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Winter 2010

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# SFRA Review

A publication of the Science Fiction Research Association

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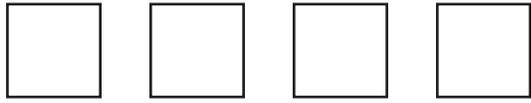
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## SUBMISSIONS

The *SFRA Review* encourages submissions of reviews, review essays that cover several related texts, interviews, and feature articles. Submission guidelines are available at <http://www.sfra.org/> or by inquiry to the appropriate editor. Contact the Editors for other submissions or for correspondence.



# SFRA *Review* Business

EDITORS' MESSAGE

## More Books, Please

Karen Hellekson and Craig Jacobsen

Read more books. Write more reviews of them. Send them to our reviews editors.

Even a quick glance at this issue's table of contents reveals that our newest category of reviews, "media" reviews, has become our largest. Not that there's anything wrong with that. It's a big category (probably too big), and covers a substantial percentage of the contemporary production of science fiction. We couldn't be happier that it has become an important part of the quarterly's content, reflecting growing interest from the association's membership. Our own research interests have led us to spend less time in print science fiction than we once did.

But we would really like to see more book reviews in our submission inboxes.

Important and interesting books continue to be written and published, even as the non-print production and distribution of primary and secondary texts explodes. There are plenty of places to read reviews of science fiction novels, but only a handful of venues for the kinds of reviews scholars need to help them decide what is worthy of their precious reading time. Even fewer venues exist for thoughtful reviews of secondary texts. Of course the journals in our field continue to publish such reviews, but as the definition of "our field" expands and fragments, the number of important and relevant studies increases beyond the ability of a few quarterlies to sift through. We can try, though.

So turn of that television and write more book reviews.



# SFRA Business

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

## Ruling Metaphors

Lisa Yaszek

One of the most challenging aspects of leading the SFRA is finding a good ruling metaphor with which to frame each president's column—after all, I know I'm writing to a group of highly trained literary and media scholars, so expectations must be high. When I mentioned this to our fearless *Review* editors, Karen Hellekson promptly suggested that I stop worrying about

literariness and think about fun things such as sparkling tiaras and ponies. And so Karen, this one is for you...

Like a fine pony, the SFRA is off to a running start this year! During our executive committee phone meeting last weekend, treasurer Mack Hassler informed us that we reached an all-time high of 360 members last year, and that nearly 200 people have already joined or renewed for 2010. As many of you already know, Shelley Rodrigo had to resign from her position as SFRA secretary for health reasons at the end of 2009, but she made a heroic effort to get all first-round renewal letters out before doing so. If you have not already renewed your membership yet, I urge you to show your appreciation for all of Shelley's hard work by doing so soon. And if you can't find your renewal letter in the postwinter holiday debris, fear not! Our new SFRA secretary, Patrick Sharp, will have second-round renewal letters in the mail by the end of February. If you receive one of these letters but have already renewed, I hope you will consider passing on the good word to friends and colleagues who might be interested in joining our organization.

Speaking of potential new SFRA members...during the January meeting our immediate past president, Adam Frisch, proposed that we might step up recruitment by both telling and showing people what we do. To that end, this year the executive committee plans to develop a new recruitment brochure and an image archive for the SFRA Web site. If you have photos or videos of SFRA members in action—presenting papers, reading stories, teaching classes, or even doing research—that you are willing to share, please contact vice president Ritch Calvin (vicepresident AT sfra.org).

I'm personally excited about the creation of an SFRA image archive because it will give us a way to commemorate what looks to be a fantastic set of future SFRA conferences. The 2010 conference theme, "Far Stars and Tin Stars: Science Fiction and the Frontier," reflects the conference's venue in the high desert of Carefree, Arizona, north of Phoenix. Conference organizer Craig Jacobsen tells us that he has already received a number of proposals and that he will actively recruit conference participants by e-mail and in person at other conferences that he attends this spring. If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to check out the conference Web site (<http://sfra2010.ning.com/>). The site includes links to the Carefree Resort online reservation system, spaces in which to organize your own panel sessions and information about two special preconference events, which I'm not going to tell you about here on the assumption that you will have more fun looking them up yourself.

Plans are also well in place for our triannual international conference, to be hosted by Pawel Frelik in Lublin, Poland, in 2011. Many of us were disappointed by the economic situation that prevented us from holding the 2008 SFRA conference in Dublin, Ireland, and so your executive committee hopes to prevent this from happening again by investing SFRA money in the EC now. We will also explore how we might make the Lublin conference more affordable for American scholars by reserving blocks of airplane seats and tour packages. I hope you will all join me in thanking Adam Frisch for volunteering to take point on this initiative.

Having spoken of ponies, it's time to move on to the second of my two ruling metaphors. While continuing its regular recruitment and conference support work, your SFRA execu-

tive committee also hopes to build a future that is every bit as bright and dazzling as a sparkling tiara! When we first met as a group at this time last year, Adam, Mack, Shelley, Ritch, and I determined that we were a transitional executive committee that should dedicate itself to preserving the best of the SFRA's past while moving the organization into the future. Much of our efforts in this respect have been devoted to the creation of a new and better organizational Web site. With the help of Karen Hellekson, Len Hatfield, Jason Ellis, and Matthew Holtmeier, we've taken significant steps in that direction, migrating content from the old Web site to a new server and then taking advantage of our new space to add blogs, discussion forums, and an SFRA storefront. This year we plan to add the aforementioned image archive as well as a members-only, password-protected area including a membership database and an automated renewal system. A dazzling plan indeed, if I do say so myself.

And last but certainly not least, this executive committee will contribute to our organization's bright and dazzling future by supervising the transition to a new set of *SFRA Review* editors and a new set of SFRA officers. Over the past two years Karen Hellekson and Craig Jacobsen have done a truly amazing job with the *SFRA Review*, providing us with the current eye-pleasing design and adding new features including the 101 series and media reviews. Karen and Craig will compete their self-imposed term of service this year, at which time they will hand over the reins to a new editor or set of editors. If you are interested in taking on this position, be sure to check out Karen and Craig's call for proposals in this issue of the *Review*, and feel free to contact Karen or Craig for more details (sfrareview AT gmail.com).

And if you are interested in professional service but editing isn't one of your strongest skills, why not consider running for a position on the SFRA executive committee? As I can personally attest, this is easily the most pleasant and productive professional service you will ever undertake. Interested parties should e-mail Adam Frisch (Adam.Frisch AT briarcliff.edu). And just think—if you are the lucky one who becomes our next organizational leader, then you will get to choose the ruling metaphors for your presidential columns!

## IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### Call for Executive Committee Candidates

Adam Frisch

SFRA seeks candidates for this fall's election for the following executive committee positions:

- President
- Vice president
- Treasurer
- Secretary

Descriptions of the official duties of each officer can be found on page 35 of the 2009 SFRA Member Directory. Nominations or questions should be sent to Adam Frisch, SFRA immediate past president (Adam.Frisch AT Briarcliff.edu).

## SECRETARY'S REPORT

### Minutes of the SFRA Board Meeting, January 23, 2010

Patrick Sharp

Meeting called to order at 1:02 PM (EST)

Meeting adjourned at 2:30 PM (EST)

In attendance (via conference call):

- Lisa Yaszek, President
- Ritch Calvin, Vice President
- Mack Hassler, Treasurer
- Patrick Sharp, Secretary
- Adam Frisch, Immediate Past President

#### I. Officer Updates (report of 2009 activities and setting of 2010 goals)

- A. President—Lisa—2009 has been an interesting first year as president: I organized the SFRA conference and had a baby all while serving as President. We have been transitioning from twentieth to twenty-first century as an organization: we have continued our traditional efforts while moving online; we are excited about the Web site, and people are using the blogs; the volunteer recruitment initiatives—including the panel at the SFRA conference—have been successful, with volunteers for projects like the syllabus project and the sf annual bibliography. We still need to address if and how we would take over Hal Hall's SFF research database at Texas A&M: we are pursuing it as a goal for 2010, along with getting more work done on the Web site. The awards committees have been contacted, and I heard back from all but the Pilgrim committee: we are on schedule to have results by March 1. I touched base with people serving in important SFRA positions, and heard that Ed Carmien, Jason Ellis, and Ritch Calvin want to continue in current positions. Karen and Craig are stepping down as *SFRA Review* coeditors, and we are discussing possibilities for replacement.
- B. Vice President—Ritch—In 2009, I continued to work on the recruitment of members and online presence like the Web site. Last year I took the IAFA Directory and cross-listed it and sent out about 400 letters. It had very little effect. Is it a good strategy (this cold letter mass mailing)? Or is it the time of year, or are other more focused strategies better? The syllabus project is ready to go online. We made some forward strides with social media such a Facebook. My goals for 2010 include continuing to figure out how best to use social media, getting the Web site more updated, and getting the membership entered into the Web site. *Discussion:* Adam—We need to develop an e-mail "brochure" about membership to put as an attachment to an e-mail. Patrick—Perhaps we should have focused membership mailings to SLSA, MLA, ASA, and other organizations. Mack—We need better promotional materials with graphics. We need to get Ed Carmien's photos, put out call to listserv for photos for the organization, and encourage members to put them up on Web site and on Facebook.
- C. Treasurer—Mack—For 2009, I have submitted the Treasurer's Report. The Treasurer has a lot of follow-up workload that includes filtering and facilitating contact between members and

publishers (for both the required and optional journals). The suppliers have to be given addresses, and several publications are behind (but not SFS). Optional journals (*Foundations*, *JFA*, *Femspec*) are a year behind. We're doing well financially this year, down about \$4,000 this year, but still very healthy. We did well with 2009 membership: 360 total members. For 2010: renewal is slow, partly due to a delay in getting letters out. We have had just under 200 renewals, but they are trickling in. Patrick will send out reminder letter by February 15. We have sent no money to Poland yet. Patrick has been saving the "trouble" e-mails regarding membership.

- D. Secretary—Patrick—I have been getting up to speed on things for the Web site. I agree that a lot of the mailings to members should be transitioned to e-mail and facilitated by the member database once it is up on the Web site; however, we will need to keep doing the paper mailings until all the work is done and the bugs are worked out. We need to do the date entry part. I've learned how closely the Treasurer, Secretary, and Vice President will have to work as we organize membership mailings and transition to online registration and databases.
- E. Immediate Past President—Adam—I've handled most of the certificates for awards committees, and I'm glad to hear they are on track. They will be there at the conference in Phoenix. My other major duty is to get the elections for EC underway. We need to solicit nominations/volunteers for office.

## II. SFRA Annual Meetings

- A. SFRA 2009: Atlanta, GA (Lisa)—Wrapped up well, made \$3,000 profit, got a lot of new volunteers, had a lot of regional scholars, and included work from fields that are underrepresented. The artists were happy: artists as respondents for panels was very fun for the artists, got them more engaged with membership.
- B. SFRA 2010: Phoenix, AZ (Craig via Lisa)—Everything is on track, and the Ning Web site is up and active. Call for papers is out. He's planning on doing recruitment at IAFA and invitations to panels. No numbers yet for enrollment.
- C. SFRA 2011: Poland (Pawel via Lisa)—Everything is on track. He's going to begin working on money issues and laying groundwork. *Discussion:* Adam—Dollar fluctuations are an issue with money going back and forth. This could be a problem for American membership: we'll really need to target European membership. We should work with a tour director to get a good package for SFRA folks in the U.S. that is affordable and more attractive. Adam will try to work on it from the U.S. side.
- D. SFRA 2012: Detroit, MI (Steve Berman via Ritch)—There has not been a lot of development on this front for various reasons. Steve is in touch with Erik Rabkin as a potential guest of honor (who is local). A formal proposal from Steve should be forthcoming by the 2010 conference.
- E. SFRA 2013: Los Angeles (Patrick Sharp)—I have a group of interested faculty who I've been encouraging to become involved. There is a faculty and a grad student SF reading group on campus, and both seem enthusiastic. We have scouted a possible activity: touring the Bradbury building, eating at the Clifton cafeteria down the street, and seeing an old SF film in one of the movie palaces nearby.

F. We are considering options for the 2014 conference, which we would like to be international (outside the U.S.). We should solicit ideas and proposal from membership about this.

- G. Status of the SFRA conference bible (Ritch)—We should morph this into a wiki on the SFRA Web site or have an external link to a wiki. This would be easier and keep things up to date. Ritch and Matt will set it up soon.

## III. Financial Matters

- A. Treasurer's Report (following).
- B. Status of SFRA grants (Patrick)—We need to have grant tab on the Web site. For grants, we want a firm deadline so that we can evaluate proposals side by side. We will continue to publicize the grants at the conference.

## IV. Transitional Matters

- A. Suggestions for new EC officers? We need two candidates at least for each office. We want to make sure the process is open, but also solicit people who we think will do it and do a good job.
- B. Suggestions for new *SFRA Review* editors? Craig and Karen are stepping down. We should ask people to put in bids, what is their vision, etc. We should put a formal announcement in next *Review* and send it out in the listserv; we need to specify what skills are necessary while not scaring people off.

## V. Revisiting Officer and Director Duties

- A. Secretary—Lisa and Patrick—Are they too much? Person who becomes next Secretary and next Treasurer must work closely together in overlapping duties of keeping records and expanding membership. We should get the membership completely entered into the Web site by the end of the year.
- B. Treasurer—Mack—We need to work together to get database up and running for this year to get it into some shape to hand off.
- C. Review work of current PR and Web directors—Ritch and Lisa—List of things we want done with the Web site: permanent page for grants (tabbed) put up soon (Matt); we want membership database online (Patrick, Ritch, and Matt); syllabus project will soon be up; we will get up the conference bible wiki.

## VI. SFRA Web Site Matters

- A. Report on status of SFRA Web site (Ritch)—Already covered above.
- B. Karen Hellekson's advice on new Web site things (Lisa)—Already covered above.
- C. Current EC's hopes for the SFRA Web site in 2010. Do we need a Web site content editor? It would be different from Jason (publicity) and Matt (Web manager). At this time we should just keep what we have and get the Web site in shape before handing it off to the next EC.

## VII. Other Old Business—None

## VIII. Any New Business—None

SFRA TREASURER REPORT  
**Report for the Year 2009**

Donald M. Hassler

Dues and subs for 360 members (some money came 2008)	21,592.33	
Atlanta conference	3210.00	
Royalties	942.62	
Scholar support gifts	520.00	
Bank interest	187.65	
Carryover from 2008	67,854.94	
<b>Total income</b>		94,306.92
State of Ohio fee	25.00	
Secretary expenses	578.85	
Treasurer expenses	175.00	
May Executive Meeting	2206.69	
Proceedings volume expenses	200.00	
Institution grant (About SF)	2,000.00	
Advance for SFRA 2010	500.00	
Student travel support	900.00	
Graduate Paper Award	100.00	
Bray Award	100.00	
Awards engraving	22.86	
Clareson Award	85.75	
Pilgrim Award	457.60	
Review/Directory costs	3200.00	
Maine Web FX and Texas host	1054.00	
Science Fiction Studies	7050.15	
Extrapolation	7050.15	
NYRSF	2217.00	
Foundation	00.00	
JFA	1180.00	
FEMSPEC	920.00	
Locus	1,122.90	
<b>Total expenses</b>		31,145.95
<b>On hand 12/31/09</b>		63,160.97

SFRA SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

**Call for New SFRA Review Editor**

Karen Hellekson and Craig Jacobsen

We will be stepping down from our duties as SFRA coeditors this year; our last issue will be Oct/Nov/Dec 2010. We have had a great run so far and look forward to making our mark during our final year with our last few issues. We previously edited the *Review* in 1998–2000. Although we limited ourselves to a three-

year term both times we coedited the *Review*, we made this term up, so as to retain sanity and permit planning. No such term limit exists in the SFRA bylaws.

To transition to a new editorial team, we, along with the Board, would like to solicit expressions of interest from potential editors, to begin with the Jan/Feb/Mar 2011 issue. Candidates should apply to the SFRA president, Lisa Yaszek (lisa.yaszek AT lcc.gatech.edu), in the form of a proposal by June 1, 2010, so that the Board may assess the applications at their executive meeting, to be held during SFRA's annual meeting in Carefree, Arizona. *SFRA Review* editors must be members of SFRA. Proposals should explain why candidates are qualified and should explain what ideas they have to make the *SFRA Review* their own.

We encourage candidates to contact us (sfrareview AT gmail.com) if they have any questions about what the job entails.

The *SFRA Review* editor is responsible for the following tasks:

- Putting out a print version of the *SFRA Review* four times a year (Jan/Feb/Mar, Apr/May/June, Jul/Aug/Sep, Oct/Nov/Dec).
- Working with the Media Editor, Nonfiction Review Editor, Fiction Review Editor, and Board members to obtain copy in a timely manner.
- Researching and preparing calls for papers.
- Working with SFRA Board members, Web site director, and publicity director to ensure publicity and messages are in line with SFRA's goals.
- Laying out the *Review* (we use InDesign, but any layout program that outputs PDFs is acceptable).
- Preparing a PDF for delivery via e-mail to the Web site director (to be put online) and to the Managing Editor (to mail the *Review*).

SFRA2010 CONFERENCE

**Start Fresh on the Frontier**

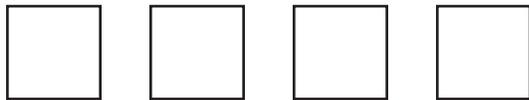
Craig B. Jacobsen

Quick, take this issue of the *Review* to your computer, go to [www.sfra2010.ning.com](http://www.sfra2010.ning.com), and join the Web site for this summer's annual Science Fiction Research Association conference. Yes, you can download the registration form (only \$175 until April 30, and that includes lunch on Friday and the Saturday banquet), get the call for proposals, see pictures of the venue (and book surprisingly affordable rooms), and check on the schedule as it evolves without becoming a member of the site. When you join, though, you can use the site to organize panels, volunteer to help out at the conference, and find like-minded scholars even before you arrive. You'll also get important (but infrequent, I promise) updates and announcements via e-mail.

Since the last issue of the *Review*, two exciting guest scholars have joined international guest scholar Pawel Frelik on the program. Margaret Weitekamp, of the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, will present "Ray Guns, Play Sets, and Board Games: What Space Toys Say About the Frontier" in a Thursday evening session kicking off the conference's theme, "Far Stars and Tin Stars: Science Fiction and the Frontier," and longtime SFRA member and biologist Joan Slonczewski will

present “Tree Networks and Transspecies Sex: Biology in Avatar.”

There is still plenty of time to register and submit proposals, but despite my own habits of procrastination (I’ve registered on-site more than once, even when I’ve known for a year I’d be attending), I urge everyone to submit and register early. If you’ve got to pick one, register early. The earlier we have firm numbers of registrants, the more the conference will be able to offer attendees. So register early and spread the word amongst colleagues, friends and students.



## Features

FEATURE: 101

### New Weird 101

Alice Davies

The New Weird. Who does it? What is it? Is it even anything? Is it even New? Is it, as some think, not only a better slogan than The Next Wave, but also incalculably more fun to do? Should we just call it Pick’n’Mix instead?

—M. John Harrison, April 29, 2003

The New Weird: movement or moment? Accurate description or misnomer? Still alive or already dead? New or simply another name for slipstream/interstitial fiction/cross-genre speculative fiction? M. John Harrison’s question quoted above generated thousands of words of debate over 86 days on the discussion boards of The Third Alternative Web site, with every possible position being argued. Since then, pieces on the New Weird have been written for magazines, LiveJournal blogs, and personal Web sites. Interviews have been given about it. Convention

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panels have been held on it. Anthologies have been dedicated to it. It has been discussed in at least two histories of genre, Roger Luckhurst’s *Science Fiction* (2005) and Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James’s *A Short History of Fantasy* (2009). And, of course, some former proponents have now distanced themselves from it. Where, then, does this leave the genre, the reading public, and the critics and scholars?

## What It’s Not

From the very beginning of the New Weird debate, critics, authors, and readers argued that using the term is simply renaming fiction that already comes under existing subgenre. Bill Congreve and Michelle Marquardt believed this, saying that the “cross-genre phenomenon called ‘slipstream,’ which China Miéville recently called the New Weird,” is one that Australians have been writing fiction in “for decades” (9). Others have equated New Weird with interstitial fiction, the recently devised Radical Fantasy and more general cross-genre/intergenre post-modern, literary speculative fiction.

However, if one considers the opinions of the authors who are considered, by some at least, to belong to the New Weird, the new subgenre is distinctive and valuable. Steph Swainston, author of *The Year of Our War* (2004), which is considered to be a central New Weird text, was one of the first authors to respond to Harrison’s questions, saying that the New Weird is a “wonderful development in literary fantasy fiction.” She described it as being “vivid” and “clever,” “eclectic,” “secular, and very politically informed,” and that it’s “most important theme [is] detail. The details are jewel-bright, hallucinatory, carefully described... These details... are what makes New Weird worlds so much like ours, as recognisable and as well-described. It is visual, and every scene is packed with baroque detail” (April 29, 2003). Five years later, Jeff VanderMeer described the subgenre in similar terms calling it a “type of urban, secondary-world fiction that subverts the romanticized ideas about place found in traditional fantasy, largely by choosing realistic, complex real-world models as the jumping-off point for creation of settings that may combine elements of both science fiction and fantasy. New Weird has a visceral, in-the-moment quality that often uses elements of surreal or transgressive horror for its tone, style, and effects” (21). China Miéville, in “Movements in Science Fiction and Fantasy: A Symposium,” described not only the content of the subgenre but the reason for its creation when he wrote “It is an act of making sense, of pointing at a perceived phenomenon in world, and arguably particularly British, speculative fiction: the explosion of the high-quality literary fantastic, accompanied by a certain uncanny baroque, a grotesque, a vivid real-of-the-unreal, uniting otherwise variegated authors” (49).

Authors, critics, readers, and publishers have all found the term a useful tool, whether or not the authors so labeled agree with their classification. The subgenre may or may not be “dead,” but the fact of its existence is irrefutable, even if it is “nebulous, fuzzy-as-hell” (48), and exists as a matter of debate.

## Precursors

In his piece “The New Weird; It’s Alive” (2008), Jeff VanderMeer argues that the literature that has come to be known as New Weird was being written long before Harrison’s fateful

discussion board question (19). Like China Miéville (whose writing, both fictional and critical, is at the dead centre of the New Weird maelstrom), and Roger Luckhurst, VanderMeer looks for the origins of New Weird in the decidedly old weird stories from *Weird Tales*. All single out H. P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith for particular mention as inspiration and precursors, and as examples of authors whose writing defies easy categorization or genre labeling. That Lovecraft and Smith are as often considered to be the predecessors of modern horror fiction as fantasy or SF only reinforces the positioning of New Weird on the edges of the already fuzzy distinction between the three “speculative fiction” genres. VanderMeer then traces New Weird’s precursors into the New Wave movement in SF in the 1960s (of which Harrison is considered to be an integral member), and through the “miniature horror renaissance” led by the weird and grotesque fiction of Clive Barker in the 1980s and 1990s. Norman Spinrad, in 2006’s “Not Really New, Not Really Weird” traces a very similar path, providing even greater details on the ways in which the works of Rudy Rucker, Jack Vance, Michael Moorcock (both as author and editor of the magazine *New Worlds*), and Matthew Hughes prefigure the weirdness of later New Weird authors. The degree to which these “precursors” invalidate the very existence of the subgenre depends on the critic.

An interesting side note in the tracing of antecedents is the linking of the New Weird to the so-called “British Boom” in science fiction in the early 2000s. Both Colin Greenland and Ken MacLeod mention the term in their comments on the “Boom” in the November 2003 issue of *Science Fiction Studies* (485, 487), and in the TTA discussion the possibility of this genre consisting of works produced predominantly by British authors is mentioned on a number of occasions, with varying degrees of agreement expressed. The Boom is also mentioned by Sherryl Vint in her introduction to the special issue of *Extrapolation* dedicated to the work of China Miéville, where she describes it as a “renaissance of British science fiction and fantasy literature (197).

Almost all who have provided any commentary in this debate have, however, agreed on the central role of British author China Miéville to the New Weird, both as its best known and most successful author, and as a vocal defender of the term. VanderMeer argues that the publication of Miéville’s *Perdido Street Station* (2000) is the first mainstream publication of a New Weird book, despite the label not being coined until 3 years later, with others similarly focusing on the novel in the same way. Miéville’s refreshing mix of fantasy, science fiction/slipstream, the grotesque, almost overwhelming detail, and a core of political ideology is evident in *Perdido* as well as his other books set in Bas-Lag (also identified by the central city of New Crobuzon), *The Scar* and *The Iron Council*, as well as his book of short stories *Looking for Jake*. Many critics consider these stories to be exemplary of the New Weird, and central to developing an understanding of it.

## History of a Label

The controversy over the name New Weird, however, truly began on April 29, 2003, when author and critic M. John Harrison posted his now infamous questions (quoted above) on the discussion boards of the fiction magazine *The Third Alternative* (TTA). The debate which then ensued is legendary in SF circles,

and involved dozens of interested parties, including Steph Swainston, Alistair Reynolds, Justina Robson, Jeff VanderMeer, and Jeffery Ford, all of whom were authors whose works were being suggested as examples of this new subgenre. It is almost impossible to summarize accurately what happened in those discussions, in part because of their length, but also because of the nature of a discussion board, where ideas may be conveyed and responses written quickly, haphazardly, or even while drunk.

When the discussion on the board wound down, little if anything had been resolved. Some argued vehemently against the very act of naming, a stance regularly taken by authors and readers who feel that to classify is to kill and constrain. Miéville himself, with his background in anthropology, addresses this criticism in an article he wrote for *Locus Magazine* in 2003, reminding readers that a label is only a tool, and only as useful as its ability to generate debate and assist understanding (8). It would be difficult to argue that the term did not at least have the potential to aid both readers and scholars, not given the enthusiasm which some showed for the label, and the sheer volume of discussion its suggestion generated.

There were, however, two aspects of this “new” literature which did find some agreement, and these were reinforced in critical pieces and interviews given over the following years. The first was the obvious distinction between the edge-of-the-genre fantasy that was under discussion and the sort of fantasy that was being marketed and sold in bookshops as “fantasy,” and the second was political dimension of this writing. Looking at the second aspect first, Steph Swainston explicitly lists a political sensibility as a key feature of the New Weird. Miéville, an avowed Marxist, has always worn his political heart on his fictional sleeve, especially in his third Bas-Lag novel, *The Iron Council* (2005). Miéville also claims that New Weird is responding to the “opening up of the potentiality in “real life,” in politics” that has resulted from the degradation of Neoliberalism (50). The New Weird, he argues, can only be “post-Seattle fiction,” rooted in real-world history and politics. These texts don’t, however, produce neat utopian political solutions, and even the Marxist Miéville has his proletarian revolution end with less than success. New Weird politics and social structures are messy, the characters don’t all live happily ever after, and morally satisfying endings should not be expected.

The politics within the texts is not the only political act of importance here. The very act of naming, some argue, is inherently political. M. John Harrison places it front and center when he said, “If I don’t throw my hat in the ring, write a preface, do a guest editorial here, write a review in the Guardian there, then I’m leaving it to Michael Moorcock or David Hartwell to describe what I (and the British authors I admire) write... There’s a war on here... It’s the struggle to name. The struggle to name is the struggle to own” (April 30, 2003). Justina Robson expands on this, saying:

It’s like Venn diagrams, isn’t it? Everyone involved in artistic creation has a whole lot of things going on at once. Some are big footprints over predecessors and some come in from the quirky sidelines of whoever’s life it is and taken all together you have a full picture of what someone’s doing at a particular moment... Trouble is, all of those Venn circles are politically charged and economically charged, like it or not.

The assignment of value (quality) is something you have to do because you're human and everything has to be categorised somewhere on the scale of Important To Me/Not Important To Me. We all know, mostly to our cost, exactly what the Science Fiction/Fantastic stamp is worth in the contemporary economy of literature. It's so powerful a stamp that Margaret Atwood's publicist has gone to enormous lengths (and has been aided) to make sure it doesn't appear in any review of *Oryx and Crake* in mainstream press.... Saying these divisions are cobblers expresses justified exasperation but it's disingenuous. This is a war, the winners get all the loot and to name the Truth. (April 30, 2003)

This politics of naming leads into the first aspect mentioned above, which is the complete rejection of the "mainstream," "cookie-cutter," three-book series quest fantasy that sell so well and fills the shelves of bookstore fantasy sections by New Weird authors. Of course, the New Weird is not unique at rejecting these "tired tropes" and venturing to produce something different. Urban fantasy, "indigenous fantasy," contemporary/post-modern fantasy and the literary fantastic/magical realism are all subgenres of fantasy that have defied the expectations of readers and publishers and produced work that doesn't look backwards to Early Modern Europe for inspiration. However, many authors working in these areas have found it less easy to be published than those producing so-called traditional fantasy. This is exacerbated when authors are pushing the boundaries even further, adding in science fiction tropes, surrealist imagery, and a healthy dose of horror and the grotesque. VanderMeer specifically discusses the benefits gained by authors who could conceivably fall under the fuzzy umbrella of the New Weird, especially after the continued commercial success of Miéville's books. The New Weird sold, publishers wanted more of it, and very weird fiction that would never have had mainstream distribution was published (20).

## The Present Future

There is no reason to doubt that the effect VanderMeer described in 2008 should not continue to be felt, even if in decreasing intensity, for a number of years to come. (In June 2009 VanderMeer himself said, "New Weird looks like a more valid term now than it did even 18 months ago. Maybe in another 18 months, it'll look like piss and vinegar again"; <http://www.jeffvandermeer.com/2009/06/01/new-weird-reading-list/>) On the positive side the anthology *The New Weird* (2008) that he edited with his wife, Ann VanderMeer, is still in print almost two years after it was first published. People like Steven Kolz are still discussing it on their blogs, and making the list of further reading that the VanderMeers provided in the book available to a wider audience (<http://mentatjack.com/2009/05/31/reading-th-new-weird/>). The term is still being used by critics and academics, and indeed scholarly and academic work is where the New Weird as a descriptor is likely to see its greatest longevity, especially when studied in the context not just of its literature, but also the social and historical circumstances of its naming.

On a more pragmatic note, for those who enjoy the work of those authors already mentioned in this article, lists do exist to direct further reading, both of antecedents and contemporaries.

The VanderMeer list cited above includes almost all the authors already mentioned and many more, including Richard Calder, Michael Cisco, Mary Gentle, Kathe Koja, Jay Lake, Mervyn Peake, Jeffrey Thomas and Conrad Williams. Mendlesohn and James also discuss a number of other authors, including Hal Duncan, K. J. Parker, Steve Cockayne, Joe Abercrombie, Stephen Hunt, Kelly Link, Jonathan Carroll, Ted Chiang, James Morrow, Patrick O'Leary, and John Crowley. A number of those just listed were featured in issue 39 of the fiction magazine *Conjunctions* titled *The New Wave Fabulists* (2002). Both the title and the featured authors neatly prefigures the New Weird debate, both in terms of precursors and practitioners.

There is, of course, no definitive answers to the questions Harrison posed in 2003. The most recent definition found describes a "mode of fantastic literature that exceeds the tired tropes and themes often associated with genre fantasy and endless sequels, and instead reinvigorates fantastic writing as a blend of science fiction, Surrealism, fantasy, magical realism, and Lovecraftian horror that is attentive to both its pulp and its high culture influences and roots" (Vint 197). Such usage shows, more than nine years after the publication of *Perdido Street Station*, and more than six after the TTA discussion boards explosion, and despite its detractors, the continuing importance and pertinence of the New Weird for those interested in the new and interesting in fantasy and science fiction.

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FEATURE: ONE AUTHOR  
**Christopher Priest**

Paul Kincaid

**Introduction**

Christopher Priest is one of the most important and one of the most problematic of British science fiction writers. He coined the term *New Wave* for the British science fiction movement centered on Michael Moorcock’s *New Worlds* magazine, yet he could never fully and wholeheartedly be described as a new wave writer. In the 1980s he seemed to publicly disassociate himself from science fiction (an interpretation of what he wrote at the time that he has since repudiated) though his work clearly and consistently plays with genre expectations. He is regularly hailed as one of the most significant figures writing within the genre, yet few if any writers of note can be identified as following in his wake. And though his work has won many of the genre’s major awards (and, with the James Tait Black Prize he is one of the few genre writers to have won a significant nongenre award), his work has received surprisingly little critical attention. In a review of one of the two books about Priest, John Clute says, “He is like the patient who is smarter and saner than the psychiatrist,” and admits that he “never felt that I had gotten a critical language to fit him; never felt that I had found any firm ground to say the next thing from” (*Canary Fever*, 217).

This is not meant to provide that critical language, and I do have to admit that the ground is never going to be firm under any critical approach to his work. Nevertheless, I will be trying to say why he is such a significant writer (“smarter and saner”) and to point out one or two fruitful avenues for exploration.

To start with, more than with any other contemporary writer, critics dealing with Priest are dealing with a work in progress. With the exception of *The Affirmation* (the novel with which he is happiest), all his books are in a state of flux, often with significant authorial changes being made whenever a new edition comes out. This is not out of any animus towards bibliographers, but part of a pervasive perfectionism, a constant effort to make his books more nearly match his ideal. His first novel, *Indoctrinaire*, was expanded from two early stories, “The Interrogator” and “The Maze,” which he describes in an author’s note to the revised edition of 1979 as “Cryptic, unresolved and willfully obscure” (191). In first expanding these stories into a novel he painstakingly explained all the mysteries of those early stories; the revision shortens those explanations, taking the work some way back towards the obscurity of his original vision.

Such obscurity has to be born in mind by anyone approaching Priest’s work. It is not there to bamboozle the reader, but grows more out of a belief that underlies all his work, that the world itself can never be fully explained. The one reliable thing we find in all of Priest’s work is that the world is unreliable, we are meant to distrust the ground upon which we stand. He will allow no security for the reader, part of making our way through the story involves a constant interrogation of our own certainties. His second novel, *Fugue for a Darkening Island*, is presented in a modish, achronological style, the short sections, usually little more than a paragraph long, taking us seemingly at random backwards and forwards through the story. It would seem a simple matter to cut up the paragraphs and rearrange them to make a straightforward chronological narrative, except that Priest deliberately inserted one detail, invisible in the current disordered format, which makes such a reordering impossible. This is because the sense of dis-ease with the world is more important than the story set within that world.

It is clear, therefore, that from the very beginning of his career, Priest was a very deliberate and thoughtful prose craftsman (of his contemporaries, perhaps only M. John Harrison pays quite as much attention to word choice and sentence structure). His influences were as much from outside the genre as within, and were often extra-literary (his coining of the term *New Wave* sprang from his liking for French *nouvelle vague* cinema). Nevertheless, his early work stayed rigidly within genre boundaries, at least as they were then being reimagined by writers such as Brian Aldiss and J. G. Ballard. *Indoctrinaire* added surreal touches to a visit to the future, *Fugue for a Darkening Island* was a catastrophe story, though it was his third novel, *Inverted World*, that marked him out as a genuinely inventive star of the new science fiction with its unique setting and extraordinarily thorough working through of its consequences. Yet it was also practically the last purely science fictional work he did. His next novel, *The Space Machine*, a revision of two of the best-known novels by H. G. Wells, felt rather like marking time, but it was while he was working on this novel that he wrote the story that marks a sea change in his fiction. “An Infinite Summer” was written out of “the sense that layers of time exist, that places do not change so much as people” (Introduction to *An Infinite Summer*, 9), but there was more than this increased subtlety in concept about the story, the writing itself was more oblique, and less confined to the rhythms and patterns of genre.

This extra depth in both the writing and the conception of his fiction increased through his next novel, *A Dream of Wessex* which introduced a lot of the ideas that would find their way into the work that followed, and even more through the sequence of Dream Archipelago stories with their rich and disturbing sense of sexual predation, the notion that beauty disguises horror. His next novel, *The Affirmation*, partially set within the Dream Archipelago but concerned less with psycho-sexual menace than with loss of sense of self, was the moment when humanist mainstream concerns and inventive science-fictional ideas finally and most successfully merged within his work. From this moment on, layerings of time and identity, dislocation from consensus reality, presented in a subtle prose that demands slow and repeated readings in order to tease out the various levels of meaning became the hallmark of his fiction.

It is perhaps unsurprising that after the masterful achievement of *The Affirmation* he should struggle to regain the same plateau. *The Glamour*, a fascinating presentation of invisibility as a social phenomenon, has gone through numerous, often extensive revisions. His next novel, *The Quiet Woman*, published as a mainstream work despite its near-future setting and concern with intrusive government, is generally reckoned among his weaker books. But the following novel, *The Prestige*, at least matches the achievement of *The Affirmation*. It is a novel that seems quite simple, but that reveals more complexity the more carefully one reads (a notebook that begins with the word *I* and that later claims even the first word is a lie), and that can be made sense of only by such delving into its depths.

This sense of a simple story that becomes more complex the more one traces its various layerings is true also of *The Extremes*. Priest was in Hungerford on the day Michael Ryan carried out random shootings there, and although never close to danger himself the sense of menace pervades what is easily his most violent novel to date. Though again the violence is subsumed beneath the intellectual puzzle of a story in which virtual reality seems to provide a posthumous link between two shootings in different continents on the same day.

Priest's most recent novel, *The Separation*, picks up on structural patterns already established in *A Dream of Wessex*, *The Affirmation* and above all *The Prestige*. A modern-day historian is given a document by a woman we come to realize could not exist in the same time-line as him. This document is a first-person narrative by an RAF pilot, J. L. Sawyer, whose brother was killed during the Blitz and who was himself shot down on that same day, and who went on to serve as an aide to Winston Churchill. The historian then comes across first a diary and then notebooks by the other J. L. Sawyer who was injured while driving an ambulance in the Blitz and whose brother was shot down and killed on the same day, and who went on to take part in the peace talks that ended the war. We realize, as we trace these conflicting histories, that there are at least five different timelines represented within the novel, though the barriers between them become increasingly permeable as the novel progresses. The world has become less stable than ever.

In one respect, Christopher Priest is a novelist who never repeats himself, each of his novels to date seems distinctly different from every other: an exercise in surrealism, a catastrophe story, an original science fiction invention, a Wellsian pastiche, a futuristic utopia, a novel of psychological disorder, a story about invisibility, a political satire, a tale of late-Victorian stage magicians, a violent story of gun crime, a second world war novel. Yet for all these overt differences, the same themes and patterns keep repeating themselves. The novels become more complex, psychologically richer, stylistically more varied and rewarding, but they explore variations on the idea that we create our own world and this creation is inherently unstable. These variations are played out using a number of recurrent motifs, some of which I shall explore in the next section.

Since *The Separation*, Priest has mined his own back catalogue for a series of books he has brought out through his own print-on-demand publishing venture, GrimGrin Studio. But at least one more novel is now on the way, about which all we can know for sure is that it will be unlike its predecessors while pick-

ing out the same disturbing cast of themes that make us doubt everything we read.

## Themes

Three key images, the double, the book and the island, echo and reecho throughout Priest's work. In this section I will look at each of these in some depth, and make brief mention of one or two others. It should be noted, however, that these images are never isolated within his work, they come together, interlinked in such a way that any consideration of one must involve consideration of others.

## The Double

Anyone inclined to draw a connection between an author's biography and his work might make much of the fact that Priest's own children are twins, except for the fact that doubles, doppelgangers, twins and mirrorings were persistent images within his fiction long before his children were born. Often, of course, Priest will create the uncanny effect without explicitly involving a double. In *Fugue for a Darkening Island*, for instance, the very first paragraph describes the narrator, Alan Whitman—white skin, light brown hair, conservative dress, etc.; the second paragraph also describes Alan Whitman—dirty skin, salt-encrusted hair, wearing the same clothes for six months. The effect is a parallax view, a mirroring of the same character at the beginning and end of the narrative; Whitman is made to be his own double. Again, in a recent story, "The Sorting Out" (*The New Uncanny*, ed. Sarah Eyre & Ra Page, 2009), he features a stalker who invades and disrupts the home of the protagonist, but in such a way that the stalker can be seen as the protagonist's doppelganger.

More commonly, however, the doubling is explicit, as it is in four of his most significant novels, *The Affirmation*, *The Prestige*, *The Extremes* and *The Separation*. In each case, the doubling is explicitly linked to the character's sense of identity, or more accurately the disintegration of identity; only the rejection of the doubling allows the reintegration of character. This is perhaps most obvious in *The Affirmation* where the two Peter Sinclairs are each trying to hold on to their sense of self by identifying with the other. In our world, Sinclair is undergoing a nervous breakdown when he writes a long manuscript which he regards as an autobiography even though the Peter Sinclair featured there lives in a place called the Dream Archipelago. In the Dream Archipelago, Sinclair's entire memory, and therefore his sense of identity, is about to be wiped out; his autobiography is supposed to replace that memory, even though it is set in a place called London. The two Sinclairs therefore mirror each other across the divide of their imaginations, and their relationships are also replicated across both worlds. It is only possible to understand one Peter Sinclair by understanding his double.

Such identification is even stronger in the multiple doublings that are a feature of *The Prestige*. Alfred Borden is actually a set of twins, but their identification is so strong that they alternate in each others life and write using the pronoun *I*. Rupert Angier uses a device created by Nikola Tesla to produce his own double, which he must then kill. Both Borden and Angier, in other words, suppress (deny the life of) one part of themselves in the service of their magic act. The lack of wholeness generated by this continues into future generations: the novel opens with

one of Borden's descendants who believes he must have a twin brother somewhere.

Although the central character in *The Extremes* believes she has killed her own twin, recalling a childhood incident in which she shot a reflection of herself in a mirror, the doubling that is such a feature of this novel is less individual than circumstantial. A lone gunman goes on a shooting spree in Texas, killing the husband of FBI agent Teresa Simmons. Teresa then visits the south coast of England where a similar lone gunman went on a similar shooting spree at exactly the same time. But throughout her investigation she keeps finding doublings (the two guns used by the UK gunman were found with him, but were also found in the boot of his car). Eventually, through a form of virtual reality known as Extreme Experience, there is a suggestion that the same man carried out both shootings.

Finally, in *The Separation*, both the individual and the circumstantial doubling come together. Twin brothers, both called J. L. Sawyer, take different paths at the outbreak of World War II, one becomes a pacifist and drives an ambulance, the other joins the RAF. On one day, early in the war, one brother is killed: if it is the pacifist, the war follows a course similar though not identical to the one we know; if it is the pilot, a peace treaty is negotiated in 1942. But that is not the only doubling in the novel. At one point, for instance, the pilot witnesses two German planes being attacked by German fighters, one of which escapes. One carries Rudolf Hess, who will initiate peace talks; the other carries Hess's double, who will not. Though the novel is actually more complex than most alternate histories: a close reading will reveal at least five separate time lines.

## The Island

If the double, twin or doppelganger is the most persistent theme in Priest's work, the island comes a close second. From the Planalto to Muriseay, from Earth City to Wessex, whether physical or metaphorical, islands have been a key feature in most of his work. Invariably, Priest's islands are socially, politically and morally complex places, though they are also, equally invariably, places that are equated with the identity of his characters, their nature essential in any understanding of how a protagonist writes the story of who and what he is.

The prison compound in *Indoctrinaire* is a form of island, as is the observatory in the story "Real-Time World," or Earth City in *Inverted World*, places in which the characters are cut off from reality, in which reality becomes the consensus of the islanders. This is made explicit in *A Dream of Wessex*, in which a group of characters from the present visit a consensus "dream" of the future. In this future, rising sea levels have turned a large portion of southern England into an island, Wessex, with a Mediterranean climate and an easy-going social atmosphere. (The novel was written at a time when package holidays to the Mediterranean were becoming widely available in Britain, and Wessex bears much in common with early experience of southern Spain or the Greek Islands, a comparison made obvious in *The Affirmation* and *The Quiet Woman*.) That this benevolent if not exactly utopian vision is directly related to the identity of the dreamers is clear when a malevolent interloper enters the dream, and suddenly the holiday-like atmosphere of Wessex becomes heavily industrialized, grim and unwelcoming.

Islands are, of course, even more central to the Dream Archipelago stories, a sequence that Priest continues to revisit. There is an industrialized northern continent whose various nations are engaged in an interminable war fought out in the largely unpopulated southern continent, but between these two continents lies the necklace of islands known as the Dream Archipelago, which maintain a strict neutrality. They are, therefore, a place of desire especially for the soldiers who must travel through the archipelago on their way to the war zone, and who return there on leave. Many of the stories, such as "Whores," "The Watched," "The Cremation," and "The Discharge" (uncollected) take on a psycho-sexual charge, in which desire is equated with threat, lust leads to death.

## The Book

When I introduced the island theme by talking of "how a protagonist writes the story of who and what he is," it was a very deliberate choice of words. Commentators on Priest's work have often explored the themes of doubles and islands, but very few have looked at the significance of the text in his work, and yet all the way through his career texts of one form or another play an absolutely essential role in our understanding of the world and how much it can be trusted.

Sometimes this is oblique: the cut-up nature of *Fugue for a Darkening Island* draws attention to the book as text, while *The Space Machine* constantly refers back to the source materials, *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells. More often, it is overt: a large percentage of his novels either consist of or revolve around documents written by one or more of the participants. The world Priest creates is only to be understood through the words of those who inhabit the world, but just as easily the world may be undermined by those words. With the single exception of Gordon Sinclair in *The Quiet Woman*, Priest has never employed a straightforwardly unreliable narrator, but more often that not the worlds narrated are unreliable. One example of this is in *Inverted World* where first a map of the "establishment" and later documents relating to the origins of what has become known as Earth City start to undermine our trust in the nature of the world as perceived by Helward Mann. Similarly, in *A Dream of Wessex*, it is newspaper articles that start to undermine the faith the dreamers place in their own island creation.

Of all the documents written by Priest's characters, the most symbolic is probably the "autobiography" written by Peter Sinclair in *The Affirmation* (and it is worth remembering that *The Affirmation* was the title of a novel that featured in the earlier Dream Archipelago story, "The Negation"). It is through this manuscript that Sinclair claims to have "imagined myself into existence" (15), though doubts are raised right from the start. To begin with, we know that it does not tell of Sinclair's life in London because it is set in a place called the Dream Archipelago (and we presume but cannot confirm that it is the parallel narrative that runs alongside this story), and it is not too long before we learn that the cottage he claims to have renovated beautifully is actually in a ruinous state. Nevertheless, it is both unsurprising and totally devastating when we eventually discover that this manuscript consists of nothing but a pile of blank pages. Like Sinclair, we have placed so much trust in the manuscript that

this revelation devastates all sense we have of the solidity of the world.

Again and again in successive novels Priest has returned to this point: that the world is made up of words, but words are unreliable, can be edited or excised. The bulk of *The Prestige*, for instance, is made up of two books, the autobiography (a very slippery concept for Priest) of Alfred Borden, which is actually written by two people and has been edited (though we don't know to what extent) by Borden's deadly rival, and the diary of Rupert Angier from which numerous pages have been torn out. There is no such thing as the full story, we are reliant always on a partial and not entirely trustworthy account. *The Separation* actually has a similar structure to *The Prestige*, in that the bulk of the novel consists of the autobiography of Jack Sawyer and the diaries and notebooks of Joe Sawyer, along with numerous other documents. There is no obvious deletion or revision of these documents, but that does not make their stories any more reliable. Jack records Joe's death, Joe records Jack's death, the documents could not exist in the same world (indeed, Joe's account begins with his diary from one source, then continues with his notebooks from a different source, and there is good reason to read each of these as belonging to a different world).

### Other Themes

Although the double, the island and the book are themes which crop up with astonishing regularity throughout Priest's work, they are only the most obvious of a whole string of recurring patterns that are to be found in his books. There is, for example, the *Romantic Triangle* in which, usually, there is tension between a woman and two lovers, this tension having a direct effect on their perceptions of the world they inhabit. It is there in its simplest form in *A Dream of Wessex*, *The Glamour*, *The Prestige* and *The Separation*, though variations can be seen in *The Affirmation* (where the two Peter Sinclairs find themselves torn between avatars of the same two women) and *The Extremes* (where Teresa Simmons effectively has to choose between two dead men, her husband and the gunman).

*Invasion* is not such an obvious theme, but the motif can be found in *Fugue for a Darkening Island*, *The Space Machine*, "An Infinite Summer," many of the Dream Archipelago stories and, of course, *The Separation*. In discussing the book I have already touched upon the *Unreliable World*, though this sense that we cannot trust the world crops up elsewhere, for instance in "Real-Time World" or "Palely Loitering." Though perhaps the most consistent feature of Priest's work is that practically all his fiction features *Dislocation*, in time (*Indoctrinaire*, "Real-Time World," "An Infinite Summer," *A Dream of Wessex*), in space (*Fugue for a Darkening Island*, *The Space Machine*, *The Dream Archipelago*), or, more persistently, from consensus reality (*Inverted World*, *The Affirmation*, *The Glamour*, *The Extremes*, *The Separation*).

### Annotated Bibliography

Christopher Priest is a nightmare for any bibliographer. He has made numerous changes to his books over the years, and would make further changes wherever possible. He has said that the only one of his books he would not change is *The Affirmation*. With that in mind, just as it is often unwise for a critic

to rely on a first edition for a definitive text, so it is perhaps impossible to arrive at a definitive bibliography. For this exercise, therefore, I have simply noted first UK editions and major revisions, along with a brief outline of the plot.

*Indoctrinaire*, 1970, Faber & Faber. A revised edition, slightly shorter but with an added Afterword by Priest was published by Pan in 1979. Based on two stories, "The Interrogator" (*New Writings in SF 15*) and "The Maze" (unpublished), that Priest describes as willfully obscure, his revisions mostly abbreviate the conventional explanations for events that concluded the original edition. The story concerns a researcher who finds himself transported to a mysterious prison-like compound in the Brazilian jungle of the 22<sup>nd</sup> century, where he must find an answer to the mind-altering war gases that were the fruits of his original research.

*Fugue for a Darkening Island*, 1972, Faber & Faber. The story tells of the social and political disruptions caused when an economically weakened Britain becomes the target for a massive influx of refugees fleeing catastrophe in Africa. The political disruption is replicated in a structural disruption: for example, the first paragraph of the novel describes the hero at the beginning of the story, the second paragraph describes him at the end of the story. However, Priest insists that the different sections of the novel cannot be reordered to form a coherent narrative.

*Real-Time World*, 1974, New English Library. Short story collection containing: "The Head and the Hand," "Fire Storm," "Double Consummation," "A Woman Naked," "Transplant," "Breeding Ground," "Sentence in Binary Code," "The Perihelion Man," "The Run," "Real-Time World"; since republished as *Real-Time World +2* (GrimGrin Studio, 2009) with "The Invisible Men" and "Nothing Like the Sun" added.

*Inverted World*, 1974, Faber & Faber. The novel that confirmed Priest as one of the most important writers of the time (it won the BSFA Award), it tells of an Earth perceived as a hyperbolic planet across which the city must move at a constant pace.

*The Space Machine*, 1976, Faber & Faber. Pastiche of early H. G. Wells in which a Victorian commercial traveler encounters the time traveler, and since a time machine can also travel through space they use it to get to Mars just in time to become involved in the Martian invasion of Earth.

*A Dream of Wessex*, 1977, Faber & Faber (published as *The Perfect Lover* in the United States). The novel that marked a new maturity in Priest's work, establishing themes that would recur in many of his finest novels. In contemporary Britain members of a research establishment dream of a consensual future in which the landscape is broken by rising sea levels but on the island of Wessex something like a utopia has been established. But the jealous lover of one of the researchers invades and corrupts the dream.

*An Infinite Summer*, 1979, Faber & Faber. Short story collection containing "An Infinite Summer," "Palely Loitering," plus three of the Dream Archipelago stories, "Whores," "The Negation" and "The Watched."

*The Affirmation*, 1981, Faber & Faber. The novel Priest considers his finest. In our world, Peter Sinclair's life is falling apart, as he suffers a breakdown he hides away in a cottage he is supposedly renovating and writes the story of Peter Sinclair in the

Dream Archipelago. In the Dream Archipelago, Peter Sinclair has won the lottery for longevity treatment, but the treatment will eradicate his memory so he must write his life story; he writes the story of Peter Sinclair in London. The two lines of reality become inextricably entangled as the novel progresses. *The Glamour*, 1984, Jonathan Cape. This book has gone through constant changes, the first UK paperback had a revised ending, further revisions were made in the first US edition, yet more changes were made when Priest adapted the novel for a BBC radio play. Eventually all these changes and others were amalgamated into a revised edition published by Touchstone in 1996. The story tells of a group of people so alienated from society that they have the ability to pass unseen by anyone around them.

*The Quiet Woman*, 1990, Bloomsbury. Published as a mainstream novel, it is a story about state intrusion into personal freedom and about perceptions of reality (it features Priest's only unreliable narrator), though it also has a curious echo of the Dream Archipelago.

*The Book on the Edge of Forever*, 1994, Fantagraphics. Nonfiction enquiry into the nonappearance of Harlan Ellison's *The Last Dangerous Visions*, originally published as a fanzine, *The Last Deadloss Visions*, in 1987, which went through several ever-expanding editions before appearing as this book.

*The Prestige*, 1995, Touchstone. Probably his most famous novel, following the film adaptation, though it also earned the World Fantasy Award and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. The story tells of the rivalry between two star magicians of the Victorian stage, a rivalry that escalates until it leads to violence and death, and has a lasting effect on future generations.

*The Extremes*, 1998, Simon & Schuster. Coincidentally, lone gunmen carry out random shootings in a Texan town and a British seaside resort on the same day. The widow of an FBI agent killed in Texas comes to Britain to investigate and, through virtual reality, finds an unexpected link between the two events.

*The Dream Archipelago*, 1999, Earthlight. Collection of the Dream Archipelago stories, extensively revised since their first publication, with one new story added. The contents are: "The Equatorial Moment," "The Negation," "Whores," "The Cremation," "The Miraculous Cairn," and "The Watched."

*The Separation*, 2002, Scribner. Winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award. One of a pair of twins is killed early in the Second World War. Depending on which one dies, the war either follows a course much like but not identical to our own history, or is ended at a peace conference, but modern-day passages suggest further time lines are involved.

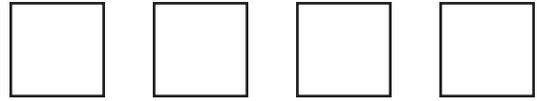
*The Magic*, 2008, GrimGrin Studio. Nonfiction account of the making of the film of *The Prestige* and its relationship to his novel.

"IT" *Came from Outer Space: Occasional Pieces, 1973–2008*, 2008, GrimGrin Studio. Collection of essays and reviews.

*Ersatz Wines*, 2008, GrimGrin Studio. Collection of early, mostly unpublished stories.

Ruddick, Nicholas *Christopher Priest*. Starmont Reader's Guide 50. Mercer Island: Starmont, 1989. Study of each of his novels up to *The Glamour*.

Butler, Andrew M., ed. *Christopher Priest: The Interaction*. Foundation Studies in Science Fiction 6. London: Science Fiction Foundation, 2005. Collection of thematic essays on his work.



## Nonfiction Reviews

### ***Frankenstein: Icon of Modern Culture***

Bruce A. Beatie

Audrey A. Fisch. *Frankenstein: Icon of Modern Culture*. East Sussex, UK: Helm Information, 2009 (Icons of Modern Culture). Hardcover, xiv + 306 pages (illustrated), £32.30, ISBN 1-978-093206-20-1.

Fisch's book consists of 18 short chapters (averaging 13 pages) with some three illustrations per chapter, and each chapter has extensive quotations from the works being discussed. I assume that she is following a standard format of the "Icons of Modern Culture" series, but it means that at least a third of the page space is taken up by illustrations and quotations. Following a short "Introduction" (3–9), the book is divided into two sections. The first, titled "Mary Shelley and the first 'Frankensteins,'" covers the novel's "Publication" (13–18), its influences ("*Frankenstein*, Godwin, and Wollstonecraft, 19–27), and its "Reception" (28–39). Fisch considers thematically "Early Science" (40–50) and "The Nature of Man" (51–56). Two chapters consider the relationship of the poetic couple to the book ("Percy Shelley and *Frankenstein*" [57–62] and "Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein*" [63–71], and the last of this section ("Revision and Authorship," 72–82) discusses the differences between the 1818 and 1831 editions.

The second and much longer section, "Beyond Mary Shelley," is a history of the novel's influence, looking at "Early Theatre" (85–109), the "Victorian Burlesque-Extravaganza" (111–30), and "Other Victorian 'Frankensteins'" (131–48). Fisch discusses "Silent Film" versions (149–55) and "Early Twentieth-Century Drama" (156–80), turning back to film in the obscurely titled chapter on "Whale, Hammer, and Beyond" (181–200)—James Whale directed the classic 1931 film with Boris Karloff and various sequels, while the British company Hammer Films remade a number of the older films in the late 50s and 60s. The next three chapters look at recent critical views of the novel and its derivatives: "Feminist Canonisation" (201–14), "Critical Progeny" (215–30), and "The Scientific Legacy of 'Frankenstein'" (231–40). The final chapter in this section discusses the "Contemporary 'Frankenstein'" (241–56) in comic books, graphic novels, anime, and foreign films. In her very brief "Conclusion: Ubiquitous 'Frankenstein'" (257–61), Fisch raises and dismisses the contradictory critical arguments as to the value of Shelley's

## Books about Christopher Priest

novel vs. its multifarious progeny. “[S]urely,” she says, “the Creature we know is not the product of one or even two minds. ‘Frankenstein’ has morphed into many different forms over time, place, and genre, with each version and production giving birth to a slightly different Creature, some more lasting than others.... Truly, [the Creature] and his progeny, as Mary Shelley could hardly have imagined, have gone forth and prospered. Surely she would be proud” (260).

The book concludes with an “Appendix: ‘The Death Bride’ from *Tales of the Dead*” (262–87), an extensive “Bibliography” (288–94). And an excellent “Index” (295–306). The inclusion of “The Death Bride,” a French tale translated into English in 1813, unexplained in the Appendix itself, was acknowledged by Mary Shelley in the 1831 edition of her novel as an explicit source.

Fisch has attempted an extremely broad survey of a tradition in a format that severely limits the extent of her discussion of any one item (except, as noted, for Shelley’s novel), but her research has been thorough, and her comments, while concise, are clear and interesting. One of the few types of “progeny” she fails to mention is linguistic: the use of *Franken-* or *franken-* as a productive prefix in English that forms nouns “with the sense ‘genetically modified.’” The online *OED* cites “Frankenfood” (hyphenated as an entry in the *American Heritage College Dictionary*), “frankenplants,” and “Frankenscience”; and recently I noticed “Franken-forests.” in the *New York Times Magazine* (online) for December 13, 2009.

## ***Keep Watching the Skies!***

Ed McKnight

Bill Warren. *Keep Watching the Skies! American Science Fiction Movies of the Fifties*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009. Hardcover, xi + 1004 pages (appendices, bibliography, index, with illustrations), \$99, ISBN 978-0786442300.

The first movie discussed in Bill Warren’s “21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition” of *Keep Watching the Skies!*—previously published in two volumes in 1982 and 1986, but now thoroughly updated with newly discovered movies as well as more detailed information about each film discussed—is 1953’s *Abbott and Costello Go to Mars*. Of course this is due only to the whim of alphabetical order, a mechanism that may sustain the fame of the comedic duo—at least in the world of film encyclopedias—long after their remaining fans stop reciting the brilliantly frustrating “Who’s on First?” for the local talent show. And yet the film is emblematic of the premise that runs through this one-thousand-page encyclopedia, covering nearly 300 films from the 1950s and early 1960s: this was the decade when the themes and motifs of the science fiction genre merged—for good or ill—with mainstream American culture.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, in a new age of atomic bombs, jet airplanes and supercomputers, many of the predictions of golden-age science fiction had come to pass, and the genre emerged from the ghetto to be recognized, if not for its literary value, then at least for its technological accuracy.

That’s the story we’ve all heard, and *Keep Watching the Skies!* offers ample evidence of its validity. Tales that in the 1920s and

1930s would have appeared only in the pages of a few relatively obscure magazines now took the form of major Hollywood spectacles, productions with budgets that could only be justified by the expectation that they would be enjoyed—and paid for—by a broad spectrum of the American public. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *When Worlds Collide* (1951), *The War of the Worlds* (1953), and *Forbidden Planet* (1956), each of which has an article of close to ten-thousand words devoted to the details of its production, represent some of the most significant films of the decade, in any genre.

But art is not created in a vacuum, as they say, and the cultural concerns that led to the creation of thoughtful, even profound science fiction films that reflected on the nature and destiny of humanity, also led to *Cat-Women of the Moon* (1953), *Monster on the Campus* (1958), and *Teenagers from Outer Space* (1959). It was impossible, if not undesirable, for science fiction to become a significant part of the culture of the 1950s without being influenced by that culture.

As the first wave of the baby boom entered their teens, Hollywood offered them *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957) and *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein* (1957), followed quickly by *Teenage Cave Man* (1958), *Teenage Monster* (1958), *Teenage Zombies* (1959) and the previously mentioned *Teenagers from Outer Space*.

Older audiences loved the *Ma and Pa Kettle* movies, so in the 1950s Hollywood would give Pa a pair of radioactive overalls for *Ma and Pa Kettle Back on the Farm* (1951). What do Abbott and Costello do? Not only do *Abbott and Costello Go to Mars*, but *Abbott and Costello Meet the Invisible Man* (1951), and *Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1953).

Nor would so progressive a genre as science fiction escape the first rumblings of the sexual revolution: *Nude on the Moon* (1961), according to Warren, “seems to have the distinction of being the first feature-length SF-oriented nudie.”

*Keep Watching the Skies!* offers an honest assessment of each of these films, as well as detailed credits, an overview of each film’s critical reception, and interesting background information about how some of them came to be produced in the first place. The films included range from 1950 to 1962; the three-year grace period spilling into the nineteen-sixties permits the inclusion of such classics as Roger Corman’s *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960), Irwin Allen’s *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (1961), John Frankenheimer’s *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962)... and Edward Bernds’s *The Three Stooges in Orbit* (1962). Entries range in length according to the merits of their subjects, from well over ten-thousand words for George Pal’s *The Time Machine* (1960) to a mercifully brief twelve-hundred words for *Man Beast* (1956).

As one would expect from a book about science fiction movies, it features plenty of photographs (273 according to the publisher), including sixteen full-page color reproductions of posters for such films as *Attack of the Crab Monsters*, *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *When Worlds Collide*, *This Island Earth*, *Rodan*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* and (of course) *Plan 9 from Outer Space*.

In addition to the entries themselves, the volume features an entertaining foreword by Howard Waldrop as well as a number of appendices, ranging from the obligatory list of the films in order of their release to an article on notable posters of the period. Two other appendices are of special interest. One, entitled “Oh,

Yes, They're the Great Pretenders," provides a listing of almost one hundred films that were not included in the book because the science-fictional element was too slight to justify a detailed treatment of the film. Even more intriguing (especially to a fan of alternative history) is a list of titles that were announced for production during the 1950s but never released. I can probably live with the knowledge that I'll never see *The Day the Earth Went out of its Mind* or *Snuffy Smith's Rocket Ship*, but I think I might have enjoyed seeing Gregory Peck in a production of *The Martian Chronicles* scripted by Ray Bradbury himself.

The thoroughness with which this volume explores its selected area of inquiry, as well as the level of detail with which it describes each film, more than compensates for the cost of the book. This volume is highly recommended for any collection devoted to science fiction, film history, popular culture or American studies.

## From Wollstonecraft to Stoker

Bruce A. Beatie

Marilyn Brock, ed. *From Wollstonecraft to Stoker: Essays on Gothic and Victorian Sensation Fiction*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009. Paper, viii + 212 pages, \$35, ISBN 978-0-7864-4021-4.

From the title of Marilyn Brock's collection of essays *From Wollstonecraft to Stoker: Essays on Gothic and Victorian Sensation Fiction*, one might expect considerable discussion of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, at the very least; however, while there is one essay that deals in part with the classic vampire novel, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is mentioned only in passing (25–26). The emphasis in these essays is in fact on "Victorian sensation fiction," a subgenre which, I discovered, was "popular in Great Britain in the 1860s and 1870s, following on from earlier melodramatic novels and Newgate novels, which focused on tales woven around criminal biographies, [and which] also descend from the gothic and romantic genres of fiction (Wikipedia, s.v. "Sensation novel"). As such, these essays are probably of only marginal interest to the average *SFRA Review* reader. Since the titles of the contributions are indicative both of content and approach, I will list them with brief comments, and conclude with a few more general critiques.

After Brock's "Introduction" (1–14), she begins part 1 ("The Instability of Identity: Character, Class, and Gender") with her essay "Desire and Fear. Feminine Abjection in the Gothic Fiction of Mary Wollstonecraft" (17–29); the term *abjection* derives from Julia Kristeva's 1982 book (cited 25 times in the index), and is used by several of the authors. The remaining essays in this section are: "'The Maiden Felt Hot Pain.' Agency and Passivity in the Work of Letitia Elizabeth Landon," by Richard Fantina (30–48); "'Portrait of a governess, disconnected, poor, and plain': Staging the Spectral Self in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*," by Laurence Talairach-Vielmas (49–61), "A Shock to the System, A System to the Shocks: The Horrors of the 'Happy Ending' in *The Woman in White*," by Judith Sanders (62–78), and "Hysterical Sensation: Bodies in Action in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*," by Elizabeth Anderman (79–88). Of the works

considered here, probably only the Collins novel will normally be considered relevant to 19th-century SF/fantasy.

In part 2 ("The Colonial Context of Gothic and Sensation Fiction"), at least Marilyn Brock's second contribution, "The Vamp and the Good English Mother: Female Roles in Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and Stoker's *Dracula*" (120–31) does discuss a traditionally regarded "fantasy" novel, but only in comparison with Le Fanu, usually considered an early mystery writer. The other three treat writers in the "Victorian sensation" genre: "Sensations Down Under: Australia's Seismic Charge in *Great Expectations* and [Braddon's] *Lady Audley's Secret*," by Julie M. Barst (91–101)—though Dickens's work goes well beyond genre fiction; "Reading Between the (Blood)lines of Victorian Vampires: Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 'Good Lady Ducaigne,'" by Saverio Tomaiuolo (102–19); and "Liminality and Power in Bram Stoker's *Jewel of the Seven Stars*," by Kate Holterhoff (132–43).

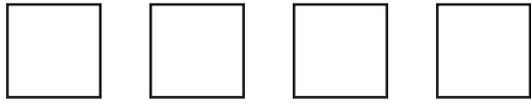
And finally, part 3 ("Fallen Woman, Fallen Man in the Victorian Novel") looks at *three* writers whose work is generally beyond the limits of genre fiction: "Ruth [by Elizabeth Gaskell]: An Analysis of the Victorian Signifieds," by Maria Granic-White (147–63); "Violence as Patrimony in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*," by Stephanie King (164–71); "In the Company of Men: Masculinity Gone Wild in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*," by Jennifer Beauvais (172–92); and "Ghostly Absence and Sexual Presence in [Henry] James's 'Owen Wingrave' and 'The Jolly Corner,'" by Nicholas Harris (193–206). The volume concludes with a few paragraphs "About the Contributors" (207–9), and a highly inadequate "Index" (211–12).

It should be obvious from the titles (which are too often punning or "cute") that the focus of these essays is, as Brock's introduction states, "issues of gender, class, and imperialism" (1), all of which are current buzz-words in general literary as well as SF criticism; the terms *postmodernist* and *postcolonial* recur about as often as Kristeva's "abjection." Some of the essays were interesting to me, in part as argument, in part because they introduced me to writers I knew little or nothing of; but some are overly repetitive and laden with critical jargon.

Perhaps the most problematic instance of jargon is Granic-White's use of the noun "signifieds" (147ff.) According to the *American Heritage College Dictionary*, this is purely a technical term in linguistics, meaning "The concept that a signifier denotes. [Transl. of Fr. *signifié*]." A "signifier" is (AHD) "1. One that signifies. 2. *Linguistics*. A linguistic unit or pattern, such as a succession of speech sounds, written symbols, or gestures that conveys meaning. [Transl. of Fr. *signifiant*]." The terms are probably from Derrida, whom Granic-White cites as a source. But to say that "artificially constructed *values* change their signifieds" (147, emphasis mine), or more significantly (forgive the pun) to speak of "Ruth's religious signifieds, Eve, Madonna, Mary Magdalen, and Christ, represent different hypostases of the self" (154) goes well beyond the narrow technical definition of the term *signified*, as well as a misuse of the philosophic/theological term *hypostasis*.

Finally, the book is about as poorly edited as any I have read in recent years. My notes list nearly three dozen typos and/or grammatical or stylistic errors, and I made no attempt to catch them all. To cite just a few—corrections noted in brackets: "Britain[']s imperial conquest" (9), "the textual endings [of]

Emily Brontë” (12), “This focus on [the] novel’s” (70), “Bella—who star[t]s missing her mother” (103), “reminders of her unconsum[mat]ed wedding day” (106), “Wilde may have peaked [piqued] Stoker’s interest” (141, note 1), and “would eagerly pour [pore] over the spectacle” (139). Whether the problems originate with the individual authors or the editor/author, McFarland & Company is, as its Web site rightly claims, “a leading U.S. publisher of scholarly, reference and academic books,” and its own staff should have caught them.



## Fiction Reviews

### *Elegy Beach*

Rikk Mulligan

Steven R. Boyett. *Elegy Beach*. New York: Ace Books, 2009. Hardcover, 375 pages, \$24.95, ISBN 978-0-441-01795-9

In 1983 Steven Boyett’s first novel, *Ariel*, offered a postapocalyptic fantasy, an Earth in which “the lights went out, the airplanes fell, the cars went still, the cities all went dark. The laws humanity had always known were replaced by new laws that could only be called magic.” *Ariel* is the story of Pete Garey and his unicorn familiar and their epic quest and final confrontation with a necromancer in post-Change New York City. While I have been a fan of postapocalypse fiction for some time, I had never encountered *Ariel* until quite recently, when it was rereleased by Ace in preparation for its sequel, *Elegy Beach*. These stories are a postapocalyptic blend of high fantasy and urban fantasy, yet they might also be considered science fiction as magic is explained as an operating system.

*Elegy Beach* is set some thirty years after the Change and is the story of Pete’s sixteen year-old son, Fred, in the seaside town of Del Mar on what was formerly the California coast. Fred Garey is a caster’s apprentice, bored of his mundane tasks (conjuring temporary unicorns and mending spells) and frustrated by the slow trickle of magical knowledge from his master, Paypay. Fred has shared his knowledge and training with his best friend Yan, the son of the town’s doctor; working together they begin to define the theory of spellware, one that uses casting as a form of software to control magic. In the process they first devise a method to control stasis, mass-produce spells, cast “macros,” and mass-produce password-unencoded charms for a barter-and-craft economy. While this is unsettling for Paypay and Fred’s father, this development also echoes the moral of works from Frankenstein to Jurassic Park: “just because you could, doesn’t mean you should.” Fred is young, distant from his father for reasons readers discover later in the novel, and has led a sheltered life in the seaside town; his enthusiasm gets the better of his judgment. Yan, only a little older, quickly establishes that he has incredible ambition and a drive to understand magic, and no compunctions

regarding the expansion of his abilities and knowledge, including the possible reversal of the Change itself. In fact, it becomes clear that Yan is quite probably a sociopath and Fred forces him out of Del Mar after a particularly dangerous spell-event; this starts the sequence of events that reunites Pete and Ariel, begins a new quest, and ends in a showdown in the Hearst Castle in the ruins of San Simeon.

Having read the books in sequence I find that the stories must be considered together not only because of their structural similarity, but because they offer one extended narrative. Fred is the voice of *Elegy Beach*, one quite different than Pete’s in *Ariel*, but this new story also becomes that of Pete and Ariel as it recounts the past twenty-five years, describes how more of the world has been altered, and unveils new challenges for the intrepid party: Fred, Pete, Ariel, and Dr. Ram, Yan’s father. While Fred’s story, it also offers the final chapter and a coda to *Ariel*. The structure of both is very similar: descriptions of daily life, the road trip and quest, challenges (gryphons vs. centaurs) and unique modes of travel ending in dramatic confrontations (necromancer vs. technomage). There is also a strong stylistic difference between the voices in both novels, a strong distinction between the narrative styles of a pre-Change twenty-something and a post-Change teen; part of this can be attributed to Boyett’s greater experience but it also reflects a generational difference, perhaps, between the pre-Internet generation and the contemporary multi-tasking iPhone cadres, something many academics might recognize in their own survey and composition courses. However, while Fred is younger, he also elaborates a much deeper understanding of the Change regarding the new laws of magic and offers tantalizing partial details of spellware; Yan is more unorthodox and ultimately devises ways to hack magic and science, endangering the world itself.

*Elegy Beach* reuses *Ariel*’s formula, but focuses more on themes of failure: of communication, fathers, friendship, and empathy. As *Ariel* herself says, “the past is a graveyard,” and much of the story is a trip through the American graveyard of the twentieth-century by a resigned if not embittered forty-something and his sarcastic magic pony. This quest does bring Pete back to life even as it brings one son back to his father and separates the other two permanently, a possibly postmodern feature that extends to many postapocalyptic stories, especially those released in the past decade. Boyett is also particularly meta in his story-telling; he shifts the “time” of the Change from the 1980s to a more contemporary point, jumping from Walkman to iPod as the detritus of the lost civilization. This felt awkward and jarring for my suspension of disbelief, but it was necessary because without the PC revolution, Internet, and 1990s software industry and its publications there would have been no spellware and perhaps no plot for this novel. This shift might make the book more accessible to a new generation of readers but it also emphasizes the role of Derrida’s archive after a fashion.

Education and literacy are minor themes, as both Fred and Yan are literate, a declining skill after the Change, and use this skills to develop their revolutionary “science” by accessing old-world books, as well as magical grimoires and personal journals. Yan’s spell book, Pete’s journal and his manuscript for *Ariel* (again with the meta) all factor heavily in the plot and echo similar tropes in Robinson’s *The Wild Shore* and Brin’s *The Postman*, further reinforcing a certain west coast, postapocalyptic

tic intertextuality. This aspect would be particularly useful for a literature course exploring this subgenre, or the use of travel literature in SF more broadly. Boyett's afterwords also offer significant insights into his writing process and a somewhat bleak assessment of the SF/F genre in the publishing industry, and his motivation for returning to write after a long hiatus, thoughts useful to creative writing students who expect to produce the next Big Thing.

## ***Puttering About in a Small Land***

Jason W. Ellis

Philip K. Dick. *Puttering About in a Small Land*. New York: Tor, 2009. Hardcover, 320 pages, \$26.99, ISBN 978-0-7653-1694-3.

It is widely reported in the scholarship devoted to Philip K. Dick that from 1950 to 1960 he turned his attention to mainstream realistic fiction for a time seeking legitimation beyond the science fiction ghetto and the financial successes that were potentially wedded to that legitimacy. Of the nine extant novels from that time that have been published, which include *Gather Yourselves Together* (1949–50, published 1994), *Voices from the Street* (1952–53, published 2007), *Mary and the Giant* (1953–55, published 1987), *The Broken Bubble* (1956, published 1987), *Puttering About in a Small Land* (1957, published 1985), *In Milton Lumky Territory* (1958, published 1985), *Confessions of a Crap Artist* (1959, published 1975), *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike* (1960, published 1984), and *Humpty Dumpty in Oakland* (1960, published 1987), *Puttering About* is now being reissued by Tor in a new hardback edition.

Set in 1950s California, *Puttering About* is about the intertwining lives of two couples—a Greimas rectangle of pairings based on sex and money during the postwar industrial boom and surface homogenization of American culture at large. *Puttering About* is a mundane realistic novel, but it focuses on the common denominator of much of Dick's science fiction as mapped by Patricia Warrick: "Contrary to much science fiction written in the fifties and sixties, Dick's work gives substantial attention to the relationships of women and men—relationships that are always troubled. Characters never fall in love, marry, and live happily ever after. Instead they grate on each other. Generally the man in the relationship is an Everyman, and although he may be successful in his work, he is a schlemiel in his love affairs, stumbling and uncertain in his attempts to cope with the competent and castrating females who always attract him. Dick's females are never weak; they are often unpleasant" (19). Dick's science fictional approach to relationships holds true in *Puttering About*. Roger Lindahl is an Everyman who putters about in his Modern TV Sales & Service business (which appears again in *Dr. Blood-money* and *Voices from the Street*), and he is distanced from his emasculating wife, Virginia. The Lindahls meet Chic and Liz Bonner at the private school where they decide to send their only son, Gregg. Chic is a business man who falls in love with Roger's business, and Liz acts as Roger's sexual object and a sexual subject in her own right who desires pleasure from Roger. Their affair, once found out, supplies the foundation for Chic and Virginia's business relationship that eventually dissolves the

sexual relationship between Roger and Liz after Roger makes a frankly unexpected desertion to Chicago, funded by stolen TV sets, to begin another life.

The novel demonstrates Dick's modernist experimentation with character development through inner monologue and flashback—primarily through the characters of Roger and Virginia at the beginning and end of the novel. For Roger and Virginia, the question upon which their thoughts turn emphasizes epistemological concerns, such as when Virginia must know and prove Roger's affair in front of a witness—her mother, or when Roger muses over Liz's appearance at his store, "Did it mean anything? If so, what did it mean? What did anything mean? he wondered. And how did a person tell?" (162). However, Dick takes a different turn with the development of Liz, who Virginia and the schoolmistress Mrs. Alt consider dumb due to her apparent disconnection with the here-and-now. Liz creates her own ontology through delusions about the world and her place in it. Furthermore, her ontological fantasies are tied to her affair with Roger and her sexualized body. In effect, her ontology does not respect bodily boundaries, and she brings everything into herself through her imaginings. On the other hand, her husband Chic speaks his mind and there is little going on inside his mind that Dick gives the reader access to. Perhaps his mind is consumed by storefront designs and business calculations. If this is so, then Chic represents the android in the story—in opposition to Roger and Liz, and to some extent Virginia—he goes on about his business even after Liz leaves him, none the wiser about Roger's affair with his ex-wife.

Dick is clearly developing his writing and characterization in this novel, but I have to disagree with Lawrence Sutin who opines in regard to Dick's realistic fiction that *Puttering About* was "[the] finest of the group—the one that deserved to be published at the time" (93). As fascinating as its mixture of interiority and dialog (particularly in the early chapters), personal ontological experimentation, and contemporary engagement of 1950s California are, it is easy to recognize why this novel was passed over during his lifetime. It is rough around the edges, not so much in its writing, but in the narrative gaps at the end of the novel and its uneven experimentation with interiority and ontological delusion. In large part, it reads as if Dick had run out of creative steam and merely had to return to narrative reporting in place of the more exciting mixture of interior and exterior voices with which the novel begins and ends (but to less effect). However, I do find something compelling about the novel that Sutin does not find in his reading: "Phil used humor to brilliant effect in his SF, but there is scarcely the trace of a smile in these novels—aiming for the mainstream seemed to freeze him up just a bit" (93). In fact, *Puttering About* has some very humorous scenes that form the novel's weak pulse. These include the beginning of Roger and Liz's affair in Chapter 15 and their returning to Roger's home where Virginia and Chic are discussing their potential business plans, or Virginia and her mother's staking out Liz's home to catch Roger in the act (it seems unlikely that Virginia's mother's name, Mrs. Watson, is coincidental) in Chapter 20. *Puttering About* may lack the energy and explosion of ideas found in Dick's science fiction, but it does present the mundane with occasional slapstick and laughs.

Dick, however, further develops his later science fiction themes in *Puttering About*. As Roger awkwardly tries to make

## Gardens of the Sun

Ed Carmien

Paul McAuley. *Gardens of the Sun*. Amherst: Pyr, 2010. Trade paper, 412 pages, \$16, ISBN 978-1-61614-196-7.

his move with Liz, he agonizes over hearing voices in radio static and reading meanings in everyday phenomena. His perception of the world is destabilized by his lust for the hypersexualized Liz. She, more interestingly, creates her own ontology in Chapter 17—an alternate reality within her mind in which bodies converge and mix, and Virginia's child becomes her own. Therefore, Dick pushes even his mundane realistic fiction toward a more postmodern and ontologically determined basis, which will receive further attention in his later science fiction novels, notably *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965), *Ubik* (1969), and *A Scanner Darkly* (1977).

Besides the tension between epistemological and ontological questions, which consistently inhabit Dick's oeuvre, *Puttering About* contains one glaring topic that deserves further critical discussion. The early chapters demonstrate an overt racism by Roger and Virginia—he being a white male from Arkansas and she being a white female from New England—toward African Americans and Latin American migrant workers, which reaches a crescendo with Roger's beating by an African American following Roger purposefully bumping into the man and calling him a "coal-black jig" (108). This racism is weakly counterbalanced by Roger's venomous reaction to his wife using the word "Okies" in the immediately following chapter (130), and Roger's decision to carry a carload of migrant workers from Ojai to the valley in the final chapter, because as he tells his son, "They wanted to get over the mountain" (314). How does Roger arrive at this point as a human being? Has he somehow developed a personal responsibility and respect for others? The only parallel provided in the text for Roger's transformation is that he gets over his own mountain—commitment and personal responsibility—by stealing a carload of TV sets from Virginia and Chic's business in order to finance his escape to Chicago at the novel's end. The rapid denouement of the novel and Roger's transformation from racist to nice guy deserves more study in reference to Dick's other works. In comparison to Dick's many fine science fiction novels, I cannot find enough redeeming qualities in *Puttering About* to recommend it to a wide audience. The problem is that, as Douglas A. Mackey observes, "To read Dick stripped bare of such science-fictional trappings as gadgets, robots, time travel, and future worlds, is still to read Dick, but in a somewhat diminished form" (31). Dick's novels about the future more elegantly and successfully speak of his present and continue to speak to us today as we turn the calendar to 2010 than does *Puttering About*.

Libraries that serve Dick scholars should obtain this unique work for their collections, and those same scholars may consider purchasing their own copy for their private collection. And finally, I would suggest his science fiction fans steer clear of *Puttering About*, because this foray into the mundane far too successfully simulates its subject.

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The sequel to *The Quiet War*, *Gardens of the Sun* picks up after military forces from Earth have finished invading, occupying, and dominating the "Outers." This action, taken either for greed (to loot the genius and art of the Outers), or to prevent the ongoing push to evolve into ever-more variant forms of humanity—take your pick—occupied the bulk of the first novel. For an excellent summary of the background McAuley uses for these two novels, as well as a thorough assessment of the setting's literary cousins, please see the review of *The Quiet War* by our own Ed Higgins in issue 290 of the *SFRA Review*.

Now that the three major Earth governments jostle over the spoils, life goes on in the sundry habitats of the outer solar system. The occupied and the collaborators work under the heel of the Earth leader, a Brazilian military tyrant painted in broad strokes who sets up his local base in the obviously referential "green zone." Earth, on the recovery from massive ecological disaster, is ruled by a collection of ruling families, and privilege is accorded to family members by measure of their relationship to the heads of the families. Those unlucky to be born without such blood relations are cogs in the family/governmental machine.

Two groups escape the occupation—the Ghosts, under the leadership of a messianic figure who claims to have received messages from his future self, and a ragtag fleet of regular Outer folks. This latter group sets up shop near Uranus for a year or two but skedaddle when the military tyrant, ignoring Earth orders to the contrary, sends an expedition to wipe them out. They then move on to Uranus, where they discover the Ghosts have already laid a claim.

McAuley's novel follows this and other threads of narrative via the perspective of a familiar cast of characters from the first book. The ragtag fleet is observed (by the reader) through Macy Minnot, the Earth defector/exile. The occupation in the settled Outer areas is viewed through the eyes of the Dave (cloned super-soldier/spy) gone rogue as he searches for a woman he met while generating dirty tricks prior to the quiet war going noisy. Loc Ifrahim, slyboots diplomat, works a dead-end job, having earned the ire of the tyrant. Earth's primary gene "wizard," Sri Hong-Owen searches for her Outer counterpart, Avernus, and investigates decades of Avernus's creations, sundry habitats carved out of the ice or rock of different moonlets.

Meanwhile, back on Earth—and here let us pause the summary, for *Gardens of the Sun* goes in too many directions, covers too much ground in too little prose. McAuley has left rich veins untapped. There are many significant journeys, two novel's worth. Macy Minnot goes into exile, then returns to the main settled Outer zone to plead her case for an amicable settlement of the war. Sri Hong-Owen's arc transforms her from tyrant's pawn to immortal interstellar traveler—but the details are pretty sketchy. Avernus's trip changes her from fugitive amidst Saturn's rings to leader of an Earthside revolt against the corrupt ruling families of the Americas, a journey she shares with wounded war hero Cash Baker, wounded pilot turned propagandist turned

rebel. AWOL spy Dave journeys far, finds the woman he seeks has married and born a child, fends off a fellow clone superspy, goes to prison for his murder, and ends up in a prison on the moon, still seeking an identity beyond his training.

Suffice to say that the Ghosts, always militant, mount an attack the occupied Outer territories. Earth military vessels fail to thwart the attack, but Sri Hong-Owen manages this trick. Earthside, the regime changes twice—once upon the death of one of the gerontocracy, again through revolution, spearheaded by Avernus and Sri Hong-Owen's son. By the end of the novel, all seems sweet—but.

But for the Ghosts, who have taken the genetic leap feared by the Brazilians, one of the causes for the quiet war of the previous novel. Their postscript shows some clearly posthuman clone sisters living the communist ideal, working toward what appears to be interstellar travel. But for Sri Hong-Owen, who by the end of the novel has become something out of an early William Gibson novel—a consciousness living in an assortment of vats, awkwardly immortal, and aided in her interstellar travel plans by a cadre of heavily modified clones. But for brief mention of an Outer interstellar journey already begun, but said to take a thousand years. Perhaps McAuley has more story to tell.

The most interesting of the journeys here are the contrasting paths taken by Avernus, the centuries-old gene wizard, born in predisaster California and refugee of old hostilities between Earth and the first settlers off-planet, on Luna and Mars, and Sri Hong-Owen, also born of Earth. Hong-Owen relentlessly pursues Avernus until she breaks off and goes her own way. Avernus, for her part, seeks peace between the factions—but in a novel called *The Quiet War* that aim is doomed, and so in *Gardens of the Sun* she returns to Earth, to continue the work of healing the Earth. Hong-Owen, meanwhile, seemingly recapitulates Avernus's many decades of work before launching herself out of the solar system, albeit in the postscript of the novel.

These two are the philosophers of the novels. Both cut, or tweak the genes of their progeny. Hong-Owen's son Alder has subtle tweaks, giving him increased intelligence and charisma. Avernus's daughter Yuli has a broader set of tweaks, but she is still captured and ultimately killed by the Brazilian occupying forces. This precipitates Avernus's return to Earth. Alder, left on Earth by his mother, faces a vengeful new administration, goes on the run and helps lead a revolution against the ruling families.

Avernus, it might be said, seeks new children amongst the oppressed people of Earth. Hong-Owen delves inward, copies herself. Avernus seeks the human among people she seeks to lead back into democracy, bringing the Outer ideal of self-governance back to the planet that evolved homo sapiens. Hong-Owen, scion of the ruling class, recreates the governing system that bred her: despite traveling to the outer reaches of our solar system, she travels inward.

That this interesting contrast is not fully developed is a pity. Far too much rockets by that does not assist this essential narrative opposition. Much is interesting. As in *The Quiet War* the hard science fiction element is constant and fascinating. The clash of cultures is not forgotten. Each individual story has at least some merit, but all too often a reader may find him or herself checking a metaphorical watch, as if to ask “are we there yet?”

When it comes to using this text in the college classroom, there may be some specific aspects of interest for classes in the sciences. McAuley's speculative looks at biology would surely be of interest to open-minded science faculty. In a more general sense, *The Quiet War* is the better choice. This is not to say *Gardens of the Sun* is a bad read—I certainly enjoyed it, and it serves as an excellent sequel to *The Quiet War*, which in the best serial space opera tradition, leaves many strings dangling. *Gardens* wraps up those loose strings while coyly tossing out a few long term story threads. We should look forward to more work from McCauley.

## **Leviathan**

Ritch Calvin

Scott Westerfeld. *Leviathan*. New York: Simon Pulse, 2009. Hardcover, 448 pages, \$19.99, ISBN-13 978-1416971733.

Scott Westerfeld appears to be a machine. I mean, he turns out novels like clockwork. On top of that, he has been quite remarkably successful. His *Uglies* series (*Uglies*, *Pretties*, *Specials*, *Extras*) was a phenomenal hit with its target audience (grade 9 and up according to *School Library Journal* or grades 8–11 according to *Booklist*), reaching #1 on the *Times* bestseller list. Not quite as popular as the *Twilight* books, perhaps, but popular—and, yes, a movie version is currently slated for a 2011 release. Among his other series have been the *Risen Empire* series and the *Midnighters* series. He also has a number of stand-alone novels, including *Peeps*, *So Yesterday*, *Fine Prey*, *Polymorph*, and the—apparently—controversial *Evolution's Darling*. Now, Westerfeld has launched his latest: the *Leviathan* series.

The novel is ostensibly set in Europe in 1914, though this Europe is an alternate universe version. Westerfeld builds his plot around the political and military events of World War I. He conveniently provides several pages as an afterword that explain which elements of the novel are factual and which elements are fictional. The novel begins with the assassination of a young prince's parents, the Hapsburgs. In the world of the novel, however, they had only one (illegitimate) heir, Aleksandar. Their murder results in a vast war, and Alek goes into hiding because he's the only living threat to the throne. The other proponent is a young girl, Deryn Sharp, who disguises herself as a boy so that she can enter the Service. Through her skills, bravery, and weird set of coincidences, she finds herself aboard a very large airship, the *Leviathan* (as “Dylan” in her disguise).

In the alternate world of *Leviathan*, Europe is divided into two great powers: the Darwinists (roughly the Allies of Great Britain, France, and Russia) and the Clankers (roughly the Central Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire). Here, the central division between the two Powers is the belief in and use of living machinery. In this universe, Darwin discovered DNA (here called “life threads”) and made possible organic engineering. The Darwinists grow all kinds of mutants, chimera, and ecologies, including the huge aircraft. The *Leviathan* is actually a genetically modified whale that fills with hydrogen. These living machines, however, have complex ecologies that require the interaction of many species. The Clankers,

on the other hand, are mortified by the living machines; they find them utterly repugnant, and they prefer inorganic machines. Instead of inflatable organic ecologies, they build biplanes and zeppelins (also filled with hydrogen).

Of course, the narrative brings our two protagonists together on top of a glacier in the mountains of Switzerland. Aleksandar has taken refuge in a secret castle on top of the mountain when the *Leviathan* comes crashing down. Despite direct orders to the contrary, young, idealistic Alek sneaks out to help the victims of the crash. As Alek and Dylan interact, they discover that many of the stereotypes that commonly circulate about the enemy are, in fact, false. Of course, everything, including their friendship, gets complicated when the Clankers send airships to destroy the *Leviathan*. Alek and his supporters must decide whether they should help the Clankers, and thereby reveal his existence, or help the *Leviathan*, their sworn enemy. As the young Prince tries to figure out a solution—and figure out where they might go once they’re off the mountaintop—the novel leaves a good many things unresolved, leaving a clear path for the next installment. Will they find a safe haven? Will Deryn’s secret be revealed? And, most importantly, what’s inside those mysterious eggs?

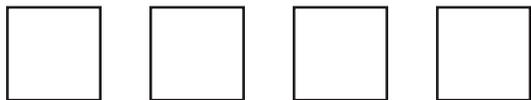
In the afterword, Westerfeld characterizes *Leviathan* as “steampunk,” as a mixture of old and new, of history and the future. And, indeed, the notion of mixture, or hybridity, seems to be the overriding theme. In order to get the *Leviathan* off the mountaintop, it becomes a hybrid of Darwinist and Clanker technologies. As a result of their interactions, both Alek and Deryn find themselves changed. And, of course, the novel plot itself is a hybrid of fact and fiction.

Although I doubt that *Leviathan* will overtake the *Twilight* series or the *Uglies* series, I don’t doubt that it will prove successful. Westerfeld has a knack for producing characters, plots, and language that appeal to his audience. Though the novel is hefty at 434 pages (though in a large font and with illustrations), that’s not necessarily a hindrance. After all, young readers devoured the *Harry Potter* books in spite of their page counts. *Leviathan* might well work to demonstrate to young readers that history isn’t dull at all. Further, it foregrounds two young characters caught up in political and historical circumstances that are much larger than they are. Even though one is born to royalty and the other a commoner, they both play a role in making history.

Of the myriad classic newspaper strips currently being reprinted, *Prince Valiant* perhaps benefits most from modern reproduction techniques. It is also arguably one of the great adventure newspaper strips. *Prince Valiant* began in 1937, the creation of Hal Foster, who drew the strip until 1970 and continued to write it for another decade before passing it on to other hands; the strip continues today. It is one of the most beautifully drawn newspaper comics ever. Foster set a high standard for realism in comics art, bringing the sensibility of such illustrators as Maxfield Parrish, N. C. Wyeth, Howard Pyle, and others to the comics page. For the entirety of Foster’s run, *Prince Valiant* was designed to fill a full newspaper page, in color, each Sunday, and Foster used the space to stunning effect. The current reprint series reduces the size to about 10x13 but maintains the full page layout and has, for the most part, carefully followed and restored the original art and color schemes. The result is a stunningly handsome hardcover book showcasing Foster’s fine draftsmanship and page composition.

*Prince Valiant* is set in Arthur’s England (the official strip title is *Prince Valiant in the Days of King Arthur*) and follows the adventures of the eponymous hero as his father, the deposed king of Thule, flees to England, where Val grows to adolescence and sets out to become a Knight. The strip is strongly indebted to Malory for its narrative contexts, especially in its early years, as Val is woven into the tapestry of Camelot, encountering major Arthurian figures such as Gawain, Merlin, Tristram, and others, and having adventures strongly reminiscent of those common in medieval romance. Like many a questing knight, Val is something of a fair unknown in his early adventures, eager to prove his merits as a knight and ultimately to reclaim his lost heritage. He is also, unsurprisingly perhaps, a sort of Heinleinian omniscient hero, able to master almost any situation even as a brash youth. In one particularly implausible sequence, he not only captures and tames a horse by himself, he also constructs his own tack, after having seen a knight in armor on horseback exactly once in his life. The strip also does not shy away from the violence inherent in the world of medieval romance; though one might imagine Val as something of an aesthete, given Foster’s lush art and Val’s black pageboy hairdo, he is in fact a remarkably efficient fighter and can be quite coldly bloodthirsty. Indeed, though the strip clearly intends Val to be heroic and for the audience to cheer him on, one of the various counter-readings possible has to do with the strip’s frank and unsentimental treatment of war and violence.

In its early days, the strip is anchored in fantasy, though as the strip developed, Foster gradually jettisoned virtually all of the fantasy elements, aiming for a high degree of historical accuracy. Early on, though, we encounter dragons, ogres, Morgan le Fay, and Merlin, among other fantastic elements. Even in these early strips, though, where magic is unequivocally real, Foster also tends to underplay, if not actively undercut, the fantastic. Little in the strip actually requires a supernatural explanation. More commonly, fantastic creatures are merely exotic ones; for instance, when the narrative refers to a “unicorn,” the illustration reveals that the creature in question is in fact a rhinoceros, and the “dragon” Val defeats is “really” a large crocodile. Indeed, the credulity of the characters is a narrative device. In one famous sequence, Val reclaims a castle taken over by an ogre (the strip suggests but does not insist that the “ogre” is really a man who



## Media Reviews

### ***Prince Valiant Vol. I: 1937–1938* [graphic novel]**

Dominick Grace

*Prince Valiant Vol. I: 1937–1938*. Foster, Hal. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2009.

has used disguise to render himself horrid) by turning the ogre's own strategy of supernatural horror against him. Val constructs for himself a horrific demon mask and "haunts" the castle, faking various supernatural powers such as that of flight to terrorize the invaders and drive them away. The strip's ambivalence about the fantastic is one of its most interesting features and would generate fruitful discussion about the uses and implications of enchantment in the context of a course in romance or fantasy.

Given its subject matter and its period, the strip is unapologetically masculinist, with women featuring primarily as objects of fear (the witches) or desire (the fair Ilene, Val's tragic first love) and though this changes somewhat in later years, the strip's primary focus is the world of male endeavor and accomplishment. This world is clearly homosocial and arguably subtly homoerotic. The love triangle that is the focus of several week's worth of strips in the second year is particularly instructive in this regard. Val loves Ilene, who has been promised in marriage to Prince Arn. Naturally, the two must fight over her. Also naturally, events conspire to make them grudging allies, then friends, as Vikings carry off Ilene. Ilene is ultimately drowned at sea, depriving both young men of her love, but not of each other. Arn is a long-haired blonde, like Ilene, and a key narrative development involves him giving Val his sword (the famous singing sword, made by the same smith who made Excalibur). A queer, or queer-friendly, reading is not difficult to derive from the lush sensuality of Foster's art and from the inescapable phallic implications of one young man handing his sword to another.

Despite its surface simplicity as a straightforward adventure yarn, then, *Prince Valiant* lends itself to various readings. In addition to being a text that can be studied profitably in the context of medieval romance, it can also be read in relation to modern revisionist Arthurian texts (e.g. *The Mists of Avalon*), as well as in relation to other twentieth and twenty-first comic strips and graphic novels. It could be compared/contrasted interestingly with such strips as *Flash Gordon*, for instance, or with the comics work of Jack Kirby (who appropriated Val's demon as the model for his own demon character, Etrigan) or, more recently, Neil Gaiman (indeed, Val puts in a brief, uncredited appearance in the illustrated version of Gaiman's *Stardust*). The Duke of Windsor apparently called Prince Valiant the "greatest contribution to English literature in the last hundred years," which, despite being obvious hyperbole, attests to the depth and complexity Foster was able to achieve at the rate of one page of comics per week for fifty years.

## **The Twilight Saga: New Moon [film]**

Catherine Coker

*New Moon*. Dir. Chris Weitz. Perf. Kristin Stewart, Robert Pattinson, Taylor Lautner. Summit Entertainment, 2009.

The second film of the Twilight franchise continues both the story begun in last year's installment and the media critique of the book series. Lest anyone not familiar with the series be confused, let me briefly summarize the plot: Girl loves vampire; vampire leaves girl; girl has psychotic break; girl has sexual tension with a teenage werewolf; girl leaves werewolf to save

suicidal vampire; girl and vampire get back together; werewolf angsts; vampire proposes marriage to girl. Roll credits and wait seven months for the next film to debut—posters already advertise *Eclipse* as being released in June, 2010.

Far more interesting than the romantic triangles and awkward metaphors (puberty equals snarling, extra body hair, and predatory male gazes, anyone?) is the cinematography. The movie is shot as a kind of love letter to the coastlines and forests of the Pacific Northwest, with many lingering shots of cold waves crashing on shores and rays of sunlight peeking through heavy tree cover. One beautiful sequence finds a depressed Bella Swann returning to the meadow in which she and Edward Cullen lay gazing rhapsodically in each other's eyes the previous spring; in her memory it is lush and green, sprinkled throughout with gorgeous wildflowers. Returning months later, she finds it brown and blasted with winter, covered in thorny overgrowths—an apt representation of her near suicidal state of mind.

Much as in the previous movie in the series, this film seemingly takes pains to undercut the "romanticism" of Bella's seemingly near-abusive relationship with her vampiric boyfriend, Edward. The actress, Kristin Stewart, is made up to look like she has burning holes with dark circles for eyes after Edward has left her; she is thin and tattered, her hair stringy. She reminded me of nothing so much as a recent outpatient at a mental hospital, someone who needs careful watching and a carefully monitored dietary intake. "Your behavior isn't normal and it scares the hell out of me," her father tells her after enduring abbreviated months of his daughter's screaming nightmares and intensive self-isolation. Surely his words echo the thoughts of every viewer in the audience, let alone every parent. We can only wonder what sort of conversations parents will be having with their 'tween daughters on the ride home from this film.

Later Bella has an accident while riding a motorbike with her friend Jacob; she apologizes as bright red seeps from her hairline. "You're apologizing for bleeding?" the boy asks, completely aghast. Bella flinches in response, mumbling, "I guess I am." Later we see a scarred Quileute woman, one side of her face unblemished, the other a reconstructed wreck, who we are told was "standing too close" to her werewolf fiancé when he "lost his temper for a split-second." The warning to women is clear: don't make your menfolk angry, or tempt them by, y'know, existing. Lest this not be shocking enough, here is a reminder to readers: these are the *good guys*.

As if the fetishization of male violence isn't enough, the fetishization of the male body takes up quite a bit of cinematic real estate, as well. Throughout the film, the camera remains largely focused on the surplus of male bodies offered up for female delectation. A subplot with the werewolves involves the consistent ripping of (male) t-shirts and shapeshifting-induced fevers, which necessitates a half dozen Native American guys being displayed in nothing but denim cut-offs for an hour and a half. The overwhelmingly female, 20–40 something audience I saw the film with shrieked delightedly, oohing and ahing in worship akin to pain at actor Lautner's sculpted abdominal muscles. One male viewer kept reassuring his female companions that they couldn't possibly be real and that they certainly "had to be photoshopped"—displaying an insecurity in acceptable body display that is seldom evidenced with females as in, say, Angelina Jolie's role in the Zemeckis adaptation of *Beowulf*.

Finally, the film is also a not-so-subtle slap in the face to the film industry as a whole, which has often maintained that women don't go to the movies, or if they do, they go with their boyfriends. The phenomenally popular woman-led franchise had opening day business that calls to mind the popularity of boy-fare such as *Star Wars*, with women camped out at theaters for hours. Fascinating to watch was the preponderance of t-shirts, often home-made, that advertised their predilections. In addition to the expected "Team Edward" and "Team Jacob" delineations, there were also members of "Team Carlisle," "Team Fang" and "Team Fur." There were declarations such as "I like boys who sparkle!" Males were far and few between, with many bearing sullen expressions or just looking plain embarrassed. The one enthusiastic boy I saw was there for his media studies class. (Full disclosure: I co-teach that class.) Though the text may be bewildering for some, it is certainly worth engaging in as we watch cinematic and numeric history unfold.

## 9 [film]

### Ritch Calvin

9. Dir. Shane Acker. Perf (voices). Christopher Plummer, Martin Landau, John C. Reilly, Crispin Glover, Jennifer Connelly, Elijah Wood, Alan Oppenheimer. Focus Features, 2009.

The 2009 animated feature film *9* shares a number of characteristics with other recent films. For one, *9* is just one of a recent explosion of SF or SF-related animated films. Others would include *City of Ember* (2008), *Futurama* (2008), *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (2008), *Wall-E* (2008), *Monsters vs. Aliens* (2009), *Battle for Terra* (2009), *Coraline* (2009), *Planet 51* (2009), and *Astro Boy* (2009). For another, *9* is a postapocalyptic film much like *The Day after Tomorrow* (2004), *I Am Legend* (2007), *City of Ember*, *Wall-E*, *The Road* (2009), *2012* (2009), and *The Book of Eli* (2010). For still another, *9* partakes of the visual imagery of many recent steampunk films, including *Around the World in 80 Days* (2004), *Hellboy* (2004), *Stardust* (2007), *The Golden Compass* (2007), *City of Ember*, *Hellboy II* (2008), and *Sherlock Holmes* (2010—not the 2009 Robert Downey film of the same name). And finally, *9* is still another *Frankenstein* variation in which man-made machines turn against and destroy humans. In this case, however, the destruction is complete; humans will not return to the planet. Given all this, is *9* simply another knock-off? a simple clone to fit some general trends? a numbers-generated commercial vehicle? I'd answer that with a qualified, "No."

The 2009 feature film began as a student project. Director Shane Acker created a computer-generated short. With Tim Burton's backing and support, Acker transformed the 2005 short into the current feature film. The current version begins with a voice-over (and visuals that are oddly reminiscent of *Coraline*), in which the Scientist tells of human hubris, of the "blind pursuit of technology [that] only sped us quicker to our doom." The primary characters are all hand-sewn dolls, called "stitch-punks" on fan sites, named/numbered 1 through 9. Each of the nine dolls has a slightly different shape and a decidedly different character. The oldest and least sophisticated of the dolls, 1, is the self-appointed Leader of the group; he is strict and intractable

in his beliefs. Dolls 3 and 4 are twins, and they are seekers of knowledge, Cataloguers who remain in the museum to learn all they can. Doll 7 is the only female in the group, a ninja-like warrior who refuses to follow 1's demands. She also seems to be constructed of a different material, and she is the only doll who is white in color. Number 6 is believed to be crazy, turning out an endless stream of drawings, though he really holds the key to the Machines all along. The massive number 8 is the warrior and enforcer of the group.

Whether Acker based his story on this idea, or not, it bears some resemblance to the enneagram (of Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, Ichazo, and Naranjo). In this theory of character types, humans consist of nine types, and in which nine is the Peacemaker, the unifier, a role that 9 fulfills in this film. Furthermore, the idea resembles the Egyptian concept of the soul, in which the human is comprised of nine parts: the eight parts of the eternal soul, plus the human body. Late in the film, the Scientist (via recorded message) tells 9 that the reason the machines went wrong was because they had no soul. In order to salvage humanity, and in order to prevent these technological machines (the dolls) from being corrupted, the Scientist imbued each of the nine dolls with one part of his own soul. So, in effect, the nine dolls are constitutive aspects or elements of the human Scientist.

The narrative begins with 9 awakening and, much like Frankenstein's Monster, discovering both his body and the world around him. Eventually, 9 joins the other dolls, and he discovers that all humans have been destroyed in the human-machine war. The Scientist, working within a Nazi-like regime, had produced a "Brain." Although intended for peaceful pursuits, the Chancellor takes the Machine from the Scientist and turns it to destruction. Once the Machine has killed all humans, it turns its attentions to the dolls, since they hold both the talisman that drives the Machine and enables the transfer of souls. While 1 prefers to hide and wait out the demise of the machines, 9 prefers to take action. While 1 calls 9 a fool guided by pointless queries, 9 calls 1 a blind man guided by fear. As with the Monster in *Frankenstein*, who seeks knowledge, in part, to be included among humanity, 9's pursuit of these questions makes him human.

In part because he inadvertently causes the death of several of the dolls, he remains determined to destroy the Machine. He also discovers the secret to the dolls, their relationship to the Scientist, and the means to free them from eternal destruction. In a scene reminiscent of the rooftop scene of *Blade Runner* in which the android Roy releases his soul, and the white bird flies up into the heavens, 9 releases the souls of the dolls who have been killed by the Machine. They fly up into heaven, sending back down a cascade of rain—which washes them clean and promises new life.

The film is engaging; the dolls each have distinct personalities; they each exhibit human tendencies—wincing in pain, gasping for breath, mourning the loss of companions (even if they don't ever eat). Of course, as with so many contemporary animated films, the CGI effects are often quite stunning. However, as science fiction should do, this film raises many of the well-worn questions and themes of our time, but here in a new (or newly polished) set of metaphors.

As the Scientist says in his opening narration, human life may have ended, but "life must go on." In Acker's original short, the film ends with 9 carrying his torch forward, representing human

knowledge. In the feature film version, it ends with 9 saying, “This world is ours, now. It’s what we make of it.” Maybe that’s lesson enough for all of us.

## *Zombieland* [film]

Chris Pak

*Zombieland*. Dir. Ruben Fleischer. Perf. Woody Harrelson, Jesse Eisenberg, Emma Stone, Abigail Breslin, Bill Murray. Columbia Pictures, 2009.

Well-produced, gory and extremely tongue in cheek, *Zombieland*, is Ruben Fleischer’s parody of the zombie film and its conventions. It is well aware of its antecedents and demonstrates just how far the figure of the zombie has become common cultural property; its clichés make it a genre open to parody while remaining amenable to an undercurrent of social critique. The zombie narrative has always had an element of the absurd awaiting exploitation for comedic effect, with films such as the British *Shaun of the Dead* (Edgar Wright 2004) revelling in the possibilities offered by this structural dynamic. In *Zombieland* we follow a group of survivors as they attempt to escape the influence of an unexplained plague that has turned the human population into zombies.

Eisenberg is the socially awkward Columbus; he is one of the few survivors in the world, as is implied by the spectacle of a hellish Earth seen from space in the opening sequence. This is familiar territory for the zombie film. Embedded within the film are several stories: Columbus’s maturation, Tallahassee’s blind search for something to fill the void left by the loss of a loved one and Wichita and Little Rock’s realization that they must begin trusting other people in order to achieve that sense of belonging they are searching for. The plot begins with Columbus’s journey to his hometown on a mission to locate his estranged family. Through his flashbacks we learn early on that he is a recluse afraid of making contact with people and indifferent toward his family. On the way he meets Tallahassee (Woody Harrelson), and the two sisters Wichita and Little Rock, who on several occasions steal their vehicle and weapons and abandon them. Throughout the film their names are substituted for those of their home towns, reinforcing the sense of them as types rather than characters.

Survival is, of course, one of the central motifs of the film. Columbus keeps a list of rules, many of which are simply common sense and certainly reflect audience responses to previous zombie films. Examples are Rule No. 1: Cardio—keeping fit can help you escape ravening zombies, and Rule No. 2: Don’t be a Hero—a rule that Columbus breaks at the climax of the film. We only hear a handful of these rules, but they structure the film’s themes and are effectively exploited throughout as a running joke. As can be expected in a zombie film, there is no shortage of guns and gore, and each demonstration of one of Columbus’s rules is accompanied by luminous text and sounds that resonate on a stylistic level with computer gaming. Tallahassee in particular, a character that clearly recalls Harrelson’s role in *Natural Born Killers*, makes a game of killing zombies. At one point, after dispatching a zombie, a “Kill of the Week”

logo accompanied by a ringing bell sweeps onto the screen. The arcade aspect of Zombie games such as the *Resident Evil* series (1996-Present, also adapted for film) and *Zombie, Zombie* (1984), which appeared in the wake of early zombie films, is here alluded to. Drawing more widely on the game or simulation theme is Wichita and Little Rock’s own journey to Pacific Playland, a theme park to which the twelve-year-old Little Rock projects her longing for normality and which becomes invested with the symbolic value of utopia.

This desire for a return to a world before the zombies is paralleled by Tallahassee’s mission to find a Twinky. He risks Columbus’s and his own life to do so, and his repeated failure leads to much comic overreaction. Columbus speculates that, for Tallahassee, the Twinky is not just a deliciously creamy sweet snack but a symbol for a return to innocence, to a time before zombies. A touching development is Columbus’s realization that Tallahassee has lost someone close to him; not the puppy that he thought he was referring to in an earlier conversation, but his son. Little Rock, while in the late Bill Murray’s mansion, joins Tallahassee at shooting practise and, responding to his advice, manages to hit a target. She symbolically fills the vacuum left by his son, becoming a part of his family. Family and belonging are in fact the central themes of the movie, and the real connections they manage to develop is set against the symbolic value of the “road trip” motif that their journey across America stands in for. This cliché, that of the growing familial bond between survivors, is itself parodied by their group dynamics and by the ease with which they accept violence. Especially relevant to Columbus is the sense that the catastrophe that has stripped away the social patterns of the old world has allowed him to develop bonds he would not have been able to before.

Bill Murray’s cameo appearance and his zombie disguise brings home the traditional association between the real, living person and the person living like a zombie. We can also ask how the growing bond between the group reveals the world prior to the catastrophe as a simulation of social relationships. *Zombieland* is a self-conscious contribution to the zombie genre that deploys its publicly acknowledged narrative styles and motifs to examine alienation. It references the multimedia aspect of the genre through its borrowing of features associated with computer gaming and makes absurd concessions to audience expectations that highlight major features of the genre. Such a film would work well in a teaching context on a genre module such as the one described by Craig B. Jacobsen in “Teaching the Zombie Renaissance” (*SFRA Review* 288: 6–7). In a sense Columbus’s rules are the rules of the genre, and his epiphany and final rule is that rules are meant to be broken. Does *Zombieland* break rules? It does so strategically by playing with audience expectations.

## *Planet 51* [film]

Amy J. Ransom

*Planet 51*. Dir. Jorge Blanco and Javier Abad. Perf. Dwayne Johnson, Gary Oldman, John Cleese. Ilion Animation/HandMade Films, 2009.

Yet another animated feature involving the tropes of science fiction hit the big screen last fall. First there was *Space Chimps* (2008), then *Monsters vs. Aliens in 3D* (2009), and now *Planet 51*, animated in Spain, written by the scenarist of *Shrek* and voiced by such diverse talents as Dwayne (the Rock) Johnson, Gary Oldman and John Cleese. While this new addition to what appears to be a trend plays heavily on the tropes of SF cinema, it adds a new twist: the aliens are us! Astronaut-celebrity Captain Chuck Baker lands on “Planet 51,” a supposedly uninhabited world of rocks, only to discover a fully developed society which closely resembles the American 1950s and whose little green men and women speak English (at least on American screens, that is). While the role reversal (invader-invaded) allows for some superficial enlightenment to occur, the queer—in both senses of the word—subtext involving man hugs and anal probes, either undermines the tale’s message of acceptance, or it offers a lovely little subversive touch. I’m just not sure which.

The story is told largely from the perspective of its main character, Lem, who shares little in common with his ostensible namesake, the author of *Solaris*, apart from his love of astronomy. The inhabitants of Glipforg, unfortunately, have very limited knowledge of the universe, largely because their government has kept all evidence of extra-glipforgian contact a deep secret, at the underground Area 9 desert complex. Lem’s plans for a nice, quiet life after high school are shattered when he discovers a real alien hiding in the planetarium, Captain Baker. As Lem learns to take risks and Baker learns to drop his preconceptions about nonhuman life forms, the film ostensibly offers a lesson in cultural relativism and mutual tolerance. Its satirization of 1950s conservatism and Cold War fears of the Other allow the film to lampoon the excesses of hysteria and to romp through the history of SF film.

*Planet 51* references, of course, Area 51, but also *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959, dir. Edward Wood, Jr.); its teenagers have gone crazy for a series of films about alien invasion, allowing the very self-referential sequence in which Lem smuggles Chuck through town during an alien invasion costume contest. The over-the-top caricature of General Grawl, in charge of Area 9 and leading the efforts to contain the “invasion,” goes beyond Stanley Kubrick’s wildest satirical dreams for General Turgidson in *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). Grawl (Gary Oldman) is drawn all in masculine angles, handsome by human standards even with green skin, antennae, and no nose. Similarly, Baker (Dwayne Johnson) reflects the astronaut as both hero and sex-object stereotype; indeed, the animated character appears as a highly fetishizable object of the gaze in a brief nude scene. The juxtaposition of these two male objects of desire offers the possibility of a tantalizingly subversive queer attraction. The several scenes which place them in close physical proximity invite slash fantasies, while at the same time perhaps suggesting perhaps the homoeroticism of traditionally all-male institutions like the military and NASA. At the same time, any possible suggestion of the text’s acceptance of homosexuality appears rejected by a number of references to yet another cliché of alien-human contact: the anal probe. Lem’s friend Skiff, who works in a comic book store and is—rightly, of course—convinced of the government conspiracy to hide knowledge of UFOs from the people, offers his friend a prophylactic cork as protection (a motif which recurs later in the film). At the film’s closing, when Lem has convinced

his people of the human’s nonaggressive intentions and Chuck is allowed to board his spacecraft home, the two friends embrace warmly. When Chuck glimpses Lem’s girlfriend, Neera, he then abruptly steps away, stressing the awkward moment, making clear that “man-hugs” are accepted practice on Earth. This bizarre renunciation of real, authentic contact with the Other, the cheap joke playing on fear of “looking gay,” frankly, made me uncomfortable.

Perhaps because of its openness to such ambivalent readings, the text has a certain pedagogical interest. Like the other films that I’ve reviewed in these pages, their satirical treatment of U.S. society of the 1950s which gave birth to the SF film craze, its self-referentiality and parody of the genre, and its reversal of some of its key tropes might make it useful to teach those very tropes. On the one hand, I gotta like a film that can take the Aliens franchise monster and turn it into the Glipforgian equivalent of a obnoxiously eager puppy, but on the other—as usual—I am disappointed in the superficial treatment *Planet 51* gives to reversing the attitudes of prejudice and Othering that it ostensibly seeks to critique.

## *Astro Boy* [film]

### De Witt Douglas Kilgore

*Astro Boy*. Dir. David Bowers. Perf. (voices). Nicolas Cage, Kristen Bell, Charlize Theron, Samuel L. Jackson. Imagi Studios and Tezuka Productions, 2009.

If you are a certain age, you may remember that Japanese animation (anime) is no late arrival to America. In the 1960s it followed *Godzilla* (Ishiro Honda, 1954) as a significant export from Japan’s blossoming postwar culture industry. Independent television stations such as KPLR in St. Louis leavened their children’s programming with the live-action and animated shows that were created for Japanese kids. Thus, *Speed Racer* (*Mach Go Go Go!*), *Johnny Sokko and His Flying Robot* (*Jianto Robo*), *8th Man* (*8man*), *Gigantor* (*Tetsujin 28-go*), *Ultraman*, and *Astro Boy* (*Tetsuwan Atom*) where imported into American popular culture. That these old programs are being recalled and adapted into prestige forms is the result both of generational change and the increasing sophistication and power of the animation tools available to filmmakers.

The translation of *Astro Boy* to the big screen is evidence of the boy robot’s enduring presence on the world stage. Since the creation of the original manga by Osamu Tezuka in 1952, *Astro Boy* has been adapted for television four times (one live-action and three animated series). The original manga series lasted for eighteen years and other comics have appeared from time to time. Figurines of the show’s various characters can be found in toyshops on most if not all of the inhabited continents (I have one bought in China). So, this production stands in the shadow of a major cultural and commercial phenomenon. Unfortunately, despite the care and money displayed on-screen, this film does not live up to the expectations raised by its pedigree.

In line with other big screen comics adaptations, *Astro Boy* delivers an origin story designed to bring a general audience up to speed. If you missed that a brilliant but neglectful father built

Astro in the image of his dead son, you get the picture. If you wonder whether an artificial boy (no matter how talented and endearing) can replace the flesh and blood original, this film leaves us in no doubt where our sympathies should lie. You will see the father's Frankenstein-like rejection of his robot son drive the hero's personal journey after he falls into an underworld, gains a group of helpful friends and defeats a nasty Fagin-like character, liberating robots and human children alike from exploitation. Astro returns to Metro City in time to save it from its power-mad leader, proving himself, winning his father's devotion. All is resolved when the father discovers that robots are people, too, and Astro blasts off to defend the city from a new menace with his blessing. By the end of the film, visual evidence to the contrary, you will not believe that a boy can fly.

This film disappoints with its pat formulation of the story that made its original great. The twentieth-century *Astro Boys* entertain by engaging their audiences from within the social and political struggles of their time, particularly those around civil and human rights. In the Tezuka original and its televisual adaptations, these movements are metaphorized through an extrapolation in which the sentient robots stand in for the subaltern and disenfranchised. The super-powered Astro gains prominence as the most significant champion against human prejudice, the exploitative desire to create a laboring class that can be disciplined and discarded at need. This is not the stuff normally associated with children's television but is certainly in line with the generally liberal hopes that marked certain strands of free world culture. This ethos, the narrative backbone of Tezuka's creation, is acknowledged but undercut by the broadly drawn Robot Liberation Front (voiced in working-class British accents) and by the scenario's perfunctory application of love interest, bone-headed villainy, and "correct" family values to its action set pieces. The social science fiction produced by Tezuka's creative imagination is trumped by the film's reduction of his futurism to "a journey in search of acceptance" ([www.astroboy-themovie.com](http://www.astroboy-themovie.com)). The result is a mediocre commodity that seeks not to answer the questions raised by its source.

But I will say something about what makes this movie worth seeing. The visual design and movement produced by Imagi Animation of Hong Kong is immaculate. The lighting and coloring of interiors and exteriors dramatizes the narrative by creating atmosphere and scale. The fine details of clothing and hair, the physics of weight and volume, the mechanics of movement, the choreography of bodies in space are smoothly handled. The fantastic elements of the scenario such as Astro's design and the cloud-based Metro City are handled in a manner that enables us to suspend disbelief. Imagi seeks the kind of artistic sophistication that has made Pixar Animation a commercial and critical success. Unfortunately, *Astro Boy* demonstrates that they have not replicated the latter's facility with integrating the visual and dramatic elements of cinematic narrative.

In an online age, watching a film is no longer a simple matter of going to a theater. *Astro Boy's* claim to our attention includes a Web site established to draw our attention to the film and its subsequent release on DVD. While the site is well designed, it is not as information rich as some. It lacks any account of the film's production staff or the behind the scenes "making of" material that is the joy of the true science fiction cinema geek. However, it does provide a "timeline" sketching the boy robot's six-decade

history, hinting at his importance as a cultural property. Thus, we are allowed a glimpse beyond the current commodity into the moral universe Tezuka created in response to his times. For those of us interested in tracing the social hopes that live at the intersection of technoscientific speculation and society, this makes the film interesting if not enjoyable.

This reviewer's prescription is to read Tezuka's original manga and to view the recent television series (from the 1980s and early 2000s). Both shows are more original and accomplished than their big screen successor. Until a successful motion picture adaptation arrives, the *Mighty Atom* is perhaps best viewed as television.

## *Surrogates* [film]

Ritch Calvin

*Surrogates*. Dir. Jonathan Mostow. Perf. Bruce Willis, Radha Mitchell, Rosamund Pike, James Cromwell, and Ving Rhames. Touchstone Pictures, 2009.

I began watching *Surrogates*, the 2009 Bruce Willis vehicle, with some reservations. The trailers were unconvincing, and they lead me to believe that the center of the film would be the chase scenes and dramatic explosions. However, upon other occasions, the trailers have been misleading about the actual narrative focus. Still, it did seem to hold some potential regarding the question of what it means to be human, so why not?

The film is based on a 2006 graphic novel of the same name, written by Robert Venditti and Brett Weldele. The movie is set in a not-too-far-distant future (2017 in the film; 2054 in the graphic novel). In this future, the vast majority of individuals never leave their houses. Instead, they inhabit a robotic "surrogate," an android that looks like them and serves as a proxy. Individuals lie in a recumbent chair in the comfort and safety of their own homes, and the surrogates go to work, go shopping, or go out dancing. From the very beginning of the film, we are provided with a condensed history of the technological innovations that lead to the surrogate technology. Extrapolating from current experiments, the synopsis states the "14 years ago," a technique was designed that allowed an individual to move an arm merely by thinking about it. (See an article about "The Science of *Surrogates*" on the blog *Cosmic Log*.) The computer interface reads the electrical currents across the synapses, and the arm moves. As the technology progressed, it was hailed as a breakthrough for those individuals confined to wheelchairs or suffering from debilitating diseases. The primary force behind the surrogates is Virtual Self Industries (VSI), the motto of which is "Life. Only Better" (shades of "more human than human" in *Blade Runner*). Of course, technology isn't always used as it's designed. Instead, the surrogates are used by able-bodied individuals who either fear leaving their homes (and the marketing strategy of VSI makes this the primary selling point) or prefer to look younger and fitter than they once did.

Of course, the trajectory from rudimentary, experimental technology to global implementation of surrogates in the span of fourteen years is more than a tad unbelievable. Perhaps even less believable is the argument that the widespread use of sur-

rogates has produced a dramatic drop in crime and the near total elimination of sex- and race-based crimes. Although I'm not sure which is less likely—the speed at which the decrease took place, or that it eliminated crime altogether. Nevertheless, a little willful suspension of disbelief never hurt anyone...

The narrative centers around three primary characters: Tom Greer (Bruce Willis), Maggie [Greer] (Rosamund Pike), and Canter (James Cromwell). Two oddities here: Tom Greer seems to be the only character in the film with both a given and a surname. Everyone else is referenced only by first name or by last name. Secondly, despite second billing, Radha Mitchell portrays Greer's FBI partner, Peters, though she really seems like a secondary character. Years prior, Tom and Maggie Greer lost their son in a car accident. They had chosen not to use a surrogate for their son, and now he is dead, and they live with enormous guilt for that. Tom shuffles lifelessly through his job at the FBI; Maggie hides behind the beautiful, happy façade of her surrogate and parties with other shallow friends. She resists any and all attempts by Tom to reconnect in the flesh.

The film also features a lot of chase scenes, shoot-outs, convoluted plots, and general skullduggery; I leave that to you to discover. From my perspective, the real center of the film is the ethical and existential question of what it means to be human, and, in large part, being human involves experiencing, and living through death, grief, and loss. Unfortunately, the film focuses too little time and attention to this aspect of the narrative. We see that Greer is miserable, but only in glimpses. We see that Maggie is miserable, but in even smaller glimpses. We see that Canter is miserable, first because he is confined to a wheelchair, second because he is forced out of the company he created, third because his surrogate invention has been "perverted," and fourth because his son is killed when he was, in fact, the intended target. However, because the film focuses so much time upon the intrigue, it is compelled to keep much of this information about Canter from the viewer until the end.

Near the end of the film, when Canter and Greer face off, Canter gives an impassioned speech about the experience of being human, in which he argues that it cannot be mediated through a machine. Although Canter is about to commit a heinous crime, and although Greer fundamentally agrees with him about the perversion of the human experience, Greer is still an FBI agent. What to do? What to do? Press "Yes" to abort. Press "No" to continue. Can the cat be put back in the bag? Can Pandora undo her deed? And what of that pesky thing called hope?

Of course, this sort of technology and these sorts of questions are not particularly new within SF. Watching this film, I was reminded of a number of previous works, among them the (vastly underrated) *Synthajoy* (1968) by D. G. Compton and "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" (1973) by James Tiptree, Jr. Certainly many of the cyberpunk texts employ similar technologies and ask similar questions. Of cyberpunk, Chris Moriarity writes that "technology shapes humans every bit as profoundly as humans shape technology." While Moriarity writes specifically of cyberpunk, I would suggest that the same holds true for science fiction in general. And, despite the computer-generated effects and physics-defying leaps across moving vehicles, this fundamental thesis is at the center of this film, as well. The surrogate technology has profoundly shaped all of society, and it has profoundly

shaped the lives of these three individuals. Would that that had been the true focus of the film.

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## *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* [TV series]

Greg Conley

*The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*. Dir. Tatsuya Ishigawa. Bandai Entertainment, 2007.

Mixing peanut butter and chocolate was a pretty good idea, right? What if someone did the same thing with two wildly different traditions of popular entertainment? That's one of the key ideas underpinning *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, an anime that combines SF with what we might call "high school (romantic?) comedy." Its first season ran fourteen episodes, adapting parts of three different YA novels by Nagaru Tanigawa.

The premise is that Haruhi is some kind of super(wo)man figure, transforming the world at will—but she doesn't know she does it. Theories are thrown around all through the show, with a faction of telepaths believing she's God and our world is her dream. The aliens think she's the next step in evolution. Kyon, the protagonist, is caught between all these groups as Haruhi tries to make life more interesting than the mundane, never noticing that she subconsciously does so. Over the course of the first season she turns someone into a giant bug, makes laser beams come out of someone's eyes, and nearly destroys the world. Apparently the solution is just to keep her happy, which falls to Kyon, the only person more irritated by her than intimidated.

The concepts aren't new, on their own, but the strength of *Haruhi* is its skillful combination of traditional SF tropes, like time travel, super-powers, and the relationship of humans to gods, with a high school comedy plot. The events that put the world at risk are the success of Haruhi's amateur film, her repressed interest in Kyon, and whether or not she wins a baseball game. Banal, but they save the world. This off-beat combination examines its own SF tropes.

*Haruhi* is conscious of its SF predecessors. Tanigawa appears to have borrowed Chardin's ideas of a human evolving to Godhead from the work of Dan Simmons. The alien, Yuki, reads the Hyperion Cantos over the course of the series. *Haruhi* is an exploration of the human side of the Godhead question—what would it mean for a human, some average person, to be the evolutionary step between us and godlike power? Haruhi is so powerful that omniscient aliens want her ability, and she disrupts space-time so badly that future time travelers can't go back further than Haruhi's awakening. The telepaths think the

## Defying Gravity [TV series]

Jen Gunnels

*Defying Gravity: Season One.* Creator. James Parriot. Dir. David Straiton and Peter Howitt. Prod. Ron Livingston, Malik Yoba, Laura Harris, Eyal Podell, Christina Cox, Peter Howitt. ABC, 2009.

universe might not have existed until she willed it, and all our memories are necessary components implanted in us. Well, can we argue with such an idea? Kyon, our everyman protagonist, rarely tries. He carries the thrust of the series: that Haruhi is still human, that her feelings and hopes are more important than her abilities. Taken apart and dissected, *Haruhi* isn't too outside the realms of traditional SF but the examination of the ideas from the ground—from Kyon, who knows enough to keep up but isn't interested in being the companion of God—allows the audience to examine the impact of all the SF ideas we usually get from the top down, with a friendly scientist explaining. The conclusion that they don't matter so much is a little odd, but in keeping with the traditions of the anime comedy.

I've already pointed out some of the ways *Haruhi* serves as an examination of SF tropes, not parodying them but starting them from a different point of view, like a simulation run from different angles. Haruhi also figures as a kind of cipher; each group lays their own interpretation on her behavior and powers (similar, we might say, to any divine entity). Kyon's task is to reintegrate the person from the viewpoints.

The form of the show also makes for a fascinating study. The first season was aired entirely out of order, with the final chronological episode placed in the middle of the series (if you decide to check the show out, watch them in the original aired order, found on the bonus disks in the Bandai release). The show acts like a puzzle box, reflecting in the shape of the show Kyon's task of assembling from disparate views an idea of who Haruhi really is, and in turn what the world she shapes means.

The show is a little long to use in any context other than a really dedicated class, but if one were to venture it, the show serves as an excellent way to approach SF concepts that might be difficult to penetrate in "harder" shows, movies, or books. The series slowly introduces its SF elements, interspersing them with humor and snark. Kyon is a very self-aware—and genre-aware—narrator/protagonist. In the second season (already released in Japan and probably on its way to America, though no date has been announced at this time), Kyon frequently compares hard work to fights and trials in popular SF, such as the latest Gundam series. It would serve as an interesting counterpoint to the Hyperion Cantos, providing a radically different view on the same evolutionary-godhead concept.

I've avoided it so far, but I would be remiss if I didn't deal with its effect on the fan base at least a bit. *Haruhi* was wildly popular, both in Japan and America, among *otaku* (those with an intense interest in manga and anime). The second season has hurt the goodwill of the fans a bit—the so-called Endless Eight fiasco centered on eight episodes dealing with a time-loop, another classic SF trope. All eight episodes are nearly the same, though each episode features brand-new animation and voice acting. An upcoming series promises to adapt the fourth, very popular novel and provide new material. In certain classes it's a very real possibility that the students will already recognize *Haruhi*. To *otaku* it's as well-known as *Star Wars* or *The Matrix*, but it's likely unknown to folks who aren't *otaku*. *Haruhi Suzumiya* is about examining SF tropes through a new lens rather than introducing new ideas. And it's funny to boot.

I'm peeved. Network television did it again. First they tease with what looked like a SF pilot with potential. And the pilot for *Defying Gravity* did have potential. The characters intrigued, the story wasn't about explosions or time loops, and it sported a mysterious alien with its own agenda. Then *wham*, just as it got interesting, ABC dropped it, leaving the remaining episodes unaired. Without the kindness of the Internet community, I would not have been able to watch the rest. Yes, peeved is the polite way to put it.

Based on the BBC program *Space Odyssey: Voyage to the Planets* (2004), released as *Voyage to the Planets and Beyond* in the United States, *Defying Gravity* follows the eight astronauts, four men and four women, of the International Space Organization (ISO) spacecraft *Antares* on a six-year mission to the planets of our solar system. The narrative also includes the men and women at mission control, and tucked away in pod four of the *Antares*, the ambiguous alien presence of Beta. Viewers may recognize Ron Livingston, of *Office Space*, playing chief engineer Maddux Donner. Other actors include Malik Yoba (Ted Shaw), Laura Harris (Zoe Barnes), Zahf Paroo (Ajay Sharma), and Karen Leblanc (Eve Weller-Shaw) to name merely a few of the large ensemble cast.

Pitched to the network as *Gray's Anatomy* in space, the story follows a typical soap opera format. The multiple narratives alternate between the present year of 2052 and flashbacks to the five-year training period prior to mission launch, revealing complicated relationships between characters as well as their troubled individual pasts. Because of this, *Defying Gravity* shares commonality with a lineage of science fiction films and novels such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *2010: The Year We Make Contact* (1984), *Mission to Mars* (2000), and *Solaris* (Stanislaw Lem's novel, not that George Clooney film of 2002). A group of astronauts are sent on a mission to a given planet. They may or may not know the true nature of said mission. In the process of reaching their objective, or upon arrival, they meet with a series of inexplicable circumstances. In the end they discover aliens, good or bad, at the center of events and make contact. *Defying Gravity* finds the most commonality with *Solaris*. Beta acts as a mysterious driving force behind the mission and only communicates through images dredged from the minds of the individuals to whom it "speaks." All of these memories deal with momentous and regretted decisions in the characters' pasts. Donner attempts to deal with leaving two crew members to die—one being his lover—on a past mission to Mars. Former combat surgeon and medical officer, Evram Minsk, mistakenly called in an air strike on a school filled with children, and Beta plagues him with the face of the girl he watched die in the wreckage. Zoe Barnes hears the cries of the baby she aborted. However, initially far more time is spent on the soap opera relationships between the characters and individual pasts than in exploring space or the

alien, Beta, in pod four of the *Antares*. As the season continued, what seemed like superfluous information at the time begins to tie back into the Beta's presence on Earth.

*Defying Gravity* also shares elements with more reality-based, science-based films such as *The Right Stuff* (1983), *Apollo 13* (1995), and *From the Earth to the Moon* (1998). The series' narrative includes both the crew and mission control personnel in addition to covering candidate training via flashbacks. The series departs from these in not depicting a warm, fuzzy, and supportive mission control. Here mission directors are callous, cold and deliberately keep crucial information from the crew. In addition candidates who did not make the cut for the crew act as mission control, dealing with their own failure while supporting the candidates selected to crew the mission. One of these, Ajay, removed from the mission at the last moment, offers a compelling examination of how he deals with this, to him, complete life's failure.

Putting the overwrought soap opera elements aside, what makes *Defying Gravity* different from other exploration-type SF television is its focus on very normal people, with very deep flaws. This isn't the noble heroism of *Star Trek* or the dystopic, edgy characters of *Battlestar Galactica* who battle for survival of, for them, the human race. The astronauts of *Antares* and mission control are pretty regular people who have had to make awful decisions. Unfortunately some of the incidents are explored in an overwritten and often stereotypical manner.

The show had the opportunity to depict men and women independent of both sexuality and career. In a way, it half-heartedly attempted to do so, but eventually fell back to more clichéd representations. The heavy-handed and fairly outdated depiction of male/female relationships, more specifically the handling of female characters, ignores past SF that pushed the boundaries on these topics. The driving force behind the story arcs for the female characters rely on stereotypical female roles—wife, mother, career woman, sex object. Certainly the weirdest character action, the biologist, Jen Crane (Cristina Cox), allows one of her experimental rabbit fetuses to come to term, despite experiment protocols, because she's going to feel lonely. It seems far-fetched that she cannot have a nurturing nonsexual relationship with any of the other seven people on board. The series also includes a very heavy-handed treatment of abortion, leaving the viewer with the uncomfortable feeling that women in the future never interrogate their positions.

Conversely, the men have a broader, more vulnerable and less stereotypical depiction which does not define them in terms of careers or sexuality. Donner and Minsk are deeply introspective and question their actions as *human beings* rather than men. There are, however, two exceptions. One, Ajay Sharma exudes a Zen-like demeanor, offering comfort and support to the others, often viewed as feminine attributes. As Other, Ajay is already feminized. The second exception, Steve Wassenfelder (Dylan Taylor), the physicist, represents the worst of the stereotypical science geek. He's hopelessly out of shape, rude, ungroomed, and shows more interest in videogames and pornography than in physics.

When addressing the actual science, the viewer again meets a level of inconsistency. For instance, blood is shown as floating globules without the presence of gravity, but the crew does not, as explained in the pilot, because of nanotechnology built into

the flight suits. But why doesn't anyone's hair float? How mission control maintains instantaneous real-time communication with *Antares* is never explained. In a concession to the reality of space travel, one episode does illustrate the danger of radiation when a solar flare forces the crew to shut down the ship and wait it out in a small radiation shelter.

The final episodes to air in the US, "Fear" and "Love, Honor, and Obey," returned to SF resulting in the best two episodes. "Fear" draws on the argument that has existed between scientists and NASA since Apollo 11. Science takes a backseat to the mission needs, and this bears on both funding and mission objectives. This episode posits a dependence on corporate funding with stipulations that the astronauts must advertise a candy bar in an EVA "stunt" for Halloween. Beta-induced hallucinations incapacitate the crew and scrub the mission. The corporation demands the return of their three billion dollar investment as the crew laments the loss of science funding. "Love, Honor, and Obey" explores the brutal training for obeying orders, highlighting that mission objectives take precedence over lives and that there is no room for human error. The action leads up to a schism between the crew and mission control and first contact with Beta. In "Eve Ate the Apple" and "Déjà vu," we return to the question of Beta and the real nature of the *Antares* mission, in which it collects more objects/beings (which is unclear) from each planet. Donner and Zoe land on Venus after atmospheric turbulence has forced them well off the designated landing site in the final episode, "Kiss." The season ends with Zoe being guided by a baby's cries to the next alien. But they are too far off the objective for her to retrieve it, and the episode ends with Zoe walking off onto the Venusian landscape against the direct order of the *Antares* crew and mission control.

While there are distinct problems with the show, I did find myself drawn to some characters, and wading through the emotionally over-written scripts, often rescued by the under-acting of the cast, gradually pays off. However, the soap opera elements and slow pacing to the character and plot reveals might put off some viewers. The show intrigues enough to hope for a second season where, now that the character and situation background has been addressed, scriptwriters could focus on the more SF centered aspects of the story. ABC has no plans to renew the series, but since the show is produced by a Canadian company, a Canadian station may possibly renew the series for a second season.

## Warehouse 13 [TV series]

Sharon Sharp and Patrick B. Sharp

*Warehouse 13: Season 1*. Creators Jane Espenson, Brent Mote. Prod. Jack Kenny, David Simkins. Perf. Eddie McClintock, Joanne Kelly, Saul Rubinek, Genelle Williams, Simon Reynolds, CCH Pounder, Allison Scagliotti, Roger Rees. SyFy, 2009.

*Warehouse 13* is a new, basic cable series on SyFy that incorporates generic structures and plot elements of SF and fantasy that will be familiar to those who have seen *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Ghostbusters*, and *The X-Files*. The lead characters are two secret service agents, Myka Bering (Kelly) and Pete Lat-

timer (McClintock), who are reassigned to a secret government installation in the middle of the badlands of South Dakota called Warehouse 13. Myka is an uptight, detail-oriented, by-the-book badass haunted by an assignment where her lover was killed. Pete is an intuitive, irreverent, seat-of-his-pants improviser with a penchant for the ladies. Forced together by the mysterious Warehouse supervisor Mrs. Frederic (Pounder), the oddball partners engage in the investigation of the paranormal much like Agents Mulder and Scully of *The X-Files*. However, instead of trying to uncover the Truth of a secret government conspiracy, Myka and Pete are the government agents charged (like *Ghostbusters*) with capturing and burying supernatural threats in the *Raiders*-like Warehouse 13. In spite of the well-worn aspects of the show, the quality writing and acting make it a humorous and engaging SF exploration of science and gender.

The mise-en-scène of *Warehouse 13* draws heavily from steampunk's fascination with Victorian-era gadgets and inventors, interweaving them with modern technologies and paranormal activities. Part of the pleasure of the series is the main setting: the Warehouse, designed by "Thomas Edison, Nikola Tesla, and M. C. Escher," houses dark objects from various historical periods. Several of the episodes are playfully crafted around such objects as Lewis Carroll's mirror ("Duped"), the father of hypnotherapy Dr. Baird's chair ("Magnetism"), and Edgar Allen Poe's pen ("Nevermore"). Steampunk objects such as the "Farnsworth"—a fictional two-way portable communication device invented by television pioneer Philo Farnsworth—make regular appearances in the narrative of the series. In the pilot, Myka and Pete have to stop a woman who has come under the influence of the "comb thing" of Lucretia Borgia (whom Pete refers to as a "dead Italian cougar"). Guided by their wizard-like Warehouse boss Artie Nielsen (Rubinek), Myka and Pete have to "neutralize" the comb by getting it away from its victims and dropping it in a container of strange, purple goo. Once Myka and Pete capture the dangerous object, it is brought back to the Warehouse, catalogued, and shelved. The Warehouse itself is riddled with archaic electrical grids, large rotating cogs, and antique fixtures that are part of the Warehouse's dampening field.

As a whole, the show presents a narrative of technology working to control supernatural forces that are a danger to the public. Like much SF, a central tenet of the show is that dangerous technologies and supernatural artifacts have to be kept out of the wrong hands. This is exemplified by former Warehouse agent James MacPherson (Roger Rees), a murderous rogue who steals dangerous artifacts to gain wealth and power. However, national entities like the United States government are also seen as unworthy of having the artifacts: though the Warehouse is funded by a highly secret and obscure part of the federal budget, it is overseen by a group of everyday citizen-trustees. Indeed, high-ranking secret service agents know nothing about the Warehouse despite the fact that it is officially a part of their agency. In this sense, the show is critical of both rampant individualism and federal bureaucracies.

The Warehouse technologies that control these supernatural forces are also represented as tenuous: the Warehouse itself is in decay, and the artifacts it contains are always breaking out or acting up in ways that threaten the protagonists. While the show romanticizes the great Victorian era of inventors, their inventions are seen as inadequate and in need of an upgrade in the

face of an ongoing supernatural onslaught. The show often blurs the line between technology and the supernatural, as well, with seemingly supernatural objects given a scientific explanation and some technologies treated as if they have mysterious magical properties.

In addition to drawing on steampunk themes and imagery, *Warehouse 13* uses the tropes of screwball comedy banter in order to reconfigure gender relationships and themes. Myka and Pete clearly pay homage to *The X-Files*' Mulder and Scully: Myka relies on detailed scientific observation and study, whereas Pete is dependent upon his intuitive "vibes." However, in *Warehouse 13* the pairing is not driven by sexual tension and the ultimate formation of the romantic couple. Rather, the series uses the characters to deconstruct dominant understandings of gendered knowledge and behavior in a more sustained and often comedic manner. When Myka's body is taken over by the young Alice from Lewis Carroll's mirror, Pete finally figures it out because, as he says, "The real Myka would never kiss me. Never. Not if her life depended on it." Their relationship is akin to sibling affection, with playful abuse and teasing about possible romantic interests. It is revealed in the episode "Magnetism" that Myka, who is a much better fighter, is always on the verge of punching Pete in the nose (which she does repeatedly with comic effect). This gender troubling is furthered by the Warehouse's resident computer genius/hacker character, Claudia Donovan (Scagliotti), who introduces herself at one point as "Warehouse 13: Next Generation" while giving a Vulcan salute. She is the modern feminist update of the older Artie, with whom she wages an ongoing battle to upgrade the technologies of the Warehouse.

The twelve-episode first season of the show was good enough for SyFy to pick it up for a second season. The season finale promises that the upcoming season will continue to explore themes of science, technology and gender. *Warehouse 13* is a useful source for SF scholars interested in recent iterations of the steampunk subgenre on television as well as SF and gender more generally. The engaging and accessible series would be a productive text for classroom discussions related to genre, technology and gender. It's also just a fun show to watch, and is clearly a step above much of SyFy's bland, formula-driven original programming.

## *The Book of Genesis Illustrated* [graphic novel]

Dominick Grace

R. Crumb. *The Book of Genesis Illustrated*. New York: Norton, 2009.

Robert Crumb was not the first underground cartoonist, but he is arguably the best-known and most influential, famous or notorious, depending on one's taste, for the relish with which he demolishes taboos in his comics. His work is sexually graphic, and violent (both sexually and otherwise), as it plumbs the depths of a psyche he would be the first to admit has issues, especially with women, but also with authority and organized religion (raised Catholic, Crumb is an avowed atheist). On first blush, then, it may seem surprising that his latest work, the lon-

gest and most sustained work of his career (five years of work to produce a book of over 200 pages—hitherto, he has limited himself to considerably shorter forms, rarely longer than 20 pages) should be a graphic adaptation of the Book of Genesis. However, anyone who has read Genesis might not be so surprised that there are some significant affinities between Crumb and this founding religious text.

Genesis *in toto*, as written, rather than as often transmitted in adaptations or as excerpted, is a text rife with human depravity. Duplicity, betrayal, theft, enslavement (even of one's own kin!) adultery, incest, rape, murder, and mass slaughter, occur with depressing frequency. It's not surprising, therefore, that this biblical adaptation includes on its cover a warning: "Adult supervision recommended for minors." In fact, Crumb is, by his usual standards, restrained here. While numerous opportunities present themselves for cringe-inducing graphic depictions (and Crumb no doubt intended the double-edged implications of another cover blurb promising "The first book of the Bible graphically depicted!") of sex and violence, Crumb keeps his version of Genesis R-rated rather than X. Yes, there is nudity, both male and female, and unambiguous depictions of sex, and several instances of explicit violence, but Crumb balances clear depictions of the frequently... earthy elements of Genesis with a degree of restraint unlikely to satisfy those who enjoy his more extreme work while also failing to satisfy those who genuinely reverence the Bible, since Crumb does not glide over the darker elements of the narratives.

Crumb's Genesis succeeds insofar as such a Quixotic endeavor could succeed. *All of Genesis* (including "the 'begots,'" as the list of contents on the back cover promises)? Illustrated by the most notorious underground cartoonist? The limitations of Genesis limit the success of the adaptation, since Crumb has chosen to make extremely few changes to the text (he uses the King James and Robert Alter translations as his sources). Consequently, the structural confusions of Genesis, its repetitions, narrative loops, tedious genealogies, and so on, all survive here. Significant chunks of Genesis do not lend themselves well to graphic adaptation, but Crumb soldiers on through them (he must be admired for the attention to detail evident in his creation of distinctive faces for the numerous progeny only ever mentioned in the genealogies).

On the other hand, Genesis includes several compelling narratives, and Crumb's graphic skills stand him in good stead when dealing with, for instance, Noah and the Ark, or Jacob's deception of Isaac, or the son-producing contest between Rachel and Leah (Crumb speculates in his notes that perhaps this section was intended originally as a kind of comedy, but refrains from depicting it in comic terms). His determination to reproduce every word of Genesis and not to send it up or impose a reading on it does sometimes work against the strengths of comics as a medium, in that he finds himself from time to time merely depicting what the words are telling us, rather than using the combination of words and pictures on which great comics depend.

Nevertheless, Crumb makes many graphic choices in his depictions that provide compelling food for thought, ranging from his depiction of the prelapsarian serpent as a kind of humanoid, with arms and legs, to the subtle ways he uses facial expression and some of the standard tropes of comics to add emotional

resonance to the text. He also occasionally interpolates subtle references to other mythological traditions into his adaptation (it's clear from his introduction and notes that he was influenced by research, notably by Savina Teubal's *Sarah the Priestess*). For instance, his illustration of Genesis 6.4, "They are the heroes of old, the men of renown," apparently depicts Gilgamesh and Enkidu killing Humbaba, but there's nothing much heroic-looking about the two figures ganging up on and stabbing an unarmed hominid. More subtle are the various uses of facial expression, such as the grins of barely concealed delight on the faces of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japeth when God tells them they will hold sway over the Earth, or the tear Sarai cries when Abram sends her to Pharaoh's bed.

It's difficult to read Crumb's version, with his vivid art depicting carefully realized humans engaging in almost mind-boggling acts of corruption and venality—at the direction of a God willing to annihilate entire populations repeatedly (the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah especially is a tremendous example of the subtle irony Crumb can inject into this literal rendition)—without having sober second thoughts about the underpinnings of organized religion. Whether Crumb intended a subtle commentary in his art is open to debate, though his introduction and his notes, as well as his comments elsewhere, make clear that he neither believes literally in Genesis nor views as particularly salutary the stories contained therein. As a literal adaptation of Genesis, *The Book of Genesis Illustrated* can be read, if one does not look too carefully at the pictures, as a faithful representation, and as such it is of moderate interest. It is much more interesting if one reads it, and one can, as a subtle critique/commentary. In this context, it would be a useful text to study in a comparative mythology or history of religion or graphic novel course, perhaps. Its usefulness in a SF or straight fantasy course is more dubious, especially at its price. However, anyone seriously interested in the graphic novel as an art form ought to read this book.

## ***Planetary* [graphic novel]**

Ellen M. Rigsby

*Planetary*. Warren Ellis (w), John Cassaday (p,i). Wildstorm/DC Comics, April 1999–October 2009.

Warren Ellis's graphic novel *Planetary* published its concluding issue on October 7, 2009. There are 27 issues in the series, the unnumbered debut issue appearing in September 1998 issues of *Gen<sup>13</sup>* (#33) and *C-23* (#6). The conclusion of the series is an opportunity for readers unfamiliar with *Planetary* to experience some of the best storytelling in speculative comics. And for those who still think comics must be either literary, as in the example of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, or pulp superhero comics, *Planetary* demonstrates a productive and fascinating kinship between superhero stories and (speculative) science fiction. The graphic side brings a series of reimagined superhero stories, in which the heroes are decoupled from the ideology of the mainstream comic genre. With superheroes drawn anew, *Planetary* redeploys these stories to focus on science just beyond the horizon of discovery. The (somewhat soft) hard science edge

yields meditations on both the wonder that comes from scientific discovery, and the ethical dilemmas often come out of such discovery.

*Planetary* follows the adventures of the organization of that name who are archeologists “mapping the hidden wonders of the world,” (debut issue, 6). There is a field team of four people who search for the mysteries of life, the planet, etc. We enter the overall narrative about two thirds of the way in, to find a new recruit joining the team, and follow the overarching narrative as it is slowly revealed to this recruit. In the debut episode we see the Planetary field team detaining a retired general to ask about the creation of a secret weapons program during the Cold War, headed by a genius, David Paine, who has discovered a kind of temporal physics which would create a bomb out of the structure of the universe itself, one that taps into the quanta of possible outcomes to erase the existence of things. Paine inadvertently turns into a monster during the bomb’s first test because he rushes out to the test site to save his lover (who may be trying to suicide because she is pregnant and married to the general). Paine becomes a monster so dangerous that when it is finally contained after destroying the military base, it is kept in a pit for the fifty years it takes it to die. This issue reimagines the Hulk superhero comic narrative with a realistic monster—one that is uncontrollable. One thread makes fairly strong criticisms of the conventional superhero narratives like those in *The Hulk* by examining what kind of power a monster would possess and how the U.S. Army would react in such a situation. At the same time it offers a nuanced vision of a monster story that emphasizes the science of the discovery and the very human pain of loss experienced by its characters. The complexity of the science discovered and discussed throughout the narrative is mirrored in the multi-linear narrative that is not always fully resolved.

*Planetary* both is and is not a superhero comic. It might be said to be a “critical” example of the superhero genre, along with Frank Miller’s *Martha Washington*, *The Dark Night* and *DK2*, or Trina Robbin’s *Wonder Woman: The Once and Future Story*, both of which offer fascinating accounts of their heroes as well as cultural criticism. But *Planetary* also belongs to a subgenre of comics that attempt to unite the various story arcs in the DC or Marvel comic universes, or in all comics. This is a populated subgenre, included in it are a range of works from multiple attempts to unite the variegated narratives of individual superheroes in the Marvel and DC universes, to the best meditation on the history of comic superheroes, Alan Moore’s graphic novel *Watchmen*. *Planetary*’s contribution to this subgenre is the critical exploration of the superhero genre’s attachments to the “good versus evil” plot and a reliance on either overblown patriotism or its opposite, nihilism, to move the plot forward.

The son of a tour guide I met in Greece commented that Warren Ellis’s *Transmetropolitan* was about everything Ellis hated and *Planetary* was about everything he loved. I suspect Ellis himself would disagree with this characterization, but it is nonetheless an apt description of the comparative tones of the two works. Spider Jerusalem, the gonzo journalist antihero of *Transmetropolitan* continually undermines his own attempts to bring justice to the world, and is bitter, self-destructive, and lonely. Elijah Snow, the protagonist of *Planetary*, is allowed to learn from his mistakes, and he does bring a kind of justice to his life—protection of his loved-ones, of the planet, and a com-

mitment to continue his way of life—searching out mysteries to solve. *Planetary*’s tagline, “Keep the world strange,” does not adequately get at the wonder that its stories evoke. *Planetary* manages to capture the majestic possibilities in speculation, making ideas the center of the story. This is its flaw as well—by centering on ideas, its story lacks deeply drawn human characters, which if present, might lead the comic in an even more literary direction. Ellis may be aware of this himself, as he writes into the second to last issue that none of the field team of planetary is really human. Nonetheless, at its best, *Planetary* evokes the wonder at the world that is often claimed to be lost on entry into adulthood, without giving short shift to the complex ethical experience that adult life brings.

## *Mouse Guard: Fall 1152* [graphic novel]

Jordana Hall

*Mouse Guard: 1152*. David Petersen. New York: Villard, 2008.

*Mouse Guard*, written and illustrated by David Petersen, in his first graphic narrative, is an excellent example of an epic form of comic, something not so easily accomplished, and especially in the animal story subgenre of fiction. While I hate to label the novel a children’s story (there is a certain level of psychological violence as Petersen attempts to flesh out his warrior mice characters that not all children could easily accept or understand), the plot and narrative that accompany the sweeping artistic style are more in line with Brian Jacques’s *Redwall* series than *Lord of the Rings* as the front cover blurb suggests.

It is the story of the Mouse Guard, developed in response to a long-distant tyrant that suggests the possibility of a prequel, and maintained to defend the inhabitants of a mouse city, and protect travelers and traders from the dangers of the forest. It is just such an event that launches three heroes on a search to uncover a mysterious plot to overthrow the Mouse Guard and the city it protects from within, revealing an unlikely villain that is intriguing if underdeveloped within the story overall.

As with all comics, Petersen’s success is judged by his combination of elements, story and art. In the case of *Mouse Guard*, the two areas are not equally effective. The art is breathtaking as Petersen manipulates a blend of realism and cartoon to great effect, breathing life into his small warriors. He conveys mood and movement extraordinarily well, and the level of shadow he employs in such a colorful novel is nothing short of amazing. Each page is a work of art that propels the story forward at the same time. It is one of the most aesthetically pleasing comics I have seen in recent years, and would be worth purchasing for nothing more than the extra pinups at the end of the comic for anyone interested in comic art.

The story, however, often falls short as well as the characterization of the mice heroes. It is perhaps more frustrating on the level of characterization in that there are quite often intriguing hints that much more lies beneath the surface, but the story jumps around too often to allow more than superficial development of the many characters he introduces. I would have preferred a more linear tale with greater characterization of say two

or three of the heroes. Instead, we have a story that is somewhat predictable and not one of the comic's assets, at the expense of the psychological characterization that is clearly where Petersen *would* excel should he allow himself the opportunity.

In the case of *Mouse Guard: 1152*, the action of the main plot, mostly episodic but illustrated in such a way as to here suggest a distinction between graphic novel and comic as there are far more single-page illustrations than comic panels, comes at the expense of the overall success of the story. Nonetheless, it is a beautiful comic worthy of note and perhaps a good critical warning for comic creators as to the crucial equilibrium required between story and art to achieve an *excellent* comic. I suspect, however, that Petersen will only get better with time and look forward to his future work.

## *Batman: Arkham Asylum* [video game]

Sean Kennedy

*Batman: Arkham Asylum*. Rocksteady Studios. PS3, August 2009.  
Eidos Interactive, December 2009.

*Batman: Arkham Asylum*, developed by Rocksteady Studios, has essentially become the single most critically acclaimed superhero video game of all time, despite the fact that it's only been on the market for a few months. The game's quality, however, does not depend entirely on its superior gameplay, but rather on its presentation and themes, which are at least, in part, influenced by science fiction. *Arkham Asylum* is primarily based on the *Batman* comics in general, as opposed to any specific comic, series, or film, which allows for a bit more freedom in terms of how the game's story is told. With different themes such as over-reliance on technology, drug-induced hallucinations, and the occasional breaking of the fourth wall, *Arkham Asylum* uses several elements of science fiction to create a very unique and profound experience for the player.

Technology is commonplace throughout *Arkham Asylum*: Batman relies on the latest WayneTech gadgets to outwit and defeat his foes, Arkham Asylum is protected primarily through technology, and it is this reliance on technology that ultimately results in the guards' loss of control of the asylum. Because Harley Quinn is able to get access to the warden's office, she is able to override the security systems of Arkham and use them against the guards and Batman. Such devices include security cameras, door locks, prisoner "suicide collars," and the not-so-humane "patient pacification system," which is essentially a floor designed to electrocute problem inmates (and which is used to "pacify" Batman later). This begs the question of whether the guards are any better than the prisoners, considering they have the same capacity for cruelty. The guards are very confident at the beginning of the game that neither the Joker—nor any other inmate—will be able to escape custody in this top security prison. However, their confidence is misplaced, considering the same devices used to keep them in control are now being used against them; the inmates are now in control because the guards are too dependent upon technology.

Some of the most incredible and engaging portions of the game are those in which Batman is affected by Dr. Crane's (a.k.a. "Scarecrow") hallucinogenic fear toxin. These sections of the game delve deep into the mind of Batman, what drives him, and what his worst fears are. These Scarecrow sequences emphasize a struggle between perception and reality that can commonly be seen in science fiction, such as *The Matrix*, *Blade Runner*, or *Ghost in the Shell*.

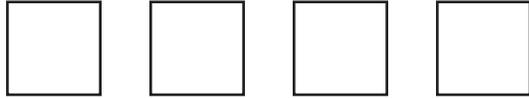
During one such sequence, the player controls Batman as he walks down a previously explored hallway in Arkham, although it is now much longer. As he progresses, the hallway gradually transforms into a dark, rainy alleyway, which turns out to be the same one in which Bruce's parents were killed. Finally Batman himself transforms into an eight-year-old Bruce Wayne, and all the while he hears the voices of his parents and of Jim Gordon, reliving his parents' murder. This process is so gradual that the only telltale sign indicating that the player about to embark on another drug-induced nightmare-like scene is the small cough uttered by Batman before he enters the room. That aside, it takes a while for the player to realize that what they are seeing isn't completely real. Again, we see a struggle between perception and reality, one brought on by a scientific element: a hallucinogenic toxin.

Batman's physical transformations during these scenes speak volumes about his character, even though they only appear in brief flashes. Aside from young Bruce Wayne (a representation of Batman as a victim), Batman, on occasion, transforms into Scarecrow himself (showing that Batman uses fear against others, just like Dr. Crane), comes across snarling, handcuffed versions of himself (representing Batman as a vicious psychopath), and even switches places with the Joker, (representing Batman as the true villain).

This latter scene is where the fourth wall is broken the most, and the player is truly brought into the surrealism of the game. While playing at a certain point, the game appears to crash and reset, shifting back to the game's opening cutscene, in which Batman is normally featured driving the Joker to Arkham Asylum and escorting him inside. However, it is made clear very quickly that this is not a system error when we see the Joker driving the Batmobile, followed by a sequence in which the player controls the Joker, escorting Batman (in shackles) into Arkham, Batman screaming all the way, sounding terrified as he professes his innocence. This surreal hallucination reestablishes the concept that Batman is perhaps so unbalanced, guilty, and similar to other criminals that, perhaps, he himself belongs in Arkham, just like the villains he has worked so hard to stop, all while making the player feel as if they are hallucinating, as well.

*Batman: Arkham Asylum* can be analyzed in a variety of different ways to discover the various science fiction elements within. The Scarecrow portions of the game make the player question what is real and what is purely imagination, not unlike the false memories of the replicants in *Blade Runner* or false perceptions of the Matrix in *The Matrix*. The authority's over-reliance on technology leads to disaster when that technology was turned against it, just as Skynet turned against humanity in the *Terminator* films. This same method can be used in a classroom setting by having students come up with even more comparisons and influences for *Arkham Asylum* (which can be accomplished by showing certain cutscenes or portions of gameplay from the

game), discussing the similarities and differences in how such elements are represented. However, the most profound, engaging, interactive experience can only be accomplished by playing *Batman: Arkham Asylum* firsthand.



## Announcements

### Calls for Papers

#### Call for Papers—Conference

**Title:** SFRA2010 Far Stars and Tin Stars: Science Fiction and the Frontier

**Conference Date:** June 24–27, 2010

**Conference Site:** Carefree Resort and Villas, Carefree, Arizona

**Topic:** The frontier, the borderland between what is known and what is unknown, the settled and the wild, the mapped and the unexplored, is as central to science fiction as it is to the mythology of the American West. The 2010 conference of the Science Fiction Research Association will explore this connection as it appears in science fiction in all media. While preference will be given to proposals that address the conference theme, submissions for papers (20 minutes), full paper panels (3 papers), roundtables and other programming are invited on all aspects of the production, distribution, reception, analysis and teaching of science fiction. Be sure to make all A/V requests within the proposal.

**Due Date:** E-mail submissions by April 30, 2010. Ongoing acceptances will be issued to help presenters plan.

**Contact:** Craig Jacobsen (jacobsen AT mesacc.edu)

**URL:** <http://www.sfra2010.ning.com>

#### Call for Papers—Conference

**Title:** Alternate Construals in Language, Literature, and Culture

**Conference date:** September 17–18, 2010

**Conference site:** Philological School of Higher Education in Wrocław, Poland

**Topic:** By its nature, literature is a form of alternate construal. It deals with imaginative alternatives to the status quo, projecting narrative accounts which in one way or another engage the real and the imagined. Among the many types of alternate construals offered by literature is a refiguring of history also known as the genre(s) of alternate history, alternate universes, allohistories or uchronias. Popular especially in fantasy, science fiction and other genres of speculative fiction, this convention is quite vast. The history which is revisioned may be factual, as is the case in Orson Scott Card's alternate history of 19th century America in the *Tales of Alvin Maker*, or imaginary, as is the case in Donna Jo Napoli's retelling of Rapunzel in her novel *Zel*. It may be history of the past, as is the case in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, of the present, as in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, or of the future, as in Nancy Farmer's *The House of the Scorpion*. The adaptation of a book

to a movie, or any other change of the medium, the retelling of a familiar story from a different perspective, a reconfiguration of gender or power relations which pushes at the boundaries of a given generic convention—all those usually involve a retelling of the original and so are forms of alternate construals. In the literature and cultural studies section of the “Alternate Construals” conference we propose to look at these and other types of alternate construals in novels and films, particularly those addressed to young audience. We are especially interested in proposals examining alternate histories and alternate futures as forms of commentary on the present and the status quo. The conference will consist of keynote speeches and parallel paper sessions. The languages of the conference will be English and Polish.

**Due date:** 400–500-word abstracts by March 31, 2010

**Contact:** Anna Zaslona (conference AT wsf.edu.pl)

**URL:** <http://www.wsf.edu.pl/240804.xml>

#### Call for Papers—Conference

**Title:** Mythcon 41: War in Heaven

**Conference date:** July 9–12, 2010

**Conference site:** Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas

**Topic:** From the great epic poems of ancient Greece and ancient India to the Book of Revelation and the Poetic Edda; from John Milton and William Blake to J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Charles Williams; from Philip Pullman to Neil Gaiman and beyond, theomachy (conflict amongst and against the gods) has been a perennial theme in mythology and mythopoetic literature. Moreover, the year 2010 marks our theme with special significance as the 80th anniversary of the publication of Charles Williams's novel *War in Heaven*. Papers dealing with the conference theme are especially encouraged. We also welcome papers focusing on the work and interests of the Inklings (especially J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Charles Williams), of our Guests of Honor, and other fantasy authors and themes. Papers from a variety of critical perspectives and disciplines are welcome. Each paper will be given a one-hour slot to allow time for questions, but individual papers should be timed for oral presentation in 40 minutes maximum. Participants are encouraged to submit papers chosen for presentation at the conference to *Mythlore*, the refereed journal of the Mythopoetic Society.

**Due date:** 300-word proposals and AV requirements by April 15, 2010

**Contact:** Robin Anne Reid (Robin\_Reid AT tamu-commerce.edu or rred13 AT yahoo.com)

**URL:** <http://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/41/>

#### Call for Papers—Books

**Title:** Arthurian-Themed Comics Collection

**Topic:** A collection of essays on comics (comic strips, comic books, graphic novels, Web comics, and adaptations into other media) based on or inspired by the Arthurian tradition, edited by Michael A Torregrossa and Jason Tondro.

**Due date:** 200–500-word proposals; first round closed January 30, 2010, but second round follows

**Contact:** Michael A Torregrossa (Arthur.of.the.Comics AT gmail.com)

**URL:** <http://Arthur.of.the.Comics.blogspot.com/>

## Call for Papers—Conference

**Title:** International Conference in Literature and Psychology

**Conference date:** June 23–28, 2010

**Conference site:** University of Pécs, Pécs, Hungary

**Topic:** We welcome papers in English on literature and psychology or film, art, or music and psychology, with psychology broadly conceived to include psychoanalysis, Lacanian, feminist psychological approaches, Jungian psychology, object relations theory, trauma studies, cognitive theory, and neuropsychology. Papers on science fiction or fantasy film are welcome.

**Due date:** Strict 150-word limit for proposal; submissions via conference Web site by April 1, 2010

**URL:** <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipsa/2010/index.html>

## Call for Papers—Conference

**Title:** Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Legend Area of the Northeast Popular Culture/American Culture Association (NEPCA)

**Conference date:** October 23, 2010

**Conference site:** Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Services (179 Longwood Ave, Boston, MA 02115)

**Topic:** Proposals are invited from scholars of all levels for papers that address any aspect of the multimedia genres of science fiction, fantasy, and/or legends in popular culture. Given the proximity to Halloween, we are especially interested in proposals devoted to the topic “Monstrous Medievalisms: Investigations of the Medieval in Gothic and Horror Narratives” for a session “Monstrous Medievalisms 2010” to be sponsored by the Society for the Study of Popular Culture and the Middle Ages.

**Due date:** June 1, 2010

**Contact:** David E. Tanner (david.tanner AT mcphs.edu) and Michael A. Torregrossa (Popular.Culture.and.the.Middle.Ages AT gmail.com)

**URL:** <http://users.wpi.edu/~jphanlan/NEPCA.html>

## Call for Papers—Conference

**Title:** Pulp Fiction and the Environment (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) panel at MLA

**Conference date:** January 6–9, 2011

**Conference site:** Los Angeles, California

**Topic:** Proposals are invited for presentations that examine works of pulp fiction—e.g., fantasy, science fiction, westerns, mysteries, thrillers, romance novels—for their environmental and/or ecological significance. What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of pulp fiction as a medium? What is the relationship between green pulp fiction and more traditional environmental literature (such as H. D. Thoreau’s *Walden*)? How does green pulp fiction complicate or enrich what it means to practice ecocriticism? Paper proposals may address any or a combination of these questions.

**Due date:** 300-word abstracts by March 7, 2010

**Contact:** Scott Knickerbocker (sknickerbocker AT collegeofidaho.edu)

## Call for Papers—Book

**Title:** *The Prisoner* and Philosophy: It Takes a Village (Open Court)

**Topic:** This edited collection examines the new series of *The Prisoner* (2009) and the original. Both instantiations of the story raise important philosophical issues and act as touchstones in current debates. We therefore seek work from scholars who work in many fields, including, but not exclusively, philosophy, English, theology, political science, psychology, and film and television studies. Rachel Ray, writing in *The Telegraph*, claims the new series is better than the original, and asks the fundamental question, “Are you part of the solution, or the problem?” Regardless of the relative merits or values of the two versions, the new one is clearly working on building a “thicker” mythos, as well as most likely reaching a much larger audience. Comparison between old and new will therefore be especially relevant.

**Due date:** 250-word abstract and 50-word bio to both editors by March 1, 2010

**Contact:** Jason Lee (j.lee AT derby.ac.uk) and Kim Paffenroth (kimpaffenroth AT msn.com)

**URL:** <http://thepriisonerandphilosophy.blogspot.com/>

## Call for Papers—Journal

**Title:** *Iowa Journal of Communication*, special issue on Games and Culture: Asia-Pacific Perspectives

**Topic:** In this special issue to be published in September 2010, we seek to exchange our scholarship on the politics of game play and its associated cultural context by focusing on the burgeoning Asia-Pacific region. Harboring global gaming production and consumption sites such as China, Korea, and the U.S., the region provides a wealth of divergent examples of the role of gaming as a sociocultural phenomenon. Welcoming a range of presentations, from micro ethnographic studies to macro political economy analyses and beyond, this special issue will provide an interdisciplinary model for thinking through the politics of game production, representation and consumption in the region. Suggested paper topics discuss games in terms of one of the following areas: History of the growth of online gaming as a global industry, discourse, and media product; critical interpretation of emerging local game industries in Asia and/or North America; online games and globalization/regionalization; convergent technologies and the impact on established modes of game play; government regulations and types of game play; game fandom and free labor; gaming as social technology/media; a culturally specific aesthetic to the production and consumption of certain games; new media and experimental gaming; gendered consumption and production of games.

**Due date:** March 15, 2010; prepare papers for blind peer review

**Contact:** Dal Yong Jin (djinn AT kaist.ac.kr)

**URL:** <http://www.uni.edu/comstudy/ica/journal/journal.htm>



## Errata

### Corrections to the 2009 Directory

Donald M. Hassler

On the copyright page, the date given as the end date for data in the *Directory* should read “July 15, 2009.”

### Members who sadly left SFRA by death during the year

Charles N. Brown  
Arthur O. Lewis

### Members who joined or renewed membership after the Directory closed in July

Jennifer Fisch-Ferguson  
808 Worchester Drive  
Fenton, MI 48430  
jrfisch AT umflint.edu

Fred Runk  
4817 East 26th St.  
Tuscon, AZ 85711  
fredr AT gainusa.com

Todd H. Sammons  
1733 Donoghho Road  
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sammons AT hawaii.edu

Kate Sullivan  
(unlisted postal address)  
sullivankate AT aim.com

### Members whose postal address has changed to the new address

David Barsky  
10035 Nita Avenue  
Chatsworth, CA 91311-2724

Jason Ellis  
122 Overlook Drive  
Kent, OH 44240

Andrew Ferguson  
1210 Lexington Farm Road  
Apex, NC 27502-5307

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### Member using a new e-mail address

Darko Suvin  
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darko.suvin AT alice.it

# Science Fiction Research Association

## www.sfra.org

The Science Fiction Research Association 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.

Visit the SFRA Web site at <http://www.sfra.org>. For a membership application, contact the SFRA Treasurer or see the Web site.

## SFRA Executive Committee

### President

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## SFRA Standard Membership Benefits

### *SFRA Review*

Four issues per year. This newsletter/journal surveys the field of science fiction scholarship, including extensive reviews of fiction and nonfiction books and media, review articles, and listings of new and forthcoming books. The *Review* also prints news about SFRA internal affairs, calls for papers, and updates on works in progress.

### SFRA Annual Directory

One issue per year. Members' names, contact information, and areas of interest.

### SFRA Listserv

Ongoing. The SFRA listserv allows members to discuss topics and news of interest to the SF community, and to query the collective knowledge of the membership. To join the listserv or obtain further information, visit the listserv information page: <http://wiz.cath.vt.edu/mailman/listinfo/sfra-l>

### *Extrapolation*

Three issues per year. The oldest scholarly journal in the field, with critical, historical, and bibliographical articles, book reviews, letters, occasional special topic issues, and an annual index.

### *Science Fiction Studies*

Three issues per year. This scholarly journal includes critical, historical, and bibliographical articles, review articles, reviews, notes, letters, international coverage, and an annual index.

## SFRA Optional Membership Benefits

(Discounted subscription rates for members)

### *Foundation*

Three issues per year. British scholarly journal, with critical, historical, and bibliographical articles, reviews, and letters. Add to dues: \$33 seairmail; \$40 airmail.

### *The New York Review of Science Fiction*

Twelve issues per year. Reviews and features. Add to dues: \$28 domestic; \$30 domestic institutional; \$34 Canada; \$40 UK and Europe; \$42 Pacific and Australia.

### *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*

Four issues per year. Scholarly journal, with critical and bibliographical articles and reviews. Add to dues: \$40/1 year; \$100/3 years.

### *Femspec*

Critical and creative works. Add to dues: \$40 domestic individual; \$96 domestic institutional; \$50 international individual; \$105 international institutional.

