devices, and even homes). Growing up in this monoculture, the key to Frek’s development as a hero is his mind-expanding encounters with physical, biological, intellectual and cultural diversity. Adventuring with the help of a talking alien cuttlefish, a genetically engineered talking dog, and a ballad-singing Grullo, Frek must comprehend the motives of his slightly-addled anti-conformist Father, a six-breasted Temptress, a time-bending Magic Pig, and a bickering couple of clamshell-headed hermaphrodites in order to realize his goals. Moreover, if he is to defeat the evil monocultural branecasters and establish a truly polycultural world, he must learn to operate according to the
What makes *Frek* different from Rucker's previous work is that it closely follows the structure of the “Monomyth” synthesized in Joseph Campbell's 1948 work, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. According to Campbell, the world's apparently diverse mythologies share more than just an underlying structure; they have a universal meaning best decoded by means of psychoanalysis. The upshot is that the hero myth is a narrative form of the rites of passage that mark the psychological and social maturation of the individual. Rucker combines the insights of *Hero* with the motifs and conventions of contemporary art and popular culture to give *Frek* greater symbolic and cultural resonance that it might otherwise have. As readers gain more experience in *Frek*'s worlds, the references to paintings by Bosch and Magritte, and the invocations of Donald Duck (here in his Vietnamese avatar Da Nha Duc) and the Powerpuff Girls (Goob Dolls) stop being mere intertexts, and ultimately become a working mythology for postmodernity. Rucker's reworking of the Monomyth is both innovative and entertaining.

Unfortunately, use of the Monomyth jeopardizes Rucker's polyculture theme.

Publishing *Hero* just after World War II, when the apocalyptic threats of cultural difference and societal conflict were readily apparent, Campbell desperately wanted to find latent signs of unity in the manifest content of the world's cultures. Though he refused to go as far as Nietzsche in championing the complete autonomy of the individual (*Beyond Good and Evil*), Campbell distrusted the wisdom of societies that asked individuals to subordinate their own needs to its imperatives (cf. Freud's *Totem and Taboo*). As his turn to the master key of psychoanalysis suggests, Campbell saw neurosis as the dominant symptom of the failures of modern society. His essentializing analysis of world myth argues that only free thinking, fully mature individual men following their own code of behavior could redeem society and preserve the possibility of civilization. As *Frek*'s heroic resolution indicates, Rucker is clearly attracted to the notion that smart and capable individuals of special gifts are capable of redeeming themselves, their society, and perhaps even a suburban lifestyle! But the Monomyth is, as Campbell argues, essentially a narrativization of rites of passage. According to Arnold van Gennep (*The Rites of Passage*) and Victor Turner (*The Ritual Process*), such rituals only temporarily separate individuals from the constraints of their society. While the middle liminal stage of the three-part rite is precisely about reconfiguring the status of the ritual subject by means of ordeal and self-discovery, the last stage of the rite necessarily reintegrates the reconfigured individual into society. It is not society that is transformed, rather because of the knowledge and experienced gained, the individual sees society in light of his newly gained perspective. As a result, and in spite of the revolutionary promises of its narrative, most often rites of passage work to accommodate individuals to the existing conditions of existence.

Though van Gennep's 1909 work was readily available to him, Campbell's postwar desire to avert the apocalypse made necessary a strategic misreading of the social functions of passage rituals. Likewise, given his own historic location in what he sees as a transnational monoculture, Rucker's choice to use the story of heroic individualism as a mode of cultural criticism is understandable, but, I think, ultimately ineffective. Because of their hope for the revolutionary potential of the myth of the heroic individual, neither Rucker nor Campbell seem to notice that it has been thoroughly appropriated as a tool of accommodation by the intertwined monocultures of big government, big business, and the mass media. Moreover, as is clear but unacknowledged in Campbell (for years a beloved professor at Sarah Lawrence!), the Monomyth is a key buttress of patriarchal authority. To be fair, Rucker's writer's notes (see <www.rudyrucker.com/frek> for amazing documentation of the writer's process) clearly indicate his desire to provide compellingly authentic female characters for his girl readers. But when it's time for the penultimate battle with the branecasters, only the men go on. The women (*Frek*'s friend Renata, her mother Yessica, and even Frek's dog's girlfriend Woo) all return home to wait it out. Renata and Frek's youngest sister Ida do participate in the final battle. But Ida's inclusion feels like a sop to me; she's there to kick the Magic Pig in the butt. And while Renata revives the battered Frek at a crucial point in the battle with a pictorial recap of the adventure, the final image is of Frek and Renata as a couple. As one character puts it, Renata has been “helping [his] body latch on to [his] soul.” If Frek is Campbell's Hero, “the one who comes to know,” Renata is Campbell's Goddess, representing the “totality of what can be known” (*Hero*). Explicitly cast as Frek's “girlfriend” at the end of the novel, Renata's role is to help him understand the full meaning of his adventures. Not only must Frek be convinced that he is capable of taking effective individual action even though triumph over the forces of social control is never permanent, but he must also synthesize a fully mature self, one capable of integrating the mundane and spiritual. Newly positioned as an adult in his web of social relations, taking up the name/mantle of the/his Father, Frek finds happiness in the “freedom to live” the manly art of the deal, the material comforts of the suburban home, and the
spiritual delights of the couple. In my view, a novel given to retrofitting the Monomyth should offer its characters more innovating alternatives than the social relations encoded in a 1950s backyard barbecue. Renata's final proclamation that the adventure is not yet over can be read against the grain to suggest that her own adventure lies ahead. Partial answer to this criticism can be found in Rucker's writer's notes, where he records some ideas about what a Monomyth for women would look like. Perhaps in a few years we will have a quest for Renata, one where women too can be the innovative and ennobling heroes of their own transformative adventure.

As much fun as Frek is, and however ambitious the attempt to rework the Monomyth, the novel does not by itself capture the frisson of life in the age of globalizing postmodern corporations. Unlike the best novels of Dick, Bruner and Sladek, and even unlike Rucker's own Ware series, Frek's mythic form obscures the relations among the nodular structure of postmodern subjectivity, the variable power of cultural institutions, and the ubiquity of the marketplace as the Planck brane of postmodern society. Despite occasional limitations, the great strength of all of Rucker's novels is that they invite readers to think about the connections and disjunctions between apparently unrelated fields of knowledge. Thinking about the costs of mass media in terms of cutting-edge physics and old-fashioned cultural criticism can be provocative. As a result, Frek can be used to interrogate how people immersed in complex social relations come to understand and experience them using whatever symbolic resources they have at hand. Read as part of an intergenerational conversation on how mythic (or fictional) narratives mediate relations between individuals and societies (see the texts cited above), and in the company of, say, David Harvey's The Conditions of Postmodernity, Frek could be an important text in any course seeking to articulate the links between modern and postmodern culture. In addition, critics interested in the hundred-year wave of "crises of masculinity" will find much to discuss in Frek, given the novel's central focus on a troubled Father-son relationship cast in a heroic adventure plot. Matched with any of the fine recent histories of masculinity (see the first chapter of Tom Pendergast's Creating the Modern Man for a review of the literature), Frek invites exploration of the intersection between the ideologies of adventure stories and the masculinities at the center and margins of contemporary society.

(NB. The idea of branes comes from recent superstring theory. See www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2002/04/020429080540.htm for a readable description of how it is being used to rethink the origins and shape of the universe).

FICTION REVIEW

Collected Short Fiction of C. J. Cherryh
Edward Carmien


This is indeed the collected short fiction of C.J. Cherryh, noted award-winning science fiction and fantasy writer who has nearly 30 years under her belt and more than 60 titles to her credit. First published by DAW Books in 1976, she is an example of what James Gunn notes as a generation of writers brought to the public's eye not largely via the magazine culture and industry but via her novels. As a result, Cherryh reverses the traditional path of the writer (despite her short story sales of the late sixties) of fantastic literature, which begins in the short form and develops into the novel. Her stories are often quite long, but not always, and as a self-taught writer it is interesting to observe the development of her short story form, a form she gave close thought to only after several of her novels were on the stands. As she says in her introduction, she loves "the tale-telling concept, the notion that I can spin a yarn, rather than construct something architectural and precise.” These stories are yarns, and very successful yarns, including Hugo Award winner “Cassandra.”

The Collected Short Fiction of C. J. Cherryh consists of three major sections. Sunfall is reprinted in its entirety, along with a new addition to the sequence of stories set in Earth cities grown ancient over uncountable years. Visible Light, Cherryh's more "ordinary" anthology of short fiction from the mid-80's, is also present, along with a new tale. Fifteen previously uncollected stories round out this collection, including her notable "Pots" and newer fiction. Although published during a span from the late 70’s to as recently as 2002, some of these stories reach farther back into Cherryh's writing history. The scope of skill on display provides a strong contrast for students of the craft of writing, as well as a detailed look at Cherryh's intense-third person approach in a wide variety of situations.

Scholars should find much here of use and interest. Cherryh utilizes two forms of direct address in this volume. One
is in the traditional introductory elements, both old and new, scattered throughout the text. Here Cherryh adopts a direct tone and speaks (always briefly) about some point salient to the upcoming piece. Prior to the *Sunfall* section she addresses her thoughts on cities, for example, saying “I’ve always thought well of cities.” Those who follow Cherryh’s career will surely notice that while she may always have thought well of them, it is only recently she has taken to living in one—Seattle—having in earlier years lived in or near her native Oklahoma. The value of such statements goes beyond simple analysis of biography, however. Cherryh goes on to say why she favors cities—“they’re a library of our culture and our past....” Thoughtful readers can mine such statements for relevant clues about authorial attitudes about human civilization, and readers familiar with Cherryh’s intellectual interests will surely begin making connections to her vast knowledge base that encompasses anthropology and archeology and more.

Another voice Cherryh adopts comes to us from via the inclusion of *Visible Light*. For that collection Cherryh lowered her mask to “give the audience an insight into the mind behind the creation.” It should come as no surprise that to accomplish this she uses a fictional device, dialogue and description into which Cherryh places herself and a fellow traveler in a journey from one place to another.

Here, too, a discerning reader can learn much about the writer’s mind, as Cherryh muses in one such bit of introductory dialogue, where she discusses the role of the artist in the making of society, speaking with the voice of her fellow traveler: “Maybe we ought to make up a better past. Maybe if all the writers in the world sat down and came up with a better history, and we could just sort of lie to everyone—I mean, where we’re going, who’d know? Maybe if you just shot those history books out the airlock, maybe if you wrote us a new history, we could save us a war or two.” Readers familiar with Lynn F. Williams’ “Women and Power in C.J. Cherryh’s Novels,” published by interesting coincidence in the same year as *Visible Light*, will find this an interesting view for a writer said to favor continuing authority in the context of stratified societies. Is Cherryh demonstrating a tendency that works against Williams’ premise that she shows a “marked preference for authoritarian governments?” Or perhaps this shows that via a purging and rewriting of history, Cherryh holds as a goal the same goal (as Williams states) as some of her major women characters, the “creative preservation of society?”

Checking the tea leaves of Cherryh’s words to the reader aside, there is an excellent textual history of Cherryh’s published prose styles in these pages. While the published dates of the various stories here range over about 25 years, the author makes clear that certain of these tales spring from her pre-publication days. While it is unlikely anything is in these pages from as early as the age of 10, when Cherryh asserts she began writing, she notes that “Companions” was written during the 1960s. Though rewritten, it stands in strong contrast to the very next tale, “A Thief in Corianth,” which Cherryh’s introductory dialogue places as being written some five years after she became a published novelist. Both stories are worth reading, but “Companions” is not in the same class as “A Thief in Corianth,” and the details of that contrast are interesting fodder for those who study the craft of fiction. The former does not leave one breathless; the latter immerses completely, and so on—good material for a creative writing class, especially as the stories differ in many other respects, such as the gender of the narrator and other key elements.

C.J. Cherryh possesses a singular and deliberately developed literary voice. Given her publishing record, her active and continuing role in the world of science fiction and fantasy literature, and her influence on a generation of writers, the importance of this text is clear. Library faculty in particular should consider (or be urged to consider by you, gentle reader) acquiring *The Collected Short Fiction of C.J. Cherryh*. In one cover is the hard to find paperback *Sunfall*, *Visible Light* and fifteen otherwise uncollected stories—not to mention the new material written for the two collections reprinted here.

While the text is a bit much for ordinary class use, researchers with an interest in the science fiction and / or fantasy literature of the past three or so decades will find this text valuable—even more so if one has a specific interest in women writers or in the broad themes that John Clute notes Cherryh often addresses, such as First Contact, the responsibilities of power, the conflict between honor and practicality, and so on.

This active, imaginative, complex and prolific writer will soon enter her third decade as a full time writer—and already has entered her third decade as a published writer, if one counts from her first published fiction, “The Mind Readers” (not, alas, in this volume) of 1968. With (at least) two new novels scheduled for a 2004 release (*Forge of Heaven* and *Destroyer* if you’re keeping count) Cherryh has many stories yet to tell, making *The Collected Short Fiction* an important signpost along a road that stretches into an unknown but hopefully long future.
Nalo Hopkinson has provided us with a vivid, often enthralling, sometimes mystifying, even puzzling, novel. If your interests include history, feminism, poets’ lives, mythology, or just a good story, you will like this. The novel shows us the lives of three women of African extraction, in three different centuries, on three different continents. We also meet one “Iwa,” a divinity of the Caribbean religion whose ability to “ride” human beings allows them to cross time and space coverage. Except for the Iwa, the novel is not fantasy, though fantastical elements are used in one section; of the other two, one is interpreted actual historical reality, based on an aspect of Charles Baudelaire’s life, and the other is almost the reverse, a realistic interpretation of a religious, abbreviated, perhaps apocryphal, legend. The novel’s title refers to the paths African people have taken: the salt of their sweat, their blood, their tears and of the earth, both sea and dirt.

The most successful and fascinating story is set in San Dominguez, that still-beleaguered island that was Hispaniola, then became Hain, a few years before the successful slave rebellion of 1791 freed its black people. The central character is Mer, a middle-aged woman slave, who provides what medical care she can to the slaves and who, like the others, labors in the sugar cane fields. We see through her eyes the daily activities of the plantation, both the mundane (boring but required Sunday services when the church-goers would rather be tending their gardens, in a vain attempt to get enough to eat) and the horrible (punishments for disobedience, like being skinned alive). Her best friend and lover is Tipingee, who worries about her young daughter who works at the big house and is part of the plot to poison the whites. Tipingee’s husband has escaped and been living with a group of fellow escapees in the mountains. Against his better judgment, he returns and is saved only by the Iwa Erzili, born one night when Mer, Tipingee, and a young mother bury a stillborn child on the beach.

Although no date is given for this section, history records that in 1759 an earlier rebellion was led by a Voodoo priest, Mackandal, who used his African knowledge of poisons to terrify the whites. In this section, we meet Hopkinson’s Makandal, a demon human, who can change his form into animals (he’s always recognizable because he’s lost part of an arm so his animal forms hop along on three legs). The portrait of a society on the verge of violent rebellion is gripping, to the point where I would have been happy to have heard more about Mer’s world.

The second section, where Erzili lands next, is France in the mid-nineteenth century, where Erzili’s mount is Jeanne Duval, the (historically real) mistress, on and off for twenty years, of Charles Baudelaire. He sees her as exotic and sexual, his “black Venus,” about whom he wrote poems. Erzili sees her as a trap from which she cannot escape; the reader sees her as a woman poor and desperate, trying to get enough money from Baudelaire to support herself and her mother while avoiding actual intercourse with him because of his syphilis (the novel and history both record her failure). The portrait of Baudelaire, chained to his mother and her money, is pretty pathetic.

When Jeanne dies (Baudelaire does return to care for her), Erzili is ejected into the body and mind of Thais, a 15-year old slave prostitute in fourth century Alexandria who impetuously decides to follow one of her sailor customers to Aelia Capitolina, a Roman city (which turns out to be Jerusalem). Her friend Judah, a homosexual prostitute, goes with her. Her tale is brief, perhaps because the legend of St. Mary of Egypt is also a simple story. St. Mary repented after discovering she could not enter the temple in Jerusalem. Hopkinson reenvisions the story’s central character as a child-prostitute who suffers a miscarriage in the temple’s entrance. While the local color detail is eye-catching and the character of Thais fascinating, there’s not much story.

I strongly recommend this book because of the windows it opens on the history of black women—it’s the sort of book that makes you want to read other books to find out more about the characters and the times. On the other hand, the novel does puzzle in its methods—the three stories are interwoven so that turning a page throws the reader into another time, another life or consciousness (Mer, Jeanne, Thais, Erzili). It’s easy enough to follow as the times and lives are so different, but the reader has to wonder why they are so intertwined. Also, each chapter (some only a few lines long) has a title page of a single word. While the whole poem they form is provided three-quarters of the way through the novel, the one-word headings are a real mystery (even after reading the whole poem). Also, Hopkinson has used words that I assume are African-French-Haitian. Some are easy enough to decipher (Mer is called “matant” a blurring of the French for “my aunt”). Others take longer; “backra” means “white” and “Ginen” are the “blacks.” But many escape comprehension. For example, on the first page, when Mer tells...
a pregnant woman that her baby will be mulatto, the woman disagrees, saying, "I'm griffonne, my mother was sacrata. The baby will be marabou." While I'm sure the words refer to levels of blackness and whiteness, I can't help but see that baby as an armful of feathers. I'd like a glossary, please.

The novel might play very well in a classroom—its historic scenes are vivid enough for students to see other times and places and its puzzles may very well spur discussion, even hot debates. The book also contains some steamy sex (mostly lesbian) which ought to intrigue students (and horrify their parents). Overall, this is a fascinating novel. We can look forward to more from Hopkinson as she continues to explore the exotic (for many readers) world of Caribbean religion and culture.

FICTION REVIEW

Absolution Gap
David Mead


This is the concluding volume of a grand space adventure which began with Revelation Space (2001) and continued with Chasm City (2002) and RedemptionArk (2003). It picks up the story of humanity's struggle to survive the burgeoning assault of the Inhibitors—an ancient machine culture dedicated to suppressing star-faring species—several decades after the Nostalgia for Infinity delivered the survivors of the Inhibitors' destruction of Resurgam to Ararat, an ocean world belonging to the alien Pattern Jugglers. Led by Nevil Clavain, the renegade Conjoiner, the survivors of Resurgam learn that the war has followed them to Ararat when Khouri the Assassin arrives with news that the Conjoiners, led by Clavain's enemy Skade, are fighting the Inhibitors in the space around Ararat. Although Skade exacts a terrible revenge on Clavain and his friend Scorpio, a handful of refugees—including Scorpio, Ana Khouri and her strange daughter Aura—escape both the Inhibitors and the Conjoiners aboard the increasingly conscious Nostalgia for Infinity, whose captain has become the spacecraft as a result of the "melding plague." Aura, although she is still in embryo, has been transformed in some mysterious way by the cosmic computer Hades; she directs the escapees, via a telepathic link with her mother, to flee to Hela, the moon of Haldora, a great gas giant orbiting 107 Piscium, to talk to "the shadows."

Intertwined with the story of Clavain, Khouri and the Nostalgia for Infinity is a second, newer narrative strand which describes the settlement of Hela under the leadership of an explorer named Quaiche. Working for the Ultra lighthugger Gnostic Ascension, Quaiche is sent to discover if there's trade to be had from the worlds of 107 Piscium. Infected by an indoctrinal virus that makes him feel religious, Quaiche experiences a tragic miracle after he crashes on Hela. Apprehending that the end times are near, when Haldora will vanish for a final time to reveal the Face of God, Quaiche enlists the help of a really terrible sadist, Dr. Grelier, to take over the Gnostic Ascension and establish a colony on Hela. About a century later, populated by hordes of refugees fleeing the Inhibitors, who have reduced numerous worlds to rubble, Hela has become a world of mobile cathedrals, endlessly traversing a path around the equator, trying to stay directly beneath Haldora as the faithful wait for the rapture. Most of the colonists—dumped by the Ultras who have come to trade for remnants of the ancient Scuttler culture which once inhabited Hela—have been infected deliberately with variants of Quaiche's indoctrinal virus, so that they are all, in some way, religious zealots. The curiously wonderful thing about Haldora is that it really does vanish; a gas giant the size of Saturn just vanishes—usually for very brief instants, but those instants are increasing in frequency.

By the time the Nostalgia for Infinity arrives, fleeing the destruction of Yellowstone, "the shadows" who live in the metal box in which Quaiche's lover died are trying to convince Quaiche that Haldora is an illusion concealing a gravity wave communicator built by the Scuttlers and that they speak for a people who live in a neighboring "brane"—a parallel universe—and who want refuge from a terrible machine culture that is transforming the worlds of their universe. Quaiche won't believe the shadows, but Ana Khouri, Aura and the crew of Nostalgia for Infinity do. Believing is one thing; opening a passage between the universes is quite a different matter. They have to decide whether the shadows are a threat or an ally, or if there are other hopes of defeating the Inhibitors. And they have to deal with the machinations of Quaiche and Grelier.

As in the earlier novels, the characters of Absolution Gap are richly textured. Sometimes appalling, sometimes engaging, the people who live in Reynolds' stories are complex, transcending the usual stock figures of traditional space opera in wonderfully imaginative ways. And the narrative is neatly handled. Reynolds moves back and forth among the various stories with ease. He also resists the impulse to impose a neat, if ultimately false, ending. His story, like the cosmos, is open-ended.
Although the Inhibitors will be defeated by the end of this novel, there is no sappy “living happily ever after” here. We are reminded that even interstellar space is an environment continually changing. The eradication of a species like the Inhibitors may simply open up a niche for another, perhaps worse predator. Like Greenfly.

What a great age it is for SF, especially British SF: China Miéville, Paul McCauley, Ken MacLeod, Steven Baxter, Mike Harrison, Alastair Reynolds – all are writing fiction as good as any in the history of SF. Absolution Gap puts the absolute stamp of success on Reynolds. If you have any taste for richly textured, mature space opera, this series is your cuppa tea. I recommend it heartily.

**FICTION REVIEW**

**The Confusion: The Baroque Cycle 2**

Douglas Barbour


It may seem an odd thing to say, but what a pleasure to find that *The Confusion,* the terrific sequel to Neal Stephenson's *Quicksilver,* has arrived less than a year after that huge and wonderful volume appeared. This is not the usual way trilogies and sequences tend to happen these days, and so for that fact alone the new novel is worth celebrating. But this second volume of The Baroque Cycle is just as learned, witty, weirdly torqued, emotionally complex, and sometimes laugh out loud funny as the first.

For those who read *Quicksilver,* or even just its reviews, let me say that *The Confusion* is not quite so complicated a work, being only two novels rather than three, *Bonanza* and *The Junto,* which both cover the period from 1689 to 1702. As Stephenson points out: “Rather than present one, then the other (which would force the reader to jump back to 1689 in mid-volume), I have interleaved sections of one with sections of the other so that the two stories move forward in synchrony. It is hoped that being thus con-fused shall render them less confusing to the reader.” In fact, this does work, especially as there are also what Stephenson’s characters might call wry and ironic connections between them. Like *Quicksilver,* *The Confusion* is a complex and sometimes frustratingly evasive novel of the doings of scholars, rogues, inventors, money-lenders, speculators, and kings in the 17th century, and so it does make some demands of its readers. But even though it asks them both to remember the twists and turns of the first novel and to take in an immense amount of further information about all kinds of events both real and fictional in the late 17th century, it’s well worth it.

Pretty well all the most interesting characters from *Quicksilver* are back. There’s Daniel Waterhouse, an intelligent man unlucky enough to be born in the age of Newton, Hooke (his friends), and Leibniz, all geniuses; after a number of journeys on behalf of his scientific friends, he eventually gets to go to Massachusetts, from whence he was dragged back to England in 1713 at the beginning of *Quicksilver.* Jack and Bob Shaftoe, one once the King of the Vagabonds and now a pox-ridden slave, the other a sergeant in England’s army, find themselves in various tight spots. Jack, especially, will, in the *Bonanza* part of *The Confusion,* make his way around the known world in partnership with other ex-slaves, and his adventures make up one of the best picaresque narratives I’ve read in a long time. Finally, there’s the almost too smart for her own good ex-slave girl, Eliza, something of an intellectual picaro, who is now playing various markets, marrying up, and still seeking revenge upon the French noble who first captured and raped her mother and her. Thus, like *Quicksilver,* *The Confusion* offers intrigue, war, piracy, exploration, sexual escapades, high court gossip, theological conflicts, and even some arguments by letter and lecture among the greatest sages of the period.

If *Quicksilver* sometimes seemed as if it would never quite get started on its actual stories, *The Confusion* more than makes up for that apparent narrative hesitancy by offering two swashbuckling adventures, even if Eliza’s tale is often more intellectual than physical. But then, Jack’s story as often demonstrates the need for quick thinking as for quick swordplay. Jack is, in fact, a fascinating character. Coming out of a fever, he finds he is cured of the pox and part of a slowly gathering cabal of slaves intent on gaining their freedom and also a lot of money. Jack is certainly an important part of their plot, but he is also, especially when the Imp of Perversity is upon him, a kind of trickster, certainly a man about whom chaos continually explodes.

Eliza’s tale involves her with kings, princes and princesses, the intellectual masters of her time, various spies, privateers, and financiers, as well as a wonderfully vile priest. This last eventually crosses over into Jack’s story, and by so doing brings Jack and Eliza together at the end of the novel. The many and varied plots (in both the adventurous and literary sense) that bring
them to this unexpected point are the very stuff of story, and Stephenson proves once again that he is a master of complex and entertaining narrative.

Once again, Neal Stephenson captures the tone and flavour of the time; he plays brilliantly with history and with the many different fictional representations of the various histories of Europe, the near East, Hindoostan (India), Japan, and Mexico. I can see any number of PhD dissertations on the relation of history as we know it to history as re-presented in The Baroque Cycle some years from now, and a few of these will undoubtedly catch Stephenson out on some matters (one error I noticed was Eliza's use of the term “homosexual” in a letter: the term isn't even in the original OED, and the first use cited in the Supplement is 1892). Still, the reader feels it ought to have happened this way, even if it didn't. I am reminded of the way Tim Powers fit his story into the gaps in the “real” Kim Philby's life in Declare. Stephenson is similarly keeping to the “record” as much as possible, yet still insinuating his tales into its gaps. The Confusion is a particular kind of historical fantasy in that it doesn’t introduce magic, beyond the interest some people, including Newton, show in alchemy, but rather so slyly introduces its fictional characters into the lives of historical ones, that it's hard not to believe they were there. It reads more like what a science fiction novel written at the time might just have been.

However we define it, though, The Confusion is a grand, wild, inventive novel, and a delight to read. I can’t wait for the final volume of The Baroque Cycle; it should be a dandy.

FICTION REVIEW

Iron Sunrise

Bill Dynes


Charles Stross’ sequel to his popular first novel, Singularity Sky, begins with quite a bang. Something goes wrong at the core of the star Moscow Prime, and in the resulting nova a populated solar system dies. The accident wasn’t a natural one, and it has triggered a “mutually assured destruction” scheme sending warships toward the assumed enemy’s home world. Unless the expatriate ambassadors of the dead world send the proper recall orders, more millions of possibly innocent people will die. But someone is hunting down and murdering the ambassadors who hold the recall orders. Singularity Sky has been nominated for a 2004 Hugo, and readers who enjoyed it will find much in Iron Sunrise to enjoy. Returning are agents Rachel Monsour and Martin Springfield, struggling again against the clock to save whole planets … and themselves. More importantly, perhaps, Stross also brings back his deft hand at plotting and his rich imagination, key elements in Singularity Sky’s success. Less self-consciously humorous than his first novel, Iron Sunrise is more even in tone, but certainly not without wit and verve; it is a very engaging read.

Intertwined with the story of Rachel and Martin's hunt for the serial killer is the story of “Wednesday” Strrowger, an adolescent refugee with a dangerous secret. Before evacuating her space station home, she uncovered documents implicating another organization in the destruction of Moscow’s star. She’s unaware of the significance of what she has found, but turns out to be pretty good at the cat-and-mouse games that develop when she is discovered. And it doesn’t hurt that she’s got a friend in a very high place. One of the frustrations with Singularity Sky had to do with Stross’ reticence about the Eschaton, an enigmatic entity guiding Martin and concerned with limiting time travel and maintaining temporal stability within human-occupied space. It's Martin's disembodied contact Herman that leads Wednesday to those incriminating documents, and in the ensuing crisis we finally learn the history of the Eschaton and just why it is so worried about the future.

This combination of ambitious plotting, sweeping scale, and fast-paced action places the novel firmly within the space opera, but it also employs a healthy dash of the spy thriller, and isn’t shy about mixing in the occasional social commentary. It must be admitted that the novel does fall prey to some of the familiar limitations of these types. The demands of juggling complicated plot lines can lead to unconvincing coincidences, and while Stross’ characters are vivid, they are not particularly fully developed. Rachel Monsour for example is never much more than the typical cool-headed, supremely capable secret agent (and it doesn’t hurt that she’s got a magical bag of tricks that Bond’s Q would envy), and her new husband Martin often just seems to be along for the ride. Wednesday, one of the principal point-of-view characters for the story, is however appealing on many levels, an adolescent rebel struggling with the consequences of decisions made in the heat of the moment.

At its heart, like all good spy novels, Iron Sunrise is interested in information: who knows what, when? how can — or
should – information be communicated? Information can be as mundane as a backup file that wasn’t trashed as ordered, or as provocative as “entangled” quarks that permit the transmission of data across the light years instantaneously. And of course, in an SF trope dating back to Mary Shelley, information may eventually become self-aware. The Eschaton, we discover, is an artificial intelligence born out of a “technological singularity” some three centuries earlier, a new kind of thinker that is interested, as all life is, in its own preservation. In Singularity Sky, the Eschaton demonstrated its desire to limit time travel, since the concomitant paradoxes could endanger its existence. Now, working to protect Wednesday from those who may be responsible for the deaths of whole planets, Herman realizes that the Eschaton may be capable of making mistakes.

A number of SF writers, Vernor Vinge perhaps chief among them, have written about the prospect of an informational singularity, which David Brin in an essay in his recent Tomorrow Happens describes as a kind of “techno-transcendence.” Writers at least as far back as Shelley have warned of the dangers posed by a preternatural intelligence awakened by mortal meddling, dangers currently being demonized by Hollywood franchises such as The Terminator or The Matrix. Stross’ approach is far less apprehensive, perhaps even optimistic. The Eschaton is, apparently at least, an agent for stability and continuity here, though a reclusive one, stepping in only when it perceives its own interests being threatened. More generally, Stross plays in highly interesting ways with the ways in which information—political, tactical, computational, emotional—flows among people, and he is deeply interested in the responsibilities that awareness or ignorance can bring. A basic dynamic at the core of Stross’ handling of this trope is that those most anxious to control access to knowledge are the most dangerous.

If Iron Sunrise is a bit less ambitious in scope than some recent space opera cycles, such as that by Alastair Reynolds, it is no less creative and witty. The novel will certainly not disappoint Stross’ fans, and should bring new readers to his work. A fast-paced and inventive tale, it does an excellent job of keeping the reader engaged and entertained … and looking forward to Rachel and Martin’s next adventures.

**FICTION REVIEW**

**βehemoth: β-Max**

Michael Levy


Peter Watts’s *Starfish* (1999) told the powerful, intensely claustrophobic tale of Lenie Clarke, a cyborged maintenance worker or “rifter” doing a long tour of duty at a geothermal power plant in deep ocean off the coast of Canada. She and the other workers at the plant had all been chosen for their psychotic tendencies on the theory that they were already adapted to a high stress lifestyle. Things began to go wrong, however, when the workers become infected with βehemoth, a deadly and ancient lifeform that had heretofore lived in isolation in the deepwater thermal vents. As the novel ends Lenie’s corporate bosses attempt to keep a lid on the infection by nuking the power plant and Lenie, for reasons I don’t want to give away, heads for shore seeking revenge. In the sequel, *Maelstrom*, we learn more about the high-tech, highly dystopian, and environmentally shipwrecked culture that is supported by the geothermal power stations. This civilization, besides its usual crises, now faces two new disasters. Lenie Clarke is spreading βehemoth across North America and is even receiving help from those who have dubbed her the “Meltdown Madonna.” Coincidentally, a raving artificial intelligence, which also claims to be Lenie Clarke, is trashing a significant part of the world wide web.

As βehemoth: β-Max opens, it’s clear that most life on Earth has been wiped out by the deadly lifeform. Deep beneath the Atlantic ocean, two cultures live in an intensely uneasy symbiotic relationship. Aboard a large underwater habitat are the “corpses,” the corporate bigwigs and their families who had enough clout to save themselves from the collapse of civilization on the surface. Outside the habitat are the rifters. Both sides hate each other, but know that they must cooperate in order to survive. Then events occur which upset the balance. Everyone, both corpses and rifters, has supposedly been rendered immune to βehemoth but, somehow, one of the rifters becomes infected with it anyway. There’s evidence that the corpses have been withholding information. There’s also evidence that βehemoth may have mutated, turned into something worse. Both sides strike out violently against each other with considerable loss of life.

Then the game changes, the closed system of corpse and rifter torn open by the sudden appearance of another player. Someone from up above is sending drones into the depths, apparently looking for, well, we don’t exactly know: Lenie Clarke vows to return to the surface to find out what’s going on. And then the story ends. The third book of the trilogy has been divided into two volumes and you’ll have to purchase βehemoth: *Sappho*, which will probably be available by the time you read
this review, to find out what happens next. In an obviously somewhat annoyed author's note, Watts explains why the book was split. Evidently, for economic reasons Tor and many other publishers can no longer afford to produce books of more than about 100,000 words unless they cross the $25.00 price barrier and they simply aren't willing to do that at this time for midlist authors. Robert Jordan can keep on going for as long as he wants to, of course, but John Wright's highly-regarded first novel *The Golden Age* was evidently split into three volumes for similar reasons.

Readers may resent having to shell out an additional $24.95 plus tax for the fourth volume of a trilogy, but in the case of Peter Watts's books the money would be well spent. *Starfish*, which I'd recommend starting out with, was one of the very best first novels of 1999 and the later volumes in the series have been equally strong; besides it's available in mass market paperback. This is well-written, high-powered science fiction, with fascinating, if not always appealing characters, and a wide range of interesting technological extrapolations. Watts is a marine biologist by profession and the underwater scenes are particularly well done. This is the real stuff.

**FICTION REVIEW**

**Steel Helix**

Ritch Calvin


I was surprised to “discover” this third novel by Ann Tonsor Zeddies. Her first two sf novels, *Typhon’s Children* and *Riders of Leviathan*, had completely escaped my notice. Those early novels have been compared to those of Frank Herbert for her imagination and world-building skills. One day, however, I noticed the title among the nominees for the 2004 Philip K. Dick Award. (The award was won by *Altered Carbon* by Richard Morgan.)

The novel takes place in distant, though within human, space. It begins on Varuna Station, which orbits the planet Garuda, which orbits the sun Meru. The names of these locations should already give us some hint about Zeddies’ affinities and the direction of the novel (as well as her similarities to Herbert’s fiction). All three names derive (or might derive) from Hindu mythology. Meru is the home of the Hindu gods, the equivalent of Mount Olympus. Varuna was one of the pre-Vedic gods and was the keeper of the cosmic order. Varuna’s position and importance faded with the ascendancy of Shiva and Vishnu. Garuda was a half-man, half-eagle who is often depicted carrying Vishnu and Lakshmi across the sky. In other stories, he steals the water of life from Indra. One can see the similarities here with the way in which Herbert draws heavily upon Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian mythologies to structure *Dune*.

The novel centers upon a doctor, Piers Rameau, who works on Varuna Station. While he does have medical duties, his primary “purpose” in life seems to be watching the transform dancer, Dakini. In this future universe, humans have begun to create genetically-engineered beings, designed for specific purposes, some utilitarian and others aesthetic, which are called “transforms.” In the low-gravity environment of Varuna Station, the dancer Dakini is created as an extremely lithe, and extremely fragile, being. And Rameau is obsessed and watches incessantly. Here, Zeddies draws on the Tibetan Buddhist figure of Dakini, who represents the spirit of female wrath, who dances wildly frenetic dances, and whose aim is the transformation of states of greed, anger, and delusion. So, the genetically-transformed being transforms states of greed.

Shortly after the novel begins, Varuna is attacked and Dakini, and nearly everyone else, is destroyed, though Rameau is spared and taken captive. Rameau has been captured by a human variant called Original Man. Years before, the Founder, Kuno Gunnarson, had the idea of creating a “better” human, which he called Original Man, which would supercede “baseline” humanity in every aspect. To achieve this end, Gunnarson creates batches, or sibling groups, which are genetically identical. They are speed developed, or “zipped,” so that a grown OMO is really only ten years old. Their education is completely directed and controlled. In their creation and socialization, they resembled Aldous Huxley’s classes of humans and C. J. Cherryh’s azi constructs. In addition, the OMO are all male. Gunnarson wanted to control breeding and population, and also wanted to control the distraction of relationships and sex. The OMO cohorts have occasional periods wherein non-reproductive sex is allowed as an outlet. One of the most significant aspects of the OMO cohort is their mantra, “Original Man is One,” which compels them to all think alike, to all adhere to orders, erasing individuality.

The OMO themselves also have transforms, called Rukh. The Rukh (later “Roc”) of Persian mythology was a gigantic bird that was capable of lifting an elephant in its talons. In this novel, the Rukh are enormously large and powerful beings, of
limited mental capacity, operating as the OMO cohort's muscle. When Rameau is taken aboard the OMO ship *Langstaff* he is immediately told to repair the Rukh that were damaged in the battle. Rameau, however, is repulsed by the transform Rukh. When he fails to assist, he is “motivated” through pain to conform. For the OMO, dissent is not an option.

The *Langstaff* makes its way to an OMO station called Eyrie, where Rameau sees the nurseries wherein the cohort are created and socialized. Rameau is dragged in front of a panel of the High Command of Original Man. The three members belong to Diamond Clan, Jade Clan and Obsidian Clan—part of Gunnarson's attempt to create a non-racist “perfect man.” (Apparently non-sexist doesn’t count…) The High Command plays a holo message left by the Founder, wherein he mentions his regret that Rameau had turned down an earlier offer to work with him. However, since the Founder is now dead, a schism has formed within the cohort. Current leaders of the High Command believe that they have “gone beyond” the Founder—since he was a baseline human himself—and decide that they will follow their own vision. Therefore, whatever use the Founder may have had for Rameau is no longer valid, and he is ordered terminated. The Commander of the *Langstaff*, Gunnarson Prime, disagrees, kills a guard on the way off Eyrie, and takes Rameau and the *Langstaff* on the run. The bulk of the novel then focuses on the battle between the two factions of OMO, and Rameau’s role in it.

Rameau is also an adherent and practitioner of Reform Mahayana. Mahayana Buddhism itself was a reform of Theravada Buddhism, which focused on meditation and concentration. As such, it required an ascetic and monastic life, which meant that most people felt they could not participate. Around the first century CE, the Mahayans developed the concept of gradations of Buddhahood, the highest of which was the bodhisattva. They also began to espouse the idea of a “future Buddha,” the maitreya. They believed that a Second Buddha would come and purify the world. And since the Second Buddha would have to pass through life to become the Second, then perhaps anyone on the street was the Second Buddha. The Mahayans also produced the shift from Buddhism as philosophy to Buddhism as religion. They argued that the Buddha took three forms or bodies: the Body of Magical Transformation (Siddartha on Earth), the Body of Bliss (the ruling god of the universe, Amithaba), and the Body of Essence (the principle and rule of the universe, Nirvana). The “Reform Mahayana” that Rameau practices, however, seems to be eclectic. When Rameau finds himself in trouble, or in pain, he often calls upon various gods to aid or soothe him. Those gods range from Amithaba to Jesus Mohammad to KaliMat.

Zeddies’ incorporation of Mahayana into the novel is not arbitrary. While the OMO are engaged in a program to create a perfect, or at least “improved” mankind, they do so on an entirely physical plane. They dehumanize the cohort in order to elevate them, and they oppress both baseline humans and the Rukh. Rameau, however, manages to succeed in his efforts to defeat the High Command faction of the OMO by developing an inclusive practice. While he draws on his medical and scientific knowledge, he also draws on myths and legends in order to re-humanize and individualize the OMO and the Rukh. He is able to bring them all together to an enlightened understanding of their interconnectivity and interdependency.

*Steel Helix* raises some of the same questions raised by *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and *Frankenstein*. When “mad” scientists (Frankenstein, Moreau, the Founder) experiment with human beings, their stories raise questions of ethics, of science, and of humanity itself. In *Steel Helix*, Zeddies suggests that the “perfect” man isn’t much of one at all.

**FICTION REVIEW**

**More Recent Winners from the Small Presses**

Michael Levy

Over the past six months I’ve accumulated a wonderful selection of new books from a variety of small press publishers and now that summer’s here I’ve finally gotten a chance to read some of them. Each is deserving of a full-dress review, but unfortunately I don’t have time to do so. If anything here really grabs you and you’d like to do a more in-depth piece on it, I’m sure that the editors of the *SFRA Review* would be happy to publish it. Let me know and I’ll send you the book.

Starting with the biggest name writer on the pile, James Morrow has a new short-story collection out from Tachyon entitled *Cat’s Pajamas and Other Stories*, which features an incredible cover illustration by John Picacio. It’s sad that, the state of publishing being what it is today, even an award-winning writer can’t bring out a collection from a major publisher, but we can only hope that Tachyon will make a tidy profit on this superb volume which features the Nebula Award-nominated story “Auspicious Eggs,” and such widely-praised reprint stories as “Director’s Cut,” “The Cat’s Pajamas,” and the bizarre alternate history tale “Isabella of Castile Answers Her Mail.” Also included, however, are three previously unpublished short stories, including the provocatively titled “Fucking Justice.” Tachyon Publications can be reached at www.tachyonpublications.com/ and while you’re there I’d also recommend Michael Swanwick’s wonderful collection of short-shorts *Cigar-Box Faust*. 
Ministry of Whimsy Press was originally founded by my friend Jeff VanderMeer, although it’s now an imprint of Night Shade Books. They’ve just done the English-speaking world a major service by publishing *The Fourth Circle*, a new novel by the talented Serbian fantasist Zoran •ivkovic, who won the World Fantasy Award last year for his wonderful “The Library,” which originally appeared in *Leviathan 3*, edited by VanderMeer and Forrest Aguirre (also a Ministry publication). •ivkovic knows American SF and has been influenced by it, but his work is much closer to that of Kafka, Borges and the surrealists. Still, *The Fourth Circle*, which will receive an entry in the forthcoming 5th edition of Neil Barron’s *Anatomy of Wonder*, is recognizably science fiction, a literary tour de force with settings as diverse as a medieval cathedral, a Buddhist temple, and the edge of a black hole. Nikola Tesla, Stephen Hawking, and Sherlock Holmes are all characters. This is the one book mentioned in this review that I refuse to part with. It can, however, be ordered from Night Shade Books at www.nightshadebooks.com.

A number of other excellent recent small press publications are also worthy of mention. Robert Freeman Wexler’s quietly effective *In Springdale Town* from PS Publishing (www.pspublishing.co.uk), concerns a peaceful New England village with a dark secret. The tale is beautifully written and reminded me a bit of the work of Elizabeth Hand. It received a rather odd mixed review in *The NY Review of SF* earlier this year which it didn’t really deserve, largely, I think, because the reviewer was offended by Lucius Shepard’s somewhat strange introduction. L. Timmel Duchamp’s *Love’s Body, Dancing in Time* from Aquaduct Press (www.aquaductpress.com) is, I believe, the first collection from this amazingly talented writer. It features her Sturgeon Award-nominated story “Dancing at the Edge,” her Tiptree Award-finalist “The Apprenticeship of Isabetta di Pietro Cavazzi,” and three other longish stories. The fact that Duchamp, who is something of a writers’ writer, received glowing blurbs from Samuel R. Delany, Nalo Hopkinson, and James P. Kelly is indicative of the book’s excellence. Two other worthwhile recent short-story collections, both from Cosmos Books (www.cosmos-books.com), are Brian Stableford’s *Salome and Other Decadent Fantasies* and David Langford’s *Different Kinds of Darkness*. The title of the Stableford book describes its contents better than I could; suffice to say, these stories are delicious if you like this kind of thing. Langford, of course, is best known as a multiple-award winning fan critic, but he’s also a distinguished short-story writer. The title piece, after all, was a Hugo winner and “Cube Root” won the British SF Association’s best short story award.

Finally, I’d like to mention a work of non-fiction that I haven’t yet read, but hope to in the very near future. It’s Damien Broderick’s *x,y,z,t: dimensions of science fiction*, which has been published as volume 20 in the I.O. Evans Studies in the Philosophy and Criticism of Literature series, formerly produced by Borgo Press and now continued by Wildside Press (www.wildside.com). Broderick is best known for such novels as *The Dreaming Dragons*, *The White Abacus* and *Transcension*, but he’s also a distinguished critic, the author of *Reading by Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction* and *Transrealist Fiction: Writing in the Slipstream of Science*. I know that it’s odd to “review” a book you haven’t read, but I particularly wanted to call attention to *x,y,z,t* because Broderick has been chosen as the scholar guest of honor at the next ICFA in March 2005. SFRA members who also attend ICFA may want to look for this book in advance of that conference.
The SFRA is the oldest professional organization for the study of science fiction and fantasy literature and film. Founded in 1970, the SFRA was organized to improve classroom teaching; to encourage and assist scholarship; and to evaluate and publicize new books and magazines dealing with fantastic literature and film, teaching methods and materials, and allied media performances. Among the membership are people from many countries—students, teachers, professors, librarians, futurologists, readers, authors, booksellers, editors, publishers, archivists, and scholars in many disciplines. Academic affiliation is not a requirement for membership.

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