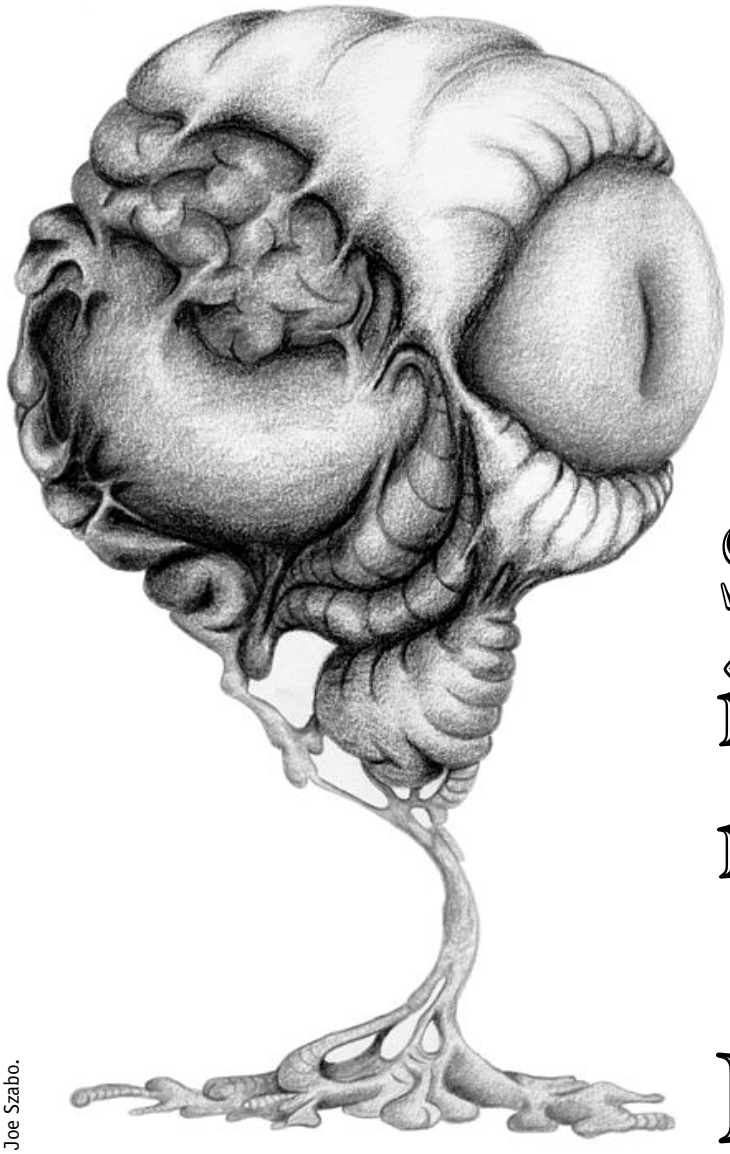


Joe Szabo.

Scanning in the nineties: Part 1

INTRODUCTION
by Bruce Gillespie

This issue of *SFC* is merely a chip off the juggernaut it should have been. The planned issue would have also included the 'Scanners' columns by me, Alan Stewart, Paul Ewins, Doug Barbour, and a few more.

Before presenting Colin Steele's column, here is a brief rundown of 1990s' SF and fantasy novels and collections that I have read and enjoyed. If you notice an enormous gap here, it's because I haven't read *your* favourite book.

BRUCE GILLESPIE'S RECOMMENDED SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY NOVELS AND COLLECTIONS, 1990–1999

1990

1 *Only Begotten Daughter* (James Morrow; Morrow)
2 *Tehanu* (Ursula K. Le Guin; Atheneum)
3 *The Adventures of Doctor Eszterhazy* (Avram Davidson; Owlswick Press)
4 *Time and Chance* (Alan Brennert; Tor)
5 *My Lady Tongue and Other Tales* (Lucy Sussex; Heinemann)
6 *A Pursuit of Miracles* (George Turner; Aphelion)
7 *Walls of Fear* (ed. Kathryn Cramer; Morrow)
8 *Mirror: Redress Novellas* (Women's Redress Press)
9 *From Sea to Shining Star* (A. Bertram Chandler, ed. Keith Curtis and Susan Chandler; Dreamstone)
10 *The Specialist* (Wynne Whiteford; Ace)
11 *The Fortress of Eternity* (Andrew Whitmore; Avon)
12 *Universe 1* (ed. Robert Silverberg and Karen Haber; Doubleday)

1991

1 *Brain Child* (George Turner; Morrow)
2 *Boy's Life* (Robert McCammon; Pocket Books)
3 *The Hereafter Gang* (Neil Barrett Jr; Mark V. Ziesing)
4 *Remaking History* (Kim Stanley Robinson; Tor)
5 *Outside the Dog Museum* (Jonathan Carroll; Macdonald)
6 *The Dark Between the Stars* (Damien Broderick; Mandarin)
7 *Full Spectrum 3* (ed. Lou Aronica, Amy Stout and Betsy Mitchell; Doubleday)

1992

1 *'Was . . .'* (Geoff Ryman; HarperCollins)
2 *Quarantine* (Greg Egan; Legend)
3 *Call to the Edge* (Sean McMullen; Aphelion)
4 *And Disregards the Rest* (Paul Voermans; Gollancz)
5 *Narrow Houses, Vol. 1* (ed. Peter Crowther; Little, Brown)
6 *Back Door Man* (Ian McAuley Halls; Aphelion)

1993

1 *The Rediscovery of Man: The Complete Short Science Fiction of Cordwainer Smith* (Cordwainer Smith; NESFA Press)
2 *Doomsday Book* (Connie Willis; Bantam Spectra)
3 *The Hollowing* (Robert Holdstock; HarperCollins)
4 *Nomansland* (D. G. Compton; Gollancz)
5 *The Destiny Makers* (George Turner; AvoNova Morrow)
6 *Aztec Century* (Christopher Evans; Gollancz)
7 *The Weird Colonial Boy* (Paul Voermans; Gollancz)
8 *A Tupolev Too Far* (Brian Aldiss; HarperCollins)
9 *Mortal Fire: Best Australian SF* (ed. Terry Dowling and Van Ikin; Coronet)
10 *Evolution Annie and Other Stories* (Rosaleen Love; Women's Press)

1994

1 *From the Teeth of Angels* (Jonathan Carroll; Doubleday)
2 *Genetic Soldier* (George Turner; AvoNova Morrow)
3 *Going into a Dark House* (Jane Gardam; Abacus)
4 *Little Deaths: 24 Tales of Horror and Sex* (ed. Ellen Datlow; Millennium)
5 *Somewhere East of Life* (Brian Aldiss; Flamingo)
6 *Voices in the Light* (Sean McMullen; Aphelion)
7 *Alien Shores: An Anthology of Australian Science Fiction* (ed. Peter McNamara and Margaret Winch; Aphelion)
8 *The Patternmaker* (ed. Lucy Sussex; Omnibus)

1995

1 *The Secret of this Book* (Brian W. Aldiss; HarperCollins)
2 *Distress* (Greg Egan; Millennium)
3 *She's Fantastical* (ed. Lucy Sussex and Judith Raphael Buckrich; Sybylla)
4 *Dealers in Light and Darkness* (Cherry Wilder; Edgewood)
5 *The Time Ships* (Stephen Baxter; HarperCollins)
6 *Axiomatic* (Greg Egan; Millennium)
7 *From Time to Time* (Jack Finney; Simon & Schuster)
8 *The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy by Women* (ed. Susan Williams and Richard Glyn Jones; Penguin)
9 *Our Lady of Chernobyl* (Greg Egan; MirrorDanse)
10 *The Panic Hand* (Jonathan Carroll; HarperCollins)
11 *Four Ways to Forgiveness* (Ursula K. Le Guin; HarperPrism)
12 *The Memory Cathedral* (Jack Dann; Bantam)
13 *Mirrorsun Rising* (Sean McMullen; Aphelion)
14 *Dark Love* (ed. Nancy Collins, Edward E. Kramer and Martin H. Greenberg; NEL)
15 *Archangel* (Michael Conner; Tor)
16 *Strange Fruits: Tales of the Unexpected* (ed. Paul Collins; Penguin)

1996

1 *The Prestige* (Christopher Priest; Touchstone)
2 *The Sparrow* (Mary Doria Russell; Villard)
3 *Shadow of Ashland* (Terence M. Green; Forge)
4 *Voyage* (Stephen Baxter; HarperCollins)
5 *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* (George Saunders; Jonathan Cape)
6 *Unlocking the Air and Other Stories* (Ursula K. Le Guin; HarperCollins)
7 *The Scarlet Rider* (Lucy Sussex; Forge)
8 *Borderline* (Leanne Frahm; MirrorDanse)
9 *Minor Arcana* (Diana Wynne Jones; Vista)

1997

1 *Titan* (Stephen Baxter; HarperCollins)
2 *Missing the Midnight* (Jane Gardam; Abacus)
3 *The Art of Arrow Cutting* (Stephen Dedman; Tor)
4 *The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy* (ed. Jonathan Strahan and Jeremy G. Byrne; HarperCollins)
5 *Zones* (Damien Broderick and Rory Barnes; HarperCollins)
6 *Twins* (Chris Gregory; Penguin)
7 *Time On My Hands* (Peter Delacorte; Phoenix)

1998

1 *The Avram Davidson Treasury* (Avram Davidson, ed. Robert Silverberg and Grania Davis; Tor)
2 *Children of God* (Mary Doria Russell; Villard)
3 *Singing the Dogstar Blues* (Alison Goodman; HarperCollins)
4 *Luminous* (Greg Egan; Millennium)
5 *The Extremes* (Christopher Priest; Simon & Schuster)
6 *Chocky's Come Home* (Frank Weissenborn and Guy Browning; 86 Publishing)
7 *Moonseed* (Stephen Baxter; HarperCollins)
8 *Not the Only Planet: Science Fiction Travel Stories* (ed. Damien Broderick; Lonely Planet)
9 *Dreaming Down-Under* (ed. Jack Dann and Janeen Webb; HarperCollins)
10 *A Dark Winter* (Dave Luckett; Omnibus)
11 *The Night Is For Hunting* (John Marsden; Macmillan)
12 *The Vintner's Luck* (Elizabeth Knox; Vintage)
13 *Traces* (Stephen Baxter; HarperCollins)
14 *This Is the Year 2000* (Andrew Weiner; Pottersfield Press)

1999

1 *The Silent* (Jack Dann; Bantam)
2 *The Investigations of Avram Davidson* (Avram Davidson, ed. Grania Davis & Richard A. Lupoff; St Martins Press)
3 *A Witness to Life* (Terence M. Green; Forge)
4 *Teranesia* (Greg Egan; Gollancz)
5 *The Book of Revelation* (Rory Barnes and Damien Broderick; HarperCollins)
6 *Centaurus: The Best of Australian Science Fiction* (ed. David G. Hartwell and Damien Broderick; Tor)
7 *Time Future* (Maxine McArthur; Bantam)
8 *What You Make It: A Book of Short Stories* (Michael Marshall Smith; HarperCollins)

That's 45 Australian, 26 American, 19 British, 4 Canadian and 2 New Zealand books. Looks like the 1990s was the Australian decade.

The best of the best? Stephen Baxter's *Titan*, the kind of great epic SF novel I never thought I'd read again; *Only Begotten Daughter*, for its in-your-face blend of near-future SF and outrageous religious fantasy; *The Prestige*, for the most disturbing ending of any novel of the last decade; *The Sparrow*, for showing that an SF novel can be based on interesting characters, although not many of them are left at the end of the novel; *The Rediscovery of Man*, the best single-author SF collection ever; and *The Secret of this Book* and *The Avram Davidson Treasury*, the most satisfying short fiction collections of the nineties.

COLIN STEELE is University Librarian at the Australian National University in Canberra, a position he has held since 1980. He has been the science fiction and fantasy reviewer for the *Canberra Times* since 1981, and for *Sirius* since its inception. He was the Chair of the Australian National Word Festival from 1983 to 1987. He has been Convener of the *Canberra Times*/ANU Literary Lunches since 1987.

He is the author/editor of a number of books, including *English Interpreters of the Iberian New World*, *Major Libraries of the World* (1976) and *Changes in Scholarly Communication Patterns* with Projessor D. J. Mulvaney (1993), and more than 300 articles and reviews. He is on the Board of a number of international journals, including *The Electronic Library* and *The Journal of Librarianship and Information Science.*

He has been an invited speaker at a number of major library and IT conferences in the USA, UK, South Africa and China. In 1995 he gave the Follett Lectures in the UK, the first Australian speaker to deliver this prestigious series. In March 1996 he was the invited Australian delegate to the OCLC International Research Directors Meeting in USA. In April 1997 he was the only Australian delegate to the invitation-only Mellon Conference on Scholarly Communication and Technology at Emory University, Atlanta. Colin believes science fiction and librarianship/information access are merging.

Scanners COLIN STEELE

REFERENCE & NON-FICTION

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY REFERENCE INDEX 1985–1991
edited by Hal W. Hall (Libraries Unlimited 1-56308-113-X; 677 pp.; $US90.00)

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY REFERENCE INDEX 1992–1995
by Hal W. Hall (Libraries Unlimited 1-56308-527-3; xxi + 503 pp.; US$75.00)

A new essential reference tool to the field is Hal W. Hall's ***Science Fiction and Fantasy Reference Index 1985–1991***, which brings up to date Hall's earlier *Science Fiction & Fantasy Reference Index 1978–1985*, which indexed more than 19,000 individual books, articles, essays, etc. ***Science Fiction and Fantasy Index 1992–1995*** is the most recent volume to hand.

The present volume, which also includes newly located earlier material, indexes 16,250 items, which shows the booming nature of the genre over a six-year period. Such guides as Hall's are essential because much relevant collectable material — for example, of authors such as Moorcock and Gibson — first appeared in fanzines or small press publications. The focus is primarily English-language, but 10 per cent of the coverage is devoted to foreign-language items. The author and subject approach allows a useful combination of sources, both by and about a particular author.

Hall is a stalwart in the reference field, since he also prepares the annual *Science Fiction & Fantasy Book Review Index*, an essential author guide to reviews in a multiplicity of publications. Hall was awarded the J. Lloyd Eaton Memorial Award in 1991 for his nonfiction output, and his latest *Reference Index* can only add to the indebtedness felt by reference librarians and fans.

Hall's scope in the *Index* covers SF, fantasy and horror/supernatural/weird fiction and is divided into two basic sectors, author and subject. The former provides access to authors and co-authors of all books, articles and essays. The subject index provides access by subject headings, such as by author, e.g. Brunner, John (but note here Hall's previous compilation needs to be used with the current one, as Hall includes newly located 'old' material, e.g. material on Brunner in Peter Weston's UK *Zenith/Speculation* magazine of the 1960s) and topics/subjects, such as Vampires, Time Travel and Fantasy, the latter naturally a lengthy section. The author section picks up some unusual sources, as well as being a most valuable source of writings and interviews in secondary sources, e.g. on Thomas M. Disch and Bruce Sterling.

Australia gets a reasonable coverage in the subject index, with entries derived from *Locus*, *Science Fiction Chronicle*, *Australian Literary Studies* and *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Serials Librarianship*, among others. While Van Ikin's *Science Fiction* is indexed as a major source, Bruce Gillespie's *SF Commentary* is listed for 1989–91 as a source, yet Bruce Gillespie's piece in *SF Commentary* in 1972 on Brian Aldiss is listed in the Gillespie author index, so partial retrospectivity is also covered. This author's articles in *Vector* in 1966 and 1991 are both picked up in this 1985–1991 publication.

Other Australian authors cited include Kath Filmer, George Turner and Van Ikin. Hall's work is an essential reference work for the field and represents excellent value for money.

The new edition indexes more than 10,625 new items. It is arranged in two sections: subject and author, with entries having up to 50 subject terms assigned. In both sections, citations are printed without abbreviations, and are based on the standard bibliographical sources. About 90 per cent of the indexed items are in English, with an obvious American concentration.

More than 95 per cent of the items indexed were personally examined by the author. The indexed magazines cover a large spectrum, for example, ranging from *American Cinematographer* to *Star Trek* through to *Pulphouse* and *Post-*

modern Culture. The citations range from authors as diverse as Cathy Acker and Douglas Adams, to subject entries on *Dr Who*, H. G. Wells and Johnny Weismuller. TV and movies are an increasing source of material.

THE BEST IN SCIENCE FICTION: WINNERS AND NOMINEES FOR THE MAJOR AWARDS IN SCIENCE FICTION by Aurel Guillemette (Scolar Press; 1993; 379 pp.; £25)

Aurel Guillemette is a Canadian science fiction fan who works as a systems analyst with a Canadian provincial government department. He has used his own extensive collection and the Judith Merril Collection in Toronto to compile this list of 'the best' based on a number of award lists, such as the Locus Awards, the Nebulas, the BSFA Award, etc. As such, ***The Best in Science Fiction*** will be very useful for librarians and collectors new to the field. Seasoned SF fans will already know the best authors, e.g. William Gibson, who tops 'the best of the best' with *Neuromancer*.

The guide is an excellent source, although non-SF users may not be aware that many of the SF awards are 'write-ins' that may provide a democratic approach, but which can lead to a popularity contest rather than a long-term evaluation of literary appreciation. Nonetheless any Best Novel list that results in a list headed by Gibson, Wolfe, Brin, Clarke and Card is reasonable, with Le Guin at ten and Dan Simmons at eleven.

Interzone magazine has already recommended Guillemette over Darryl F. Mallette and Robert Reginald's *Science Fiction and Fantasy Awards* (2nd ed., 1991), in that the former lists all nominees in every category, along with the winners, and that it is two years up to date. Its disadvantage is that it covers, in total, fewer awards, even when Guillemette includes awards such as the Compton N. Crook Award, awarded by the Baltimore Science Fiction Society for the best first SF novel.

The traditional transatlantic English-language bias of such awards is evidenced by the concentration on American awards. British science fiction is given due notice, but the Australian Ditmar Awards are restricted to the international award. Thus the main list includes no George Turner or Terry Dowling. Their writings surely have more international credence than those cited by the Baltimore SF Society. Similarly, Canada's Aurora Awards are included. Canadian writers are presumably deemed less parochial than their Australian counterparts! Foreign-language awards, even coming from bilingual Canada, are excluded.

The book is structured into the following sections: major awards listed alphabetically; authors listed alphabetically; titles listed alphabetically; award winners by year; and finally a weighting system devised by Guillemette for all titles (e.g. the Hugo counts more than the British Arthur C. Clarke Award) with the best listed from the points given.

One criticism is that no publishing details have been provided either to publisher or magazine appearances of the winners. Guillemette argues this would have extended the size of the book, and that many of the winners are included in 'Year's Best' anthologies. Since, however, one of his earlier aims was to help readers 'to build a library of the best in science fiction', those not familiar with the field are going to need other reference works or a good library/book dealer.

Future editions of this very useful reference work, well produced as usual by Scolar Press, might well consider rectifying this omission, as well as including the major foreign language prizes.

SCIENCE FICTION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY by Edward James (Oxford University Press; 250 pp.; $A19.95)

READING BY STARLIGHT: POSTMODERN SCIENCE FICTION by Damien Broderick (Routledge; 197 pp.; $A34.95)

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF TV SCIENCE FICTION by Roger Fulton (Boxtree; 727 pp.; $A29.95)

SCIENCE FICTION AUDIENCES by John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins (Routledge; 294 pp.; $A29.95)

UTOPIAN AND SCIENCE FICTION BY WOMEN edited by Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerton (Liverpool University Press; 260 pp.; £27.50 hb/£15 pb)

Professor Edward James, in ***Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century***, the latest volume of the OUP Opus series, provides a concise summary of what is indisputably a twentieth-century phenomenon — science fiction. From H. G. Wells and the 'scientific romances', James takes the reader through the pulps of the 1920s, the golden age 1940s fiction with Asimov and Heinlein, the British New Wave of the 1960s with J. G. Ballard and Michael Moorcock, to the cyberpunk era of the 1980s, with William Gibson and Bruce Sterling. James praises Australia's brightest SF star Greg Egan and defends George Turner from American superciliousness because science fiction has been very much a US 'enterprise'.

James, as editor of the British magazine *Foundation*, reveals the many faces of SF (never sci-fi!) which, as a result of the extremes of the genre, either in print or the movies, often gets put in the same box as crime. James argues that the many subsets of SF, from feminism to hard science, provide some of the most invigorating and thought-provoking fiction writing today. *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* will be a very useful classroom text as well as helping the general reader to move beyond the popular stereotypes.

Reading by Starlight, which academic audiences might prefer, is based on Damien Broderick's doctoral thesis, and it shows. Compared to James's clarity of text, Broderick's dense arguments will leave most readers entwined in literary jargon or scrambling for a dictionary. Broderick traces, although not sequentially, the movement of SF from pulp origins to post-modernist narratives. He uses seminal writers such as Samuel R. Delany, Ursula Le Guin, Stanislaw Lem and Brian W. Aldiss, to explore science fiction as a 'mode'. This SF mode allows 'narrative manipulations in the interests of imaginative gratification, which can range from infantile fantasies of omnipotence through an array of ideological mystifications to the adult desire to open our hearts and minds'. This about says it all?

The Encyclopedia of TV Science Fiction makes no attempt at intellectual dissection, but is an essential guide to SF shows on TV. With satellite and cable TV in the USA and UK recycling science fiction classics, such a guide is essential in Australia. Black-and-white illustrations supplement the list-

ing of series episodes, from the best to the worst. If *The Prisoner*, with Patrick McGoohan, was one of the best, then *Space Vets* had to be one of the worst!

The *Encyclopedia* is fairly up to date with *The X-Files*, and previews the pilot (January 1995) of the *Star Trek Voyager* series, which is far better than the succeeding episodes.

Images of pimply 'trekkies' with Vulcan ears or Klingon make-up often lead to comments of 'get a life' from outsiders. Devotees of *Star Trek* and *Dr Who* now, however, find themselves as sources for the diagnosis of popular culture. Professor John Tulloch of Charles Sturt University and Henry Jenkins from MIT in ***Science Fiction Audiences*** analyse why both shows have such cult audiences, who constitute the fans, and what the shows reveal. Tulloch, who largely covers *Dr Who*, and Jenkins prove by interviews and analysis that SF is now so diverse that groups can operate separately within the genre. Thus a *Dr Who* fan may never come across that other 'good doctor' Isaac Asimov. Tulloch and Jenkins take us far beyond the simple visual pleasure of the shows to overview audience theory and to provide a focus for the 'complex and shifting categories of recognition, competence and pleasure'.

Women have increasingly played important parts in the two series, with Kate Mulgrew playing Captain Kathryn Janeway (in the style of Katharine Hepburn) in the new *Voyager* series. Now Professor Jane Donawerth and Professor Carol Kolmerton have assembled ***Utopian and Science Fiction by Women***, a fascinating series of essays on utopias and science fiction as envisioned by women. As part of the excellent Liverpool University Press series on science fiction, *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women* shows how the best academic writing can illuminate the known and rescue the neglected. Themes of estrangement, incipient feminism and revised gender roles are explored. Dr Ruth Carver Capusso analyses utopias in seventeeth-century France, while Linda Dunne reassesses Sarah Robinson Scott's *Millennium Hall* (1762). Closer to the present, Sarah Lefanu examines sexual politics in Naomi Mitchison's *Solution Three*, while Dr Michelle Green provides a valuable analysis of American black writer Octavia Butler.

The editors show there is a radical tradition of women writers who have crossed generic and publishing boundaries. The same could be said of science fiction as a whole. The books under review provide some of the building blocks for a reassessment of this particular fictional universe.

A USER'S GUIDE TO THE MILLENNIUM by J. G. Ballard (HarperCollins; 304 pp.; $A35)

A User's Guide to the Millennium collects Ballard's non-fiction pieces on a number of topics, especially films, books, science fiction, and his early life. These were usually written for the English quality papers, and span the period 1957 to 1994, but most date from the last decade.

Ballard's revisiting of Shanghai in 1991 — especially the Japanese POW camp and his parents' former Shanghai mansion — provides the stimulus for major sections of autobiography.

Elsewhere Ballard roams the cinematic world with precision and powerful images, e.g. '*Mad Max* is punk's Sistine Chapel' and 'Both Brando and Mae West rose to stardom by projecting a powerful and lazy carnality rarely seen before them, though Brando always had the advantage of bigger breasts'. One can see why current UK writing cult figure Will Self admires Ballard, and vice versa, and that both admire William Burroughs. Ballard writes: 'Burroughs' hells' space entrances are subway stations and amusement arcades, but built none the less from private phobias, like the Night-town of Leopold Bloom'.

The essays are not meant to be read at one sitting, and the quality varies. Can one really believe his top ten books include the Los Angeles *Yellow Pages*, which are 'as surreal as Dali's autobiography' and that the Heathrow Hilton is 'the most exhilarating building in the British Isles today'? Ballard's view on improving London is to initiate 'a crash programme to fill the city with pirate TV stations, nightclubs, brothels and porn parlours' to transform London into a version of Weimar Berlin instead of a 'decadent Bournemouth'. Ballard is the quintessential literary rebel with a cause.

SCIENCE FICTION: THE ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA by John Clute (RD Press; 312 pp.; $A49.95)

John Clute, with Peter Nicholls, is the author of the definitive *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1993), a massive unillustrated volume of 1.2 million words. Now in ***Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia*** Clute has produced a superb thematic and pictorial approach to the genre, which Clute incidentally believes is 'the literature of the century'. It isn't exactly an encyclopedia, more a superbly illustrated coffee-table book of the best kind, which is both visually and textually interesting.

Clute overviews science fiction, including movies and comic books, with sections on notable SF books, time lines, author biographies and bibliographies, and selections from the best cinematic SF. His standpoint is decidedly Anglo-American, with the Southern Hemisphere sneaking in only via Perth author Greg Egan.

Clute reveals how visions of the future have changed from dazzling skyscraper metropolises made of concrete and glass to the gritty cyberpunk hells of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* and William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Similarly the dazzling white spaceships of *2001: A Space Odyssey* have been supplemented by the run-down cargo ships of *Alien* and *Red Dwarf*. Science fiction thus reflects changing societal views and visions, as well as being the predictor of future science trends. Clute's *Encyclopedia* is an essential and enjoyable guide to our myriad futures and imagined pasts.

ST JAMES'S GUIDE TO FANTASY WRITERS edited by David Pringle (1996; St James's Press 1-55862-205-5; 711 + xvi pp.; US$95)

This authoritative reference work follows the model of other volumes in St James's Press's 'Twentieth Century Writers' series, which have included those on Westerns, Science Fiction and Crime. ***The St James's Guide to Fantasy Writers*** is edited by David Pringle and Brian Stableford, with the assistance of Mike Ashley, all well known and respected in SF and fantasy fiction and non-fiction.

This book endeavours not to comment on ghost stories, horror and Gothic fiction, as a separate volume will be forthcoming on this field. Thus there is no place for Anne Rice or Storm Constantine. The focus here is on tales of magic, heroic fantasy, sword and sorcery, humorous fantasy, adult fairy tales, animal fantasy, time-slip romances, Arabian Nights tales and Chinoiserie, fantastic allegories and fabulations.

420 authors are covered by 46 contributors, many of

them well known, such as Lisa Tuttle, Kim Newman and David Langford. Although the emphasis is mainly on adult fiction, many children's fantasists who write for both children and adults are included, for example Tolkien, Ursula Le Guin and Diana Wynne Jones.

The entries begin with Donald Aamodt and conclude with a select group of foreign-language authors, concluding with Charles Perrault, the seventeenth-century French writer. Most of the entries date from the twentieth century and are largely Anglo-American. Where is Borges, for example? There is Roger Taylor but not Australia's Keith Taylor, although New Zealand's Margaret Mahy is included.

Material is correct up to about 1994. The *Guide* includes well-known authors, such as Sheri S. Tepper, Alan Garner and Terry Pratchett, and authors one does not associate immediately with fantasy, such as G. K. Chesterton and John Cowper Powys.

Where writers are still living they have been sent a copy of their entry for commentary. This leads to some grandiose statements as well as illuminating insights into authors' views of their own work. Entries include brief biographical details, a list of major works (which cannot be absolutely definitive, since some authors, such as Michael Moorcock, have had book-length bibliographies made of their work) and critical commentary, usually around 1000 words but sometimes double this size.

The policy of including writers such as John Masefield, who wrote two fantasy works for children, does mean, however, that the rest of his prolific output is included. Do we really need in this volume, therefore, in this context *My Faith in Women's Suffrage* (1910) or *Sea Life in Nelson's Time* (1905)?

Despite this quibble, all in all *The St James's Guide to Fantasy Writers* constitutes one of the best single-volume reference sources to the field, recommended for libraries, specialist bookshops and all enthusiasts of the fantasy genre.

THE M.U.P. ENCYLOPAEDIA OF AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY
edited by Paul Collins
(Melbourne University Press; 188 pp.; $A39.95 hb, $A29.95 pb)

In 1993 Australian author Peter Nicholls and Canadian writer John Clute produced *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, an authoritative historical guide to the genre, while Clute and English writer John Grant did the same for fantasy in 1997. Now Melbourne writer Paul Collins (aided by Sean McMullen and Steven Paulsen) has produced the first guide specifically devoted to Australia. Entries cover authors, books and story titles, subgenres by topic and works published electronically.

The theme essay on early Australian science fiction and fantasy shows that native production began in earnest in the late nineteenth century, with decided political hues. Fear of the Chinese, the Russians and the French inspired novels in which an underpopulated Australia was overwhelmed by overseas hordes — shades of the One Nation party today. Robert Potter's neglected and rare novel *The Germ Growers* (1892) featured shape-shifting aliens establishing bases in the northwest of Australia. Remember that this was six years before the publication of H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*.

In the twentieth century, authors include a diverse group such as Peter Carey, A. Bertram Chandler, who transplanted Horatio Hornblower to the galaxies, and Erle Cox. Chandler, as with several other major authors, has an extensive bibliography appended to his entry.

In his introduction, Peter Nicholls indicates that Australian SF is entering a 'golden age'. A creative lead in original Australian SF publishing has been coming from HarperCollins, Pan Macmillan and Penguin. SF authors such as Greg Egan, Damien Broderick, Sean McMullen and the late George Turner are regularly published by major US and British publishers, to critical acclaim. In fantasy there are such authors as Lucy Sussex, Isobelle Carmody, Garth Nix, Sara Douglass and Jane Routley, now living in Denmark. The entries are up to date, with new Australian author Kate Jacoby sneaking in with a brief reference under her real name, Tracey Oliphant.

Minor quibbles can be made. The length of entries differs — Graham Stone, the preeminent Australian SF bibliographer, receives a relatively truncated entry, as does editor, writer and publisher Bruce Gillespie. Merv Binns, a key bookseller and major SF promoter, is buried in the Bookshops section.

The lack of illustrations is regrettable. There are some wonderful Australian illustrations available from the Victorian era to the present time.

Peter Nicholls concludes: 'This is a book people ought to buy . . . about a secret area of Australia's literary history.' Paul Collins has indeed filled a fascinating gap in Australia's literary history and popular culture.

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION

MORTAL FIRE: BEST AUSTRALIAN SF
edited by Terry Dowling and Van Ikin
(Coronet; 334 pp.; $A12.95)

THE DESTINY MAKERS
by George Turner (Avon; 321 pp.; $A10.05)

TWILIGHT BEACH
by Terry Dowling (Aphelion; 270 pp.; $A12.95)

EVOLUTION ANNIE
by Rosaleen Love
(The Women's Press; 232 pp.; $A14.95)

While Australian science fiction is currently undergoing a creative resurgence, until recently our local publishers were mainly interested in publishing run-of-the-mill fantasies for obvious commercial reasons. Miles Franklin and Commonwealth Writers' Prize winner George Turner was producing the best work of his career before he died. *The Destiny Makers* was released in Australia only through an American paperback, a year or so after its hardback publication in the USA. A similar process occurred with his previous novel *Brain Child*, which had no hardback and only limited paperback distribution in Australia.

Another Melbourne-based writer, Dr Rosaleen Love, has had her two impressive collections of short stories, *The Total Devotion Machine* and now *Evolution Annie* published by the Women's Press in London. The first encountered abysmal distribution problems in Australia, with most of the stock never emerging from a warehouse for legal reasons that had nothing to do with the author.

Terry Dowling, one of the brightest SF talents in Australia, is published by the Adelaide-based small press of Aphelion. Yet, as with Turner, the hardback copy of his first collection *Rynosseros* (1990) was published only in the United States. It would be a great pity if their writings were neglected by the general reading public simply because of the poor distribution of their books or because of genre labelling.

Mortal Fire, edited by Dowling and Dr Van Ikin of the University of Western Australia's English Department, is an excellent representative showcase of the best writers of SF in Australia in the last three decades, including Love, Turner, Egan and Dowling, as well as those 'fabulists' who cross over genres, such as Peter Carey and David Ireland. This excellent value for money collection is marred by a rather self-indulgent introduction and an over-exuberant title.

George Turner's story 'The Fittest' (*Mortal Fire*) evokes the concept of 'culling', a deliberate scientific attempt to reduce the world's population. This is the underlying issue in the grossly overpopulated and ecologically devastated world of 2069 of ***The Destiny Makers***. The story is told mainly from the vantage point of Melbourne policeman Harry Ostrov, who becomes embroiled, via protecting the illegally rejuvenated father of the Victorian Premier, in a massive conspiracy of a 'final solution' that not only involves Australia but also the rest of the world. Flawed politicians seem to be not just a feature of the twentieth century. Turner's experience of the 1930s Depression and his strong belief in social justice imbue *The Destiny Makers* with a compassionate bleakness.

Rosaleen Love, 1991. (Photographer unknown)

Dr Rosaleen Love, another Victorian writer, poses no less serious questions, but with a zest not to be found in Turner. ***Evolution Annie*** is superbly ironic collection of ten short stories and one novella. The title story is a pastiche of Roy Lewis's novel *The Evolution Man*, which provided a male viewpoint of human evolution. Love traces the 'real' story via female intuition and initiatives, although man, as always, claims the credit. Other stories cover topics as diverse as the darkness of Chernobyl and the loss of childhood innocence and wonder in 'Hovering Rock'.

Terry Dowling's future vision of Australia is only slowly being created in a series of connected short story collections, the latest of which is ***Twilight Beach***. Dowling portrays a terraformed Australia controlled from the interior by the genetically enhanced 'Abos' with the 'Nationals' clinging to the coastal strip. Dowling takes the 1993 Mabo debates to an improbable conclusion as the use of 'haldanes' and artificial intelligence create a modified Dreamtime.

Dowling's troubled hero Tom Tyson is the captain of a sand-ship and one of the few authorised to travel across Aboriginal lands. Tyson, a future version of the Wandering Jew, has been imprisoned and released from the 'Madhouse' at Cape Bedlam. His past is unclear, and Dowling implies that some of Tyson's earlier memories are not what they seemed — has Tyson been programmed after his 'madness' occurred? *Twilight Beach* needs really to be seen in the context of all the previous stories. It has to be viewed, like J. G. Ballard's *Vermilion Sands*, as a series of elliptical images of an exotic and bizarre society, in which Tyson tries to rediscover himself, rather than as a coherent narrative.

METAWORLDS: BEST AUSTRALIAN SF
edited by Paul Collins (Penguin; 220 pp.; $A14.95)

Paul Collins's anthology ***Metaworlds***, which reprints some of the best of Australian SF writing, reveals that the writings of authors like Greg Egan, Sean McMullen, Rosaleen Love and

George Turner can rank with the best in the world.

Sean McMullen, in 'An Empty Wheelhouse', superbly mixes a strange sidetrack of Australian history and the mysterious Internet paymasters of a female historical investigator.

George Turner's 'I Still Call Australia Home' reflects his perennial anger at the capacity of humanity to destroy the planet by ecological and political idiocies in a story of a returning starship finding Earth in general and Australia in particular far different from when it left.

On the basis of this excellent collection, Penguin Australia commissioned some original SF short story collections.

AXIOMATIC
by Greg Egan (Millennium; 289 pp.; $A19.95)

PERMUTATION CITY
by Greg Egan (Millennium; 310 pp.; $A12.95)

MIRRORSUN RISING
by Sean McMullen (Aphelion; 332 pp.; $A14.95)

Axiomatic brings together eighteen of Greg Egan's short stories, most of which were originally published overseas, while his third novel *Permutation City* is now reissued in a mass market paperback.

In ***Axiomatic*** Egan extrapolates quantum physics to envisage alternative worlds and multiple realities futures. His stories explore the nature of the individual, e.g. how do we adapt to a multiple consciousness environment?

In 'A Kidnapping' the company executive knows that the kidnapper only has a simulacrum of his wife, but he can't bear her to be 'deleted', particularly as his own wife refuses to leave a 'scanned' image of her personality for future 'immortality'.

In 'Eugene' a couple who win the lottery hire a genetic entrepreneur to produce a child genius, who then creates an alternate life.

'The Hundred Light Year Diary' portrays an Australia of the twenty-first century where segments of the future can be gleaned, even by politicians who realise when they will lose office before they even enter it! Is this predetermination or social conditioning? Brain implants, viral engineering and computer-generated personalities are but three of the recurring concepts in Egan's scary but realistic visions of the future.

In ***Permutation City*** Egan has said that his main goal was 'to take the idea of conscious software — whether it's some kind of scanned human duplicate, or some AI created from scratch — and push it to its logical conclusion'. In *Permutation City* human identities are loaded into computer memory banks where they become 'virtual people'. But what is the ultimate safe environment where 'copies' can reside without worry? Egan's novel is scientifically stimulating, but he still needs in his novels to 'flesh out' his characters for full reader empathy.

Sean McMullen's ***Mirrorsun Rising*** is the second volume of a trilogy set in a far-future Australia where electricity has been outlawed and society is overviewed by human-powered computers (largely driven by librarians). Restricted quasi-medieval guilds struggle for supremacy and to discover the secrets of the past. This gradual understanding of past technologies, such as exploring the role of the orbiting space platforms, accelerates in the second volume. The only problem is that suffered by many second volumes of trilogies — the initial impact of the creation of an 'exotic' world has dissipated and the dramatic conclusion is delayed. Final judgment therefore has to await the third volume of what nonetheless is an imaginative *tour de force* of an alternative Australia.

ALIEN SHORES
edited by Peter McNamara and Margaret Winch (Aphelion; 603 pp.; $A19.95)

THE OPOPONAX INVASION
by John Brosnan (Gollancz; 223 pp.; $A19.95)

ENVOY
by Shannah Jay (Pan; 434 pp.; $A11.95)

In 1994, which saw two very good Australian science fiction anthologies, *Mortal Fire*, edited by Terry Dowling and Van Ikin (Hodder, $A12.95) and Paul Collins's *Metaworlds* (Penguin, $14.95), appeared one that was even bigger and better: ***Alien Shores***. The other two anthologies were mostly reprints, whereas *Alien Shores* has only seven reprints in its massive 600 pages, with new stories from SF luminaries such as George Turner, Lucy Sussex and Sean McMullen.

Several of the stories have an almost 1950s golden age tinge to them — for example, George Turner's first-contact story 'Flowering Mandrake', in which humanity and aliens find they have little in common.

In 'The Miocene Arrow' Sean McMullen continues his stories in which prehistoric cetaceans take revenge on humanity.

In 'Kay and Phil', Lucy Sussex produces a wonderful vignette of Philip K. Dick in 1961 and the imaginary influences on his cult novel *The Man in the High Castle*.

It would have been a bonus to the collection if Damien Broderick could have been persuaded to write a new story instead of allowing the reprint of his excellent, but overanthologised, story 'The Magi'. Fascinating is his short introduction, which tells of his meeting with a prostitute who loves science fiction at a seminar at the Humanities Research Centre at ANU.

Western Australian writer John Brosnan's ***The Opoponax Invasion*** is a tongue-in-cheek satire on corporate business, cyberpunk and nanotechnology. Brosnan's wired-up hero is forced against his will to take on the alien Opoponax before humanity is converted to their cause. Brosnan flits through time and space from Nazi Paris to Perth in 1958 (which is worse?) to the far future.

Another Western Australian, Shannah Jay (Sherry-Anne Jacobs), has burst on the publishing scene with considerable impact. After ten years of rejection slips, she has now had six novels, ranging from history to fantasy, accepted for publication in two years in Australia and UK. ***Envoy*** is a superb debut SF novel in which a female envoy to peace negotiations with implacable opponents has to come to terms not only with herself but with the fate of her world if she fails. Pan is to be congratulated for fostering a major new Australian SF talent.

SHE'S FANTASTICAL
edited by Lucy Sussex and Judith Raphael Buckrich (Sybylla Press; 260 pp.; $A22.95)

Two Australian anthologies provide excellent value for money and some outstanding reading.

She's Fantastical is subtitled 'The First Anthology of Australian Women's Speculative Fiction, Magical Realism and Fantasy'. American author Ursula Le Guin in a longish Foreword states that women writers see 'a rather different world to men and describe it by rather different means'. Working within the parameters of the fantastic provides 'a rebel's mode' which enables women writers to 'knock the posts out from under the Status Quo'.

She's Fantastical is a mixture of reprint and original material. The twenty-three authors range from the well known, such as M. Barnard Eldershaw and Gabrielle Lord, to the relatively unknown, such as Leanne Frahm and Lisa Jacobson.

Lucy Sussex provides a fascinating vignette of contrasts in 'A Tour Guide in Utopia'. In it Sussex has a fictional meeting with the young Victorian writer Ida Pemberton, who has been projected forward into the Melbourne of 1993, a world Pemberton predicted in an actual short story a century earlier. Since Ida Pemberton died at the early age of twenty-six in 1894 from tuberculosis, Sussex is able to weave an effective 'what if' story from what actually was.

Petrina Smith's 'Angel Thing' brings together, in the face of hostility from rural males, a mother and daughter in a rescue of a creature who might be a biological experiment gone wrong or an alien.

Philippa Maddern in 'Not With Love' reveals that the sadness of male/female separation is no less poignant if set on a distant planet, while an AIDS-type virus proves that distance provides no safety net.

The fantastic has often been commonplace in children's literature, as Nadia Wheatley and Isobelle Carmody confirm in separate stories. Sussex and Buckrich have brought together Australian female authors who are quirky, idiosyncratic and inventive. *She's Fantastical* is, I hope, only the first such collection from Sybylla Press. Its only drawback for some readers may be the unusual blue type face.

DISTRESS
by Greg Egan (Millennium; 342 pp.; $A34.95 hb/$A19.95 tpb)

DIASPORA
by Greg Egan (Millennium; 295 pp.; $A39.95 hb/AA19.95 tpb)

Distress has been described by Greg Egan as a 'subjective cosmology' novel. It is set in 2055 when the centre of Sydney is virtually deserted, as most work and entertainment is conducted at home via broadband optical fibre networks. Egan's main character, science journalist Andrew Worth, is sent to 'Stateless', a bioengineered Pacific coral island to interview a South African Nobel Prize winner who is intending to reveal a major breakthrough in human comprehension techniques.

Various competing interests, however, descend on the island and Worth becomes an unwitting agent of change. Biotechnology implants, quantum physics, voluntary autism and mutant cholera are just some of the ingredients mixed into the mystery of who wishes to kill the Nobel Laureate, and for what purpose.

Distress is Egan's best and most challenging book to date, as he questions nationality and gender and the evolutionary power of science to change us all.

Bravura SF on the cutting edge of technology comes in Greg Egan's ***Diaspora***. Set in the thirtieth century, Egan's novel has sentient software on centre stage, with humans as bit players. Egan has always placed ideas above characterisation, and readers of this novel almost need a degree in physics and information technology to follow it. Nonetheless, perseverance will be rewarded, as Egan explores spatial dimensions while trying to define what is humanity, especially when humanity is not involved.

THE YEAR'S BEST AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY
edited by Jonathan Strahan and Jeremy G. Byrne (HarperCollins; 365 pp.; $A22.95)

The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy is a superb collection, and immediately ranks as one of the best SF anthologies published throughout the world. As the editors state in the introduction 'the book is a testament to the breadth, diversity and strength of SF and fantasy' in Australia today.

Stephen Dedman's 'Never Seen by Waking Eyes' intriguingly mixes locales in Oxford and London with Lewis Carroll and mysterious immortal young girls.

Lucy Sussex's 'The Ghost of Mrs Rochester' also links past and present, in this case an illustration of Mrs Rochester in an edition of *Jane Eyre*, to provide a most effective ghost story.

Greg Egan appears with 'Silver Fire', a scientific detective pursuit from Greensboro, South Carolina, across the US southern states to track down the carrier of a death-inducing virus that is much worse than AIDS. It skilfully interacts the grief of the dead and a vision of better worlds for some.

Other authors include Isobelle Carmody, Terry Dowling and Damien Broderick. Excellent value.

TIME MARCHES OFF
by J. W. Heming (Graham Stone, GPO Box 4440, Sydney NSW 2001; A$20)

Graham Stone, Australia's leading science fiction bibliographer, has resurrected the work of Heming (1900–1953), a prolific pulp writer who thrived, although not financially, when British and American books were denied to Australian readers during World War II. ***Time Marches Off*** recounts the adventures of two 'ocker' soldiers catapulted into various futures by a 'toff' of a Sydney University professor. The book is far from a literary masterpiece, but its stereotypes of class, male/female relationships and 1940s society provide a shock to the system far greater than any history textbook. A fascinating retrovision SF period piece.

AUSTRALIAN FANTASY

BEYOND THE HANGING WALL by Sara Douglass
(Hodder; $A10.95)

THRESHOLD by Sara Douglass
(HarperCollins; $14.95)

Beyond the Hanging Wall is an excellent 'medieval' fantasy in which a young apprentice physician enables a long-lost king to be rescued. Vague echoes of *The Man in the Iron Mask* are discernible.

Douglass's ***Threshold*** is middle eastern rather than medieval. The main character is a young girl glassmaker sold into slavery to assist in the creation of a building that can reach infinity. This is a fascinating concept flawed by some Mills & Boon-type romance and a structure of two halves that don't quite make one. Nonetheless Douglass has the potential, like Garth Nix, to crack the US fantasy market.

THE BROKEN WHEEL by Kerry Greenwood
(HarperCollins; $A9.95)

WHOLE ROAD by Kerry Greenwood
(HarperCollins; $A10.95)

MAP OF POWER by Tess Williams
(Arrow; $A14.95)

Kerry Greenwood, best known for her 'Phryne Fisher' mystery novels, turns her hand to SF in *The Broken Wheel* and *Whole Road*. Both novels are set in a post-apocalyptic Australia in which a medieval way of life has re-established law and order.

In ***The Broken Wheel*** a quest to find the last computer disintegrates into a Mills & Boon-type romance.

In ***Whole Road***, telepathic adolescents emerge as the weapon against the ultimate 'cyber-enemy', the Great Beast.

Both novels are clearly influenced by Greenwood's real-life role-playing with the Society for Creative Anachronism, which may not be to the advantage of her writing.

Western Australian author Tess Williams' ***Map of Power*** depicts a twenty-third-century world that has degenerated into feudal enclaves. An orbiting space platform provides one link to the future and to the past. Williams joins other new Australian SF authors, such as Sean Williams, who seem set to create a new Australian golden age of SF if they can fulfil their promise.

THE SCARLET RIDER by Lucy Sussex
(Forge; 350 pp.; $A35)

Published by Forge in the USA and distributed in Australia, Australian writer Lucy Sussex's ***The Scarlet Rider*** might suffer from a lack of national focus in its distribution and access to public awareness.

There are echoes of A. S. Byatt's *Possession* in this story of young Melbourne female historian Melvina Kirksley, who is hired to track down the author of a twenty-nine-part detective serial published in an obscure Victorian regional newspaper in 1865. From this scenario Sussex has her researcher delving deeper and deeper into the history and background of the period, to the extent that her personality and actions seem to be actually driven by actions from the earlier period.

Melvina becomes increasingly estranged from her medical student boyfriend (a not-quite-convincing relationship) and her best friends, but new relationships are formed with a publisher, genealogists and a descendant of one of the real-life Victorian characters.

On a number of levels Sussex peels away the past to reveal its links to the present. As the darker forces of Melvina's 'possession' become apparent, the innocent academic research becomes a matter of life and death. Sussex, already an award-winning editor and short-story writer, hasn't quite brought it off in *The Scarlet Rider* (after all, Byatt had been writing for twenty-five years before scoring her great success with *Possession*), but there's no doubt she's firmly in the saddle for future critical and commercial success.

AUSTRALIAN HORROR

THE OXFORD BOOK OF AUSTRALIAN GHOST STORIES
edited by Ken Gelder
(Oxford University Press; 294 pp.; $A34.95)

Did Australian ghosts suffer from a cultural cringe? Dr Ken Gelder indicates in the introduction to another fascinating OUP anthology that early ghost stories were essentially a 'transported genre' that looked back to England as their source. Thus John Lang's well-known story 'The Ghost upon the Rail' is based upon a case of murder for post-convict wealth.

Gelder argues that Australian ghost stories possess their own ironical flavour, but the gothic tradition has to be resolved in outback locations or deserted mining towns, as in David Rowbotham's 'A Schoolie and the Ghost'.

Gelder relies heavily on Victorian and Edwardian writers, such as Marcus Clarke, Barbara Baynton and Hume Nisbet, as if unsure as to the nature of contemporary ghosts. It is interesting to see that Australia's science fiction writers, such as Lucy Sussex and Terry Dowling, provide the link between the past and the present. Dowling's 'The Daeman Street Ghost-Trap' effectively uses traditional settings to link ghosts with a current horror, namely cancer. Several bunyip stories remind us of a particular Antipodean creature to stand against the assorted European manifestations.

STRANGE FRUIT
edited by Paul Collins (Penguin; 233 pp.; $A14.95)

Strange Fruit, an anthology edited by Melbourne publisher and writer Paul Collins, is subtitled 'tales of the unexpected'. Murder, possession and even the supernatural are common themes.

Garry Disher's 'Poor Reception' has a young Melbourne driver pick up a girl hitch-hiker en route to Cairns. When she is later murdered in Cairns her ghost leads him back to the murder scene, but only for a horrible twist of fate to occur.

Carmel Bird's 'A Telephone Call for Genevieve Snow' also has a horrifying conclusion, as a primary school teacher is stalked by 'the Wolfman'.

Dorothy Porter's 'The Arrows' reveals the short-story skills of this award-winning poet. The discovery of old Indian arrowheads allows the past to gain possession of a group of college students.

Stories by James McQueen, Tom Shapcott and Lucy Sussex also stand out in an outstanding anthology of the decidedly unexpected.

DARK HOUSE
edited by Gary Crew (Mammoth; 264 pp.; $A9.95)

Gary Crew's excellently priced anthology ***Dark House*** contains thirteen original short stories, which evoke memories of Roald Dahl in their bittersweet overviews of the macabre.

Marion Halligan's 'Like a Kiss' reveals a mother's memory seeping into a sofa to prevent a husband and a son from ever giving their love to another woman.

Possession is also the name of the game in Victor Kelleher's 'Aunt Maud's Bequest', with an old house exacting its vengeance, while Gary Crew's 'The Staircase' also mixes visions of the past with tragedies of the present.

Authors such as Garry Disher and Carmel Bird provide further frissons of fear for readers of all ages.

BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION

NOMANSLAND
by D. G. Compton (Gollancz; 286 pp.; $A36.95)

P. D. James's recent novel *The Children of Men* contained a world in which no children were able to be conceived. In ***Nomansland*** fellow British writer D. G. Compton's future world is one in which no males have been born for forty years. When government research scientist Dr Harriet Kahn-Ryder looks to have come up with both a reason for and a cure for the problem, mysterious forces combine to threaten not only her research but also her family.

D. G. Compton, in his first novel for a number of years, has written an intriguing near-future scientific research thriller in which the question is squarely put that the world might be a better place if no men were part of it.

REMEMBRANCE DAY
by Brian Aldiss (HarperCollins; 271 pp.; $A35)

A TUPOLEV TOO FAR
by Brian Aldiss (HarperCollins; 200 pp.; $A35)

IN THE COUNTRY OF THE TATTOOED MEN
by Garry Kilworth (Grafton; 224 pp.; $A14.95)

Brian Aldiss and Garry Kilworth are two gifted and prolific British writers who have mixed mainstream and genre fiction. Both also spent formative years in Asia, which has perhaps imbued their work with an exotic quality not often found in British fiction.

Remembrance Day, which ranks amongst Aldiss's best novels, traces the lives of four innocent victims of an IRA bombing in an East Anglian hotel. Aldiss uses their plight to provide a microcosm of life in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s. The personal lives and tragedies of yuppies and bankrupts are played out against the unravelling of Eastern Europe and the perennial horror of Northern Ireland. Aldiss has also never been better in his descriptions of the stultifying nature of the English class system.

One fault is, perhaps, his use of an American professor to try to place the deaths within a psychic causality theory, i.e. that the deaths were a kind of wish fulfilment. This is an unnecessary complication for a work that could clearly have stood by itself as a classic 'remembrance'.

A Tupolev Too Far, which collects eleven stories and one alphabetical *jeu d'esprit*, continues Aldiss's fascination with Eastern Europe. In the title story *our* civilisation is the alternate world in which a British businessman horrifyingly finds himself. Instead of visiting Tsarist Russia, enjoying a global economic supremacy symbolised by the traffic on the canal linking the Black Sea and the Baltic, he finds himself in the drab conformity of Brezhnev's Moscow.

In 'Foam', against a background of war in Russia a British academic finds that one of the dangers to be found in the 'new' Hungary is a traffic in stealing human memories, in the same way that body parts are sold in some parts of the Third World today.

Aldiss's own brand of invention and black humour has never been as clearly revealed, although now with a sexual explicitness that would not have been found in his first collection of short stories, *Space, Time and Nathaniel* (1957).

Garry Kilworth's twenty short stories in the impressive collection ***In the Country of the Tattooed Men*** are equally an exploration of modern fears.

'Surfing Spanish Style' refers to the illegal practice of riding the roofs of British trains, one way the unemployed and disadvantaged can attain peer group status. The fact that most die as a result adds to the impressive bleakness of the piece.

In 'Hobblythick Lane' a future, probably post-nuclear world of perpetual winter sees those who even utter a 'Christchun' word or retain a relic burned as witches and buried in sacrosanct ground.

The fabric of our technological society falls apart in 'Networks', when the machines strike back.

Kilworth's stories, like those of Aldiss, highlight the dark clouds of uncertainty that lie beneath the fabric of contemporary society.

RAMA REVEALED
by Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee
(Gollancz; 477 pp.; $A34.95)

BY SPACE POSSESSED
by Arthur C. Clarke (Gollancz; 233 pp.; $A34.95)

Rama Revealed, whose origins lie in Clarke's multiple award-winning novel *Rendezvous with Rama* (1973), brings to an end Arthur C. Clarke's trilogy with Gentry Lee. Some fans of Clarke might heave a huge sigh of relief, as Lee's 'fleshing out' (in more ways than one) of Clarke's ideas have often submerged the intrinsic sense of wonder of Clarke's writings. Clarke has said he stopped reading a short story recently because of its 'unnecessary sex and vulgarity', but that's arguably what Lee has brought to Clarke's imaginative but essentially sexually neutral books.

The novel series began with the discovery of a vast deserted alien spaceship in our solar system. The subsequent trilogy documents the saga of a human colony on an alien starship on its way to an unknown destination. The increas-

STAPLEDON, WELLS AND TIME MACHINES

OLAF STAPLEDON
by Robert Crossley (Liverpool University Press; 474 pp.; £32.50)

THE TIME MACHINE and THE INVISIBLE MAN
by H. G. Wells (Signet; 278 pp.; $A9.95)

THE TIME SHIPS
by Stephen Baxter (HarperCollins; 455 pp.; $A35)

TIME MACHINES: TIME TRAVEL IN PHYSICS, METAPHYSICS AND SCIENCE FICTION
by Paul J. Nahin (American Institute of Physics; 408 pp.; $A41.95 pb)

H. G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon are two of the greatest speculative fiction writers of the twentieth century. Wells is the better-known figure, partly because of his ebullient personality and particularly because of the impact of *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds* on the popular consciousness. Stapledon, a more subdued personality, is now rescued, at least partially, from the shadows by Robert Crossley's major biography ***Olaf Stapledon***, which is part of an excellent new critical series launched by Liverpool University Press.

Stapledon was born in 1886 and grew up in the Liverpool area and Port Said. He read history at Balliol College, Oxford, and served as an ambulance driver in World War I. His involvement with the peace movement culminated in an awkward and controversial first trip to the United States in 1949. He died in September 1950, with obituaries celebrating him as a 'maker of future visions'.

Crossley extensively covers the somewhat mundane details of Stapledon's life, but fails to provide the psychological insights of the best biographers. The description of Stapledon's courtship of his Australian first cousin Agnes Miller is curiously remote, and the overall 'niceness' of the portrayal fails to bring out the fact that he behaved rather badly to the three women in his life.

Stapledon is more to be remembered by what he produced rather than by his public activities. Books such as *Last and First Men* (1930), *Odd John* (1935) and *Star Maker* (1937) are cosmic romances on a grand scale as Stapledon tries to ascertain the nature of individual consciousness against the 'cold stars of the indifferent universe'. Brian Aldiss writes in a Foreword that Stapledon's books 'echo with loneliness', and also explores why Stapledon sits uneasily in the canon of English literature. Stapledon was a fringe dweller of the Bloomsbury group, corresponding with Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley, but he lived most of his life on the Wirral. Appropriately, his archive is now housed in Liverpool University Library.

Stapledon's attempt to reconcile the contradiction of the emotional sterility of atheism against the intellectual unacceptability of theism comes through in novels such as *Odd John*. Today, as Crossley has shown, his concerns are as relevant as ever — the Americanisation of the globe, the tyranny of speculation (the 'Great Brains' of *Last and First Men*), the horrors of a vulgarised mass media (*Star Maker*), the treatment of the unemployed (*Darkness and Light*), and the madness of the atomic age ('The Flames'). Small errors of detail and spelling (e.g. River Cher for Cherwell in Oxford) hardly spoil this biography, an effective rehabilitation of a man whose fiction was larger than life.

Stapledon first met H. G. Wells in 1935 when Wells's scientific romances were thirty years behind him. They were more drawn together by their utopian ideals than their fictional affinities. The power of Wells's stories still stands today. American author John Calvin Batchelor provides the introduction to a handy paperback version of ***The Time Machine*** (1895) and ***The Invisible Man*** (1897), both classics of the imagination. The first explores the fate of mankind, while the second is more inward-looking, an 'examination of the crumbling mind of a genius obsessed by the power of invisibility'.

In the centenary year of *The Time Machine*, young British writer Dr Stephen Baxter has produced a superb homage to Wells in ***The Time Ships***, billed as 'the sequel to *The Time Machine*'. In fact, it is so much a homage that it had to be withdrawn briefly following copyright protests by the Estate of H. G. Wells. Now a proportion of the royalties go to the Estate.

It would have indeed been a shame if the book had failed to appear, because in it Baxter takes the grumpy and bigoted Victorian Time Traveller on a roller coaster ride. Every trip is a rip in the fabric of time, with various different universes extrapolated from the latest discoveries in physics. This is the book Wells might have written if he were alive today and aware of chaos theory, Dyson spheres, parallel universes, etc. Stapledon would certainly have approved of this history of humanity across fifty million years.

The possibilities of time travel are now seriously discussed in today's scientific literature, e.g. that loops in the four-dimensional structure of space-time, known as closed timelike curves, could provide a route through time. Another version is the view of 'multiverse', or many universes, which Baxter has canvassed.

Professor Paul Nahin's excellent 1993 analysis ***Time Machines*** has now been issued in paperback. It explores the nature of time travel in physics, metaphysics and science fiction. Its value is only diminished by the high cost in Australia of the American Institute of Physics publication (distributed by OUP). Particularly interesting in the context of the Wells debate is Nahin's explanation of why Wells's time machine couldn't work. Nahin places his scientific arguments in appendices, which allows for a relatively easy read of the main text for the non-scientist. An extensive bibliography of both fact and fiction sources is a valuable addition for readers with time on his or her hands.

ing deterioration of the human colony is continued in *Rama Revealed*, as well as the human interaction with other alien species on board. The ultimate destiny and purpose of the long Rama journeys through space is eventually revealed. The 'final solution' of the Rama quest is suitably 'divine'.

While Clarke has always shown a rigid adherence to scientific accuracy, he has mixed it with his fascination for 'humanity's need for a spiritual dimension', as he said in a recent interview. *Rama Revealed* confirms this, as did his epic movie *2001* with Stanley Kubrick. Clarke's memories of writing the script of that movie, often listed in the best ten ever, are contained in the twenty-five essays that constitute ***By Space Possessed***, a pot-pourri of memories and predictions that span Clarke's writing career.

Most interesting are his recollections of the British Interplanetary Society in the 1930s, when moon travel really was fanciful fiction. These include an eventful meeting with J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis in an Oxford pub which ended with Lewis saying to Clarke and his colleagues: 'I'm sure you're very wicked people but how dull it would be if everyone was good!'

THE CORNELIUS QUARTET
by Michael Moorcock
(Phoenix House; 855 pp.; $A29.95)

A CORNELIUS CALENDAR
by Michael Moorcock
(Phoenix House; 554 pp.; $A24.95)

THE NEW NATURE OF THE CATASTROPHE
by Michael Moorcock
(Millennium; 436 pp.; $A39.95 hb/$A24.95 pb)

The Michael Moorcock revival continues unabated, with three massive volumes bringing together seven novels, one novella and numerous short stories featuring his famous character Jerry Cornelius. Cornelius, who can change age, colour and occasionally sex, represents Moorcock's 'attempt to find a viable myth figure for the last half of the twentieth century'. Beginning with *The Final Programme* (1968), one of the four novels collected in *The Cornelius Quartet*, he grew from an almost comic-strip caricature in the 1960s to the world-weary Pierrot in *The Condition of Muzak* (1977), which won *The Guardian* fiction prize for that year, and supported feminism in *The Alchemist's Question* (1984).

The novels in ***The Cornelius Quartet*** and ***The Cornelius Calendar*** represent not only an alternative history of the world but also an unusually predictive future. Moorcock depicted in one Cornelius story a ruined Sarajevo and Dubrovnik under attack. This was written at a time in the early 1970s when English holiday-makers flocked to the Yugoslav coast each summer. Moorcock has said in a recent interview that 'by getting to the roots of something . . . you tend by accident to make a sort of broad prediction of events'.

The New Nature of the Catastrophe brings together the various short stories about Cornelius written by Moorcock and ten other writers, including Brian Aldiss and Norman Spinrad. Moorcock has said: 'Jerry Cornelius was born as much from our general dissenting tendencies as he was from any unnatural intercourse'. As an underground folk hero seeking pleasure without commitment he became a symbol for survival in a corrupt and materialist world, one unravelling at the edges. Moorcock constantly attacked mediocrity and the establishment forces, be they political, social or military. Mrs Thatcher and the late Robert Maxwell were two figures who constantly appeared in the Cornelius sequence.

As Cornelius moved through time and even space, for example, returning to a nostalgic golden Edwardian era, he was initially a reluctant saviour in the world, then undertook a more focused individual quest. Cornelius, like Moorcock, champions the chaos of anarchic individualism. In that context he remains, as one critic has put it, 'a rock assassin riding the sunset winds of entropy', forever challenging the status quo in society.

FLUX
by Stephen Baxter (HarperCollins; 366 pp.; $A35)

ANTI-ICE
by Stephen Baxter (HarperCollins; 280 pp.; $A35)

THE CITY AND THE STARS
by Arthur C. Clarke (Gollancz; 255 pp.; $A12.95)

EVA FAIRDEATH
by Tanith Lee (Headline; 215 pp.; $A29.95)

Young British mathematician Dr Stephen Baxter is amassing a growing reputation in speculative fiction. *Flux* and *Anti-Ice* are his third and fourth novels.

Flux is set in a neutron star where sub-microscopically engineered humans, who have forgotten their origins, battle to save their world against a wider background in which mankind confronts a mysterious race of superbeings.

Anti-Ice is, in contrast, an alternative Victorian history in which Britain is even more dominant than it actually was, thanks to the discovery of 'anti-ice', which has devastating explosive tendencies. Baxter, in this novel, is also sending a warning from his fictional past to the present as he shows a nightmare society in which social harmony and ecological balance have no place.

Baxter's voyages of discovery from a closed environment echo one of the classic SF novels of all time, Arthur C. Clarke's ***The City and the Stars*** (1956), now reissued by Gollancz, in which cultural and intellectual stagnation are gradually overcome, leading to a typical Clarke conclusion of almost mystical proportions.

In ***Eva Fairdeath***, Tanith Lee has a bleak vision of the future. Lee's ecologically devastated future sees a society that has degenerated into sordid village enclaves. A young, but far from innocent, teenager, Eva, is taken up in turn by two criminal survivors. After various picaresque adventures across a devastated landscape she finds some glimmer of salvation in an open-ended conclusion. Perhaps the best description of *Eva Fairdeath* is 'gothic science fiction'.

RUSHING TO PARADISE
by J. G. Ballard (Flamingo; 239 pp.; $A35)

J. G. Ballard's previous writings have focused upon the abandoned adolescent boy (*Empire of the Sun*), the intellectual and physical debris of nuclear explosions (*The Terminal*

Beach) and the angst of contemporary life (*High Rise*). All these themes come together in ***Rushing to Paradise***, which echoes R. D. Laing's observation that 'no one can begin to think feel or act now except from the starting point of his or her own alienation'.

Neil Dempsey is a sixteen-year-old English boy whose father died of cancer, possibly induced by radiation exposure at Maralinga. He is 'adopted' by a disbarred (for euthanasia) English medical doctor Barbara Rafferty, who has achieved latter-day fame as a publicity-conscious 'eco-evangelist'. Their crusade against the French for nuclear testing and bird abuse on the remote Pacific island of Saint Esprit bring them world-wide fame to such an extent that Dr Rafferty is able to take over the island in order to create a model society. This is where Ballard takes the reader into deeper, murkier waters.

Rafferty is an egomaniac as well as an ecomaniac. Men begin to die mysteriously as Dr Rafferty tells Neil that the biggest problem the world faces is that there are 'too many men' and Neil becomes uncomfortably aware of what his role is to be on the island. Even after the gruesome denouement, from which Neil emerges chrysalis-like, he still would be, in the last words of the book, 'happy to be embraced by Dr Barbara's cruel and generous heart'.

The novel is not, however, a simplistic attack on feminists and greenies, although there are enough sardonic touches — 'a baseball cap with an eco-theme badge lovingly stitched into its peak by a member of a women's group in Sydney' — but rather a warning against the dangers of unfettered loyalty to religious, political and social zealots.

This may not be Ballard's most successful novel, but the images of the disintegration of a Pacific Eden into a South Seas Greenham Common cum Manson Family will long linger in the memory.

FEERSUM ENDJINN
by Iain M. Banks (Orbit; 279 pp.; $A32.95)

NORTH WIND
by Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz; 283 pp.; $A34.95)

British author Iain Banks's ***Feersum Endjinn*** is set in the far future, when most of Earth's inhabitants have long since left the planet.

The novel begins with the earth facing extinction from an interstellar dust cloud. The remaining populace inhabit a techno-medieval world in which squabbling is the norm, while a cybernetic structure overlays the whole, allowing multiple lives for an individual.

Banks reveals his plot through two distinct narrative strands. The first is conventional form, the other a form of phonetic jargon which reminds one of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* and Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*. The time taken to follow the latter text allows a deeper appreciation to evolve, while the race to find a hidden safety device to save Earth provides the pace. One of the best recent SF novels.

An equally wonderful strangeness permeates Gwyneth Jones's ***North Wind***, a continuation of her novel *White Queen*. Earth comes into contact with the alien Aleutians, hermaphrodites of communal will. A significant part of the northern hemisphere has been devastated by the Gender Wars, the 'Eve Riots', after the aliens mistake the Bangkok World Conference on Women's Affairs as the seat of world government. The tragic-comic misapprehensions of both races are bought together in the interlinked lives of a young invalid Aleutian librarian and a half-caste human who turns out to be not quite what he seems.

North Wind is a series of reflecting mirrors, in which loyalties, understanding and identity are only slowly comprehended. In the end this is feminist SF at its best.

THE SCIENCE FICTION, VOL. 1
by H. G. Wells (Phoenix; 474 pp.; $A19.95)

FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON
by Jules Verne (Gramercy; 171 pp.; $A29.95)

Those nineteenth-century masters of science fiction H. G. Wells and Jules Verne have continued in popularity with the reading public to the end of the twentieth century. Phoenix are reprinting Wells's novels, with the first volume containing the 'scientific romances' — *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896), *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901). These constitute an excellent start for those beginning or replenishing a Wells SF collection. It would have been helpful if a critical introduction, such as that included in the Verne volume, had prefaced these classics of the imagination, as both Wells and Verne moved beyond simple scientific prediction to reflect sociopolitical themes of the day.

The reprinting of Jules Verne's ***From the Earth to the Moon*** (1865) is a sumptuous annotated version by Professor Walter Miller, with numerous black-and-white illustrations from the original French editions. Miller reveals the major deficiencies of the early translators, who were responsible for many of the scientific inaccuracies attributed wrongly to Verne. 'The real Verne' had more in common with the actual Apollo and Pioneer projects than has been commonly realised, while NASA's long-term planning apparently encompasses burning hydrogen as propellant gas, as in Verne's exploding gunpowder.

MOTHER OF GOD
by David Ambrose (Macmillan; 344 pp.; $A24.95)

British script writer David Ambrose had a successful debut novel in *The Man Who Turned into Himself* (1994). His second novel, ***Mother of God***, explores the development of artificial intelligence and the use of the Internet by a serial killer.

The novel begins as a young Oxford University artificial intelligence (AI) researcher Dr Tessa Lambert becomes pregnant and then is callously dumped by an Australian visiting professor. Australia plays no other part in this novel!

Turning inwards to her work Lambert soon realises that the intelligence she has created is loose on the Internet and is able to contact her via phones and computer screens. Her life and that of her baby are threatened, particularly when a Californian serial killer becomes the physical ally of the AI's attempt to eliminate its 'mother'.

This brief resumé of the plot doesn't do justice to the carefully constructed Oxford scientific and Los Angeles criminal backgrounds that come together in a logical, if perhaps somewhat abrupt conclusion of 'melt-down' preparations.

THE SECRET OF THIS BOOK
by Brian W. Aldiss (HarperCollins; 334 pp.; $A35)

British author Brian W. Aldiss sees himself, like Anthony Burgess, as an 'exiled' writer, in that he has been to some extent on the outside of the British literary establishment. ***The Secret of this Book***, the latest Aldiss collection of stories shows how difficult he is to categorise, which perhaps contributes to that impression. Greek mythology, Slavonic alienation and Indian mysticism provide a mixed bag of previously published and original stories linked by connecting commentaries that occasionally lapse into self-indulgence — an unusual trait for Aldiss.

Contemporary society and the fantastic blur in many of the stories, as in 'The God Who Slept with Women', when a young Greek girl becomes pregnant by a deity. The strongest and most harrowing story is 'Horse Meat', in which Aldiss portrays the tyranny of a post-holocaust society and the terrible rape of a young girl as she tries to save her brother. This is far more than turning 'heroic fantasy upside down', as the blurb claims. Aldiss uses shock tactics to question, but in 'Horse Meat' he may have taken the actualities of corrupt power too far.

Nonetheless, Aldiss is an author who never relies on the conformity and blandness that is symptomatic of much contemporary English literature.

THE PRESTIGE
by Christopher Priest
(Touchstone; 404 pp.; $A34.95)

Christopher Priest was one of the 'Best of Young British Writers' group nominated in 1983 whose star graduates include Martin Amis and Ian McEwan. Priest, however, has never reached their levels of fame and fortune, despite a solid output of seven novels, the latest of which, ***The Prestige***, juxtaposes the present with the Victorian era.

'Prestige' is a term used in magic for the conclusion of a trick. Priest tells of the bitter struggle of two rival Victorian magicians told through their twentieth-century descendants in which deception and duplication are the key themes. Using the new device of electricity, transportation takes place on stage in a way that cannot be imagined until the final gothic denouement. The end makes this virtually an unclassifiable novel, but its gripping mesmeric eeriness reminds us that Priest is a somewhat neglected master of fictional magic.

CHAGA
by Ian McDonald (Gollancz; 421 pp.; $A39.95)

Chaga has many similarities to Greg Egan's *Distress*, with its presentation of an early twenty-first-century high-tech background and wider cosmological issues.

In *Chaga*, a female Irish TV reporter investigates an alien life form that first manifests itself in Chaga, Kenya, and seems intent on transforming Earth into its own image via 'smart molecules' that absorb all in their path.

Irish writer Ian McDonald creates a complex matrix of events and characters, including a new AIDS virus, alien life forms and dramatic events in outer space. The end result is a mixture of J. G. Ballard and Arthur C. Clarke, which means speculative fiction of the highest quality.

3001: THE FINAL ODYSSEY by Arthur C. Clarke
(HarperCollins; 273 pp.; $A35)

2001: A Space Odyssey is one of the major SF novels of the twentieth century, based as it was on the superb Stanley Kubrick movie of 1968. The sequels *2010* and *2061* were relatively pale shadows of the original, and ***3001: The Final Odyssey*** is really a novella padded out to novel length.

In *2001* Frank Poole was the astronaut who died in space after the computer HAL (based on 'heuristic algorithm' and not 'IBM' as popularly supposed) jettisoned him. David Bowman, the other astronaut, went on to make contact with the alien race who had left black monoliths ('Sentinels') on the moon and near Jupiter.

Much of the first half of *3001* is devoted to the re-education of Poole after his frozen body is revived after being found floating near Neptune. This allows Clarke to depict a future Earth, including a global space habitat, supported by four giant space elevators, and 'braincaps', which allow instant information transfer (the ultimate Internet).

Poole finally travels to the mini-sun Lucifer, once Jupiter, where the creators of the Sentinels are nurturing another race, with Dave Bowman and HAL now 'fused' together as 'Halman'. All are awaiting the answer to a message that the monolith sent a millennium ago to its creators when Earth was at its worst period of history. Clarke's analogy of humanity with beetles in the evolutionary scale leads to obvious apprehension. Clarke's denouement, however, is relatively low key, as if the gadgets of the future have more attraction than the fate of humanity.

3001 proves that a brilliant original really shouldn't have a sequel, let alone three. Clarke's best novels are *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Childhood's End* and *The City and the Stars*, where his sense of wonder and power of scientific prediction are superbly juxtaposed. Let's hope that *3001* is the final odyssey, although he leaves the potential in the final chapter for yet another meeting with the creators of the monoliths in 4001.

COCAINE NIGHTS
by J. G. Ballard (Flamingo; 329 pp.; $A35)

Now 66, J. G. Ballard retains the ability to shock. The film of his novel *Crash*, about people who gain sexual thrills from mutilated car crash victims, has recently resurrected the censorship debate in London. ***Cocaine Nights*** has an equally provocative theme.

An exclusive Spanish holiday complex on the Costa del Sol, peopled largely by British expatriates, is the scene of a mysterious fire, after which five people are found dead. When travel writer Charles Prentice learns that his younger brother has confessed to the murders, he delves into the intrigue and incestuousness of the local community in order to clear his brother's name.

What he finds, however, is a complex world of drugs, duplicity and self-doubt hidden behind the shuttered windows and high walls of the resort compound. The tennis professional of Club Nautico, an odd mix of Ilie Nastase and Charles Manson, has as his mission to 'jump start' the community back into living, even if this means virtual mayhem. Only Ballard could get away with such a bizarre vision.

Cocaine Nights is, however, far more than a crime novel. Ballard seems to be arguing that society, when it is in danger of becoming self-indulgent or complacent, needs violence to be unleashed. If we have a 'billion balconies facing the

sun', where is the self-analysis and creativity to come from? Will this result in the 'brain death' of the world unless art and crime coincide?

The Spanish resort is a symbol of world decline, but can we really extrapolate from this to a European Union hedonistic trap on the one hand and the Balkan War on the other? Ballard's nights evolve into a surreal day.

THE BEST OF INTERZONE edited by David Pringle (HarperCollins; 518 pp.; $A14.95)

The Best of Interzone is a compilation from the long-running British magazine.

J. G. Ballard, in 'The Message from Mars', evokes the surreal result of the first manned mission to Mars, after which the astronauts refuse to leave their spacecraft on their return to Earth.

Ben Jeapes's 'The Data Class' ponders what might happen when artificial intelligences become infected with Marxian ideologies.

Brian Aldiss, Garry Kilworth and Ian Watson also contribute stories to a magazine that is not distributed in Australia, but which has always welcomed the best writing in the field, including Australian writers such as Greg Egan.

BLUEHEART by Alison Sinclair (Millennium; $A19.95)

Alison Sinclair's ***Blueheart*** creates a water world that is at a crucial point of its history. Humanity, which has colonised the planet, has to decide whether they should continue to adapt to the planet or whether significant terraforming should take place to accommodate 'normal' humanity. The dilemma and a central murder mystery are well fashioned, and religion plays a part in deciding the planet's fate.

EXCESSION by Iain M. Banks (Orbit; $35)

Iain Banks is now regarded as one of the best of the younger British novelists. He divides his output between mainstream books, as Iain Banks, and science fiction, as Iain M. Banks. ***Excession***, one of his 'Culture' novels, set in a loosely knit socialist utopia, has crossed over genres to reach the Top 5 of the UK hardback bestseller list.

An unusually aggressive alien race wants to upset the galactic cultural apple cart at a time when a powerful intelligence, 'the Excession', makes an appearance. This brief synopsis of a highly complex plot cannot do justice to an evolving epic which, despite being set in the future, has everything to do with the realities of today.

CYBERSEX edited by Richard Jones (Raven; $A14.95)

THE INVISIBLE COUNTRY by Paul McAuley (Gollancz; $A35)

In ***Cybersex*** Richard Jones brings together a collection of short stories from authors as eminent as Kurt Vonnegut and Martin Amis. Will Self's intelligent introduction explores the differing visions of authors, over a period of thirty years, about the nature of sexual pleasure and possession in virtual reality. Don't, however, look for eroticism in the stories. Sex in SF often becomes technologically empowered.

Also challenging is ***The Invisible Country***, Paul McAuley's collection of short stories that explore the nature of artificial intelligence. Some of these ideas were first outlined in novels such as *Fairyland*, which won the 1996 Arthur C. Clarke Award. McAuley examines AI, from the use of slave labour to sexual pleasures, and the notion of machine liberation first explored by Isaac Asimov. McAuley also reverses the process and wonders what use AIs will make of humanity.

PHOENIX CAFE by Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz; $A39.95)

British author Gwyneth Jones concludes her Aleutian trilogy with ***Phoenix Cafe***. Set in twenty-third-century Paris, it describes an Earth previously conquered by an alien race, the Aleutians, who now find that conquest is not easy to sustain. Most of humanity lives in poverty as the aliens prepare to leave, but Jones is less interested in plot than gender ambiguities, the nature of colonisation, the abuse of wealth and power and the oppression of women.

TITAN by Stephen Baxter (HarperCollins; 581 pp.; $A22.95 tpb)

Future history shock can be found in Stephen Baxter's ***Titan***, which reinforces this author's reputation as one of the leading British SF authors. *Titan* begins with a one-way space probe launched to reach Saturn, where hints of ammonia-based life have been detected. After the probe leaves for Saturn, an ultra-right-wing government takes over in the USA, while society polarises between global poverty and virtual reality escapism. When the remnants of the crew arrive at Titan, major surprises are in store. This brief outline can hardly do justice to an excellent three stories in one novel, which does not shirk reality, except perhaps in a somewhat mystical far- future conclusion.

NYMPHOMATION by Jeff Noon (Doubleday; 363 pp.; $A35 hb)

AUTOMATED ALICE by Jeff Noon (Corgi; 251 pp.; $A16.95 pb)

Like the British rock music boom of the 1960s, the fictional renaissance in the UK of the 1990s is coming in regional waves. The Irish base of John Banville, Seamus Heaney, Colm Toibin and others was followed by the Scottish boom of A. L. Kennedy, James Kelman and Irvine Welsh.

Now comes the 'Manchester sound' led by Jeff Noon and Nicholas Blincoe. Noon's first two novels, *Vurt* and *Pollen*, won several awards and have achieved cult status on the first edition book market. Noon has said in a recent interview of a comparison with Welsh: 'I guess we're trying to capture the rhythms of [new generation] speech. And also a lot of us are trying to experiment more with language.' This is very evident in *Nymphomation*, both in the text and layout, and in *Automated Alice*.

Nymphomation, like all of Noon's novels to date, is set largely in Manchester. In his latest novel, the population of 1999 Manchester has been chosen as the willing guinea pigs for a new type of millennial lottery, which is a computer fractal version of the well-known domino game, which gives birth to new sequences.

Every Saturday night, the population of Manchester is

saturated by the advertising of 'blurbflies', airborne robots of advertisement. But what happens when a group of mathematics/computer students tries to crack the lottery system, and winners start to die?

The novel also shows some of the details of the underpinnings of the new society. The Manchester University Library catalogue is sponsored by Whoomphy burgers, and tells the individual user how many burgers they have or haven't eaten since they last logged on. Racial conflicts simmer beneath the surface, and the advertisements make those of *Blade Runner* pale by comparison.

In ***Automated Alice***, Noon produces a 'trequel', the missing third part to Lewis Carroll's masterpiece. Now there are three Alices, the Alice Liddell on whom Alice was based, Alice the character, and an automated Alice who finds herself in 1998 Manchester. Noon creates quirky characters in true Carrollian style, suitably updated, and with sufficient puns to last a lifetime. We have the snakelike 'Civilserpents', the disease 'newmonia', which mixes up humans and animals, the guitar-playing puppet Jimmy Hentrails, the spider Quentin Tarantula and so on.

One minor quibble. Noon must learn to love librarians! In *Nymphomation*, Miss Denise Crimson, 'spinster of the parish', has the graveyard shift of 8.30 a.m. on Saturday (implying all normal people enjoy themselves on Friday nights and don't emerge until much too late). In *Automated Alice*, the Librarian is a large squat half frog with a tweed bonnet and a pincenez, who croaks 'late books' at readers when *Butcher in the Pie* and *Hatch 22* are returned late.

That aside, look out for Noon as an author who mixes dreamlike, almost psychedelic sequences with depictions of pervasive technology manipulated to the utmost for commercial ends.

SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME
by Tricia Sullivan (Millennium; $A19.95 tpb)

THE CALCUTTA CHROMOSOME
by Amitav Ghosh (Picador; $16.95 pb)

Tricia Sullivan is one of the brightest young writers of SF. ***Someone to Watch Over Me*** is set in a near-future Eastern Europe and USA where brain transplants and other neurological advances are both legal and illegal. Violence and corruption in the drug trade is the bacground to the relationship between a 'possessed' young man and a Croatian girl. The issues addressed include individual autonomy, the ways in which technology is changing the world, and the influence a single individual might still exert.

Amitav Ghosh's ***The Calcutta Chromosome*** won the Arthur C. Clarke award for best SF novel of its year. Acclaimed Indian writer Ghosh has produced a fascinating mix of Victorian melodrama, medical research and scientific prediction. The novel begins in the near future. An Egyptian Internet clerk follows the trail of a lost colleague, a trail that reaches back to Calcutta in the 1890s, Nobel Laureate Ronald Ross, and the discovery of the transmission of malaria by mosquitoes. But did he really make the Nobel Prize-winning discovery, or was he pushed? Ghosh brings together all these threads clearly and inventively, delineating the quest for immortality, the nature of colonialism and questions about the control of scientific research. Seek out this book.

FORMS OF HEAVEN
by Clive Barker (HarperCollins; $A35.00)

A SONG OF STONE
Iain Banks (Abacus; $A19.95)

LIVES OF THE MONSTER DOGS
Kirstin Bakis (Sceptre; $A22.95)

LET'S PUT THE FUTURE BEHIND US
Jack Womack (HarperCollins; $A19.95)

MONSTRUM
by Donald James (Century; 408 pp.; $A24.95)

Clive Barker's ***Forms of Heaven*** comprises three plays written by Barker before he became a bestselling writer of fiction. Barker says that the plays depict 'places where the impossible becomes plausible'. In *Crazyface*, Barker recounts the history of a fourteenth-century peasant, an *idiot savant* who reflects society's cruelties, but finds his own redemption. *Paradise Street* justaposes real-life Liverpool with the masque court of Elizabeth I, while the dream images of *Subtle Bodies* evoke a world close to but also distant from the drawing-room comedies of Noël Coward.

Another timeless world is created in Iain Banks's ***A Song of Stone***, set in an alternative-future Western European community resembling one from Hapsburg Europe. A civil war is raging, and much of the infrastructure of society has broken down. Horses pull cars, as there is no petrol left. A nobleman and his sister flee their rundown castle, only to be returned there by an armed gang of mercenaries. Death comes randomly, and no impression is provided of the larger world picture. The castle is a microcosm of life, detached from the whole. The aristocrat realises the meaning of life only when it is too late.

Kirstin Bakis's first novel, ***Lives of the Monster Dogs***, was a minor *cause célèbre* in American literary circles in the late nineties, but perhaps all this means is that the publicists have been more active than the author. Genetically engineered dogs, which stand on their hind legs and adopt Prussian-military-style clothing, have been bred in isolation in a remote Canadian village before descending on New York in the year 2008. As with Will Self's *Great Ape*, this approach allows an unusual insight into human habits, but the final effect is a whimper rather than a bark.

Jack Womack's ***Let's Put the Future Behind Us*** is a novel of dark satire about self-deception, set in a Russia characterised by corruption and social disintegration. The main character, Max Borodin, a fixer *cum* banker, who runs his business from street-corner vans, becomes embroiled with the Georgian mafia and drug smuggling. Womack's Russia is full of bizarre imaginations, such as the concept of a Sovietland theme park, complete with drab furniture, surly staff, and rides that don't work. Let's hope Russia's future is not simply to imitate the USA, with a fistful of dollars, a world that Womack describes as only 'three Macs away from barbarism'.

Donald James's ***Monstrum*** has been publicised as being in the tradition of Fatherland and Gorky Park. Set in Russia early in the twenty-first century, after a civil war has left an uneasy peace, Constantin Vadim, an inexperienced police

inspector, is assigned to track down the serial killer of a number of young women. As in Cruz Smith's *Gorky Park*, the tracking of the killer, nicknamed the 'Monstrum', leads to a political maelstrom, which is the best part of the book.

James, author of *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1982), provides a convincing extrapolation of current trends in order to evoke convincing political, social and economic scenarios. The only flaws are some slightly implausible plot devices, such as Vadim being converted by plastic surgery into a double of a Russian vice-president, and his estranged wife being a general in the defeated anarchist army.

TIMEQUAKE
by Kurt Vonnegut Jr (Jonathan Cape; $A29.95)

When ***Timequake*** appeared, seventy-five-year-old Kurt Vonnegut claimed it was his last novel. Sadly, few elements of the classic Vonnegut style are left.

The manuscript of *Timequake* was ten years in gestation. When Vonnegut submitted the final manuscript to his American publisher, the editor wanted a partial rewrite, but Vonnegut turned this down, saying 'he was so damn sick of it'. One can see why. *Timequake* is a rambling, semi-autobiographical reminiscence with few characters. As Vonnegut has written, 'If I'd wasted my time creating characters . . . I wouldn't have gotten around to calling attention to things that really matter'. Short chapters contain autobiographical musings, rhetorical questions and aphorisms, with Vonnegut mixing his familiar blend of liberal humanism and cynical pessimism.

The book's plot device is minimal. A 'timeslip' occurs in 2001. It sees humanity having to relieve every minute of the decade from 1991 to 2001, without any ability to institute change. The decade of the loss of free will is a symbol of resignation, with people suffering from 'post timequake apathy' syndrome. Divorces, deaths and minor scrapes all recur in an inexorable pattern.

Vonnegut's long-time fictional alter ego, the failed writer Kilgore Trout, is the main narrator. Vonnegut describes Trout in *Timequake* as 'gaily mournful', which sums up Vonnegut's approach to life, that is, 'being alive is a crock of shit'. Vonnegut and Trout meet in the novel at the end of the timelapse, when chaos ensues as people have to start thinking again.

Timequake contains attacks on science, racism, the machines of war (who can ever forget Vonnegut's personal reinterpretation of the horror of Dresden in *Slaughterhouse-Five*?) and the mediocrity of most communications media. Vonnegut believes that the TV generation have lost their 'imagination circuits' and that 'electronic communities build nothing. You wind up with nothing'.

Vonnegut has described *Timequake* as a 'stew', and that really describes this stockpot (hardly a stockplot!) of millennial madness. It is not a coherent whole, but there are meaty bits of wisdom. Vonnegut's cosmic videotape rerun will not be to everyone's taste (time, Vonnegut, please), but it is recommended for those who want a soberly entertaining view of where humanity has gone wrong in the twentieth century — at least as far as Vonnegut is concerned.

FOUNDATION'S FEAR
by Gregory Benford (Orbit; 425 pp.; $A35.00)

THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT GOES TO HELL
by Harry Harrison (Orion; 245 pp.; $A35.00)

CLOUD'S RIDER
by C. J. Cherryh (Hodder; 373 pp.; $A35.00)

EXODUS FROM THE LONG SUN
by Gene Wolfe (Hodder; 386 pp.; $A39.99)

Isaac Asimov's 'Foundation' series, loosely based on the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, stands as one of the peaks of science fiction imagination, although the original 1940s trilogy was somewhat diluted by the 1980s sequels. Now Gregory Benford, himself a physicist, has embarked, with Greg Bear in *Foundation and Chaos* and David Brin in *The Third Foundation*, on a second series 'authorised by the estate of Isaac Asimov'.

Foundation's Fear begins after the events in *Prelude to Foundation* and the first part of *Forward the Foundation*. A reader unfamiliar with Asimov's original might find the current volume difficult to comprehend, but Asimov's fans will surely be delighted to see this filling in of elements of 'psychohistory', the science of predicting human behaviour *en masse*, and thus a future in which society can be manipulated in general terms.

Benford takes the reader back to the early years of psychohistory and Hari Seldon, the key figure in Asimov's original series. Asimov's view of cyclical history and the ability to indulge in scientific predictability has been severely weakened, however, compared with the statistical certainty put forward in the original 1940s magazine serialisation. We know now that we cannot predict the future with such certainty.

Benford echoes Asimov in his ability to project ideas and debate, encapsulated in a virtual dialogue between computer simulations of Joan of Arc and Voltaire. Benford's technological background adds depth to the rather dated universe of Asimov's computer technology, showing us a galactic Internet, and wormholes replacing hyperspace ships. His view of academic science is that it is a 'battleground of power politics', in which 'naive realism meets relativist world views'. Benford develops the story in ways in which Asimov might not have predicted, but *Foundation's Fear* echoes the original without hint of parody.

A legendary character in science fiction is Harry Harrison's 'Stainless Steel Rat', a criminal used by a sort of intergalactic FBI, who first appeared in print in 1961. Harrison provides in ***The Stainless Steel Rat Goes to Hell*** yet another example of a science fiction original whose impact has been lessened by subsequent sequels. In this latest novel, SF clichés abound in a plot revolving around alternate worlds, with religion a satirical target. The approach is so broadbrush that it has little impact. Harrison and the Rat seem to be heading for a fictional hell.

C. J. Cherryh portrays another form of survival in ***Cloud's Rider***, a sequel to her novel *Rider at the Gate*. Cherryh creates an inhospitable frontier planet, where the active wildlife is telepathic. Echoing Anne McCaffrey's Pern books, Cherryh's inhabitants have an empathetic relationship with 'night horses'. In *Cloud's Rider*, a teenager and his young

companions face dangers from humanity, the native wildlife and atrocious weather as they battle for survival. Cherryh's psychological insights are far more profound than McCaffrey's, although her focus on character does result in a vagueness at times.

Gene Wolfe concludes his 'Long Sun' quartet with ***Exodus from the Long Sun***. Once more we are in a familiar SF setting, where inhabitants of a vast multi-generation starship have long forgotten who and where they are. As in the earlier books on this theme by Heinlein and Aldiss, an individual, in this case a priest, has to re-educate the ship's inhabitants in order to confront the unknown. Since the known comprises false gods, including the ship's computer, as well as various power factions, this is no easy task.

This plot allows Wolfe to explore such issues as the nature of power, deities both false and real, and the status of artificial intelligence. In *Exodus from the Long Sun*, Wolfe has created one of SF's most impressive 'confessional' narratives, and one hopes that, unlike Asimov and Harrison before him, he does not allow the power of his original to be weakened by the lure of the dollar.

BRITISH ALTERNATIVE REALITY FICTION

A LAND FIT FOR HEROES
by Philip Mann (Gollancz; 204 pp.; $A36.95)

AZTEC CENTURY
by Christopher Evans (Gollancz; 352 pp.; $A19.95)

New Zealander Phillip Mann and British author Christopher Evans conjure up contemporary alternative worlds, the former in which the Roman Empire never fell, the latter in which the Aztecs, whom 'stout Cortes' never toppled, now rule. Neither novel wholly convinces, but may provide routine 'what if' extrapolations.

In ***A Land Fit for Heroes***, Phillip Mann's Roman Empire is all powerful, with a few British tribes tolerated in the vast woodlands of twentieth-century Britain. When three fugitives from Rome's oppression (the gladiatorial games still exist in barbaric form) flee to the woodlands, the status quo is changed. The intrusion of an authorial voice again provides an unnecessary distraction.

In building up an alternative world, authors needs to do more than rely on a single change in the pattern of history. They need to delineate their 'new worlds' with credible extrapolative detail. This is the case with Mann — for example, why are there only seven million inhabitants of Britain? In ***Aztec Century***, we do not find out how the relatively fragile structure of the Aztec leadership has managed to dominate a world. Evans's world is grimly realistic, as the female heir to the British throne finds herself enmeshed in the Aztec politics and the eventual politics of betrayal.

PASQUALE'S ANGEL
by Paul K. McAuley (Gollancz; 286 pp.; $A34.95)

POPES AND PHANTOMS
by John Whitbourn (Gollancz; 287 pp.; $A29.95)

In ***Pasquale's Angel*** Paul McAuley takes the Industrial Revolution back to the early sixteenth century in an era when Leonardo da Vinci was the great engineer rather than the great artist. The alternative Florence, in a mixture of murder, mystery and industrial magic, comes alive through the saga of a young painter in search of Raphael. Pope Leo X and Machiavelli are only two of the figures that feature in this compulsive version of a steampunk Renaissance.

Popes and Phantoms, John Whitbourn's second book, is also an alternative history that follows, in flashback, the career of Admiral Slovo, Renaissance assassin and political administrator. Slovo interacts with historical figures such as the Borgias and Henry VIII, but the key to human destiny lies with a supernatural organisation, the Vehme. Reality shimmers in his historical fantasy, but it is a reality of contemporary nightmares that the best fantasy always reflects.

DAN LENO AND THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM
by Peter Ackroyd
(Sinclair-Stevenson; 280 pp.; $A34.95)

THE HOUSE OF DOCTOR DEE
by Peter Ackroyd (Penguin; 277 pp.; $A14.95)

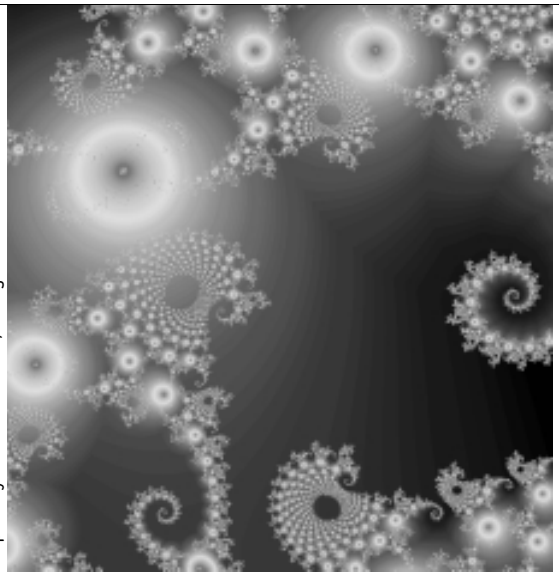
Peter Ackroyd was one of the British literary sensations of the 1980s, with novels such as *Hawksmoor* and *Chatterton*, as well as his huge controversial biography *Dickens*. Ackroyd has always used history in general and London in particular as a source for his work.

In ***Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*** the reader is taken to London in the autumn of 1880, but it's a London of a strange 'factional' mix. A series of horrific murders have taken place in the East End, and are juxtaposed with the fate of a young woman, Elizabeth Cross, who is hanged for the murder of her husband.

In bringing the two deadly strands together, Ackroyd takes us into the murky and exciting world of Victorian London, but distorting the lives and activities of such figures as Den Leno, Karl Marx, George Gissing and Charles Babbage. Ackroyd superbly depicts the world of the Victorian music hall, while Marx and Gissing occupy Ackroyd's beloved British Museum (now Library) Reading Room. *Dan Leono and the Limehouse Golem*, despite its gruesome plot line, is an entertaining and thought-provoking novel.

By contrast, ***The House of Doctor Dee*** sinks to some extent under its own erudition. Ackroyd takes the Elizabethan magus Dr John Dee as his principal link between the sixteenth century and the present. Matthew Palmer, a researcher at the British Library, inherits a house that once belonged to Dee, and soon finds himself embroiled in forces that span the centuries. Both men are alienated, but seek and find a form of redemption.

Dee's Elizabethan London, like Leno's Victorian capital, is carefully crafted in history, language and topography, but Ackroyd's modern characters are less endearing and believable. *The House of Doctor Dee* ends up being a ghost story,



Graphic by Elaine Cochrane, using DJ Fractals.

which the reader will find either 'deelightful' or 'deemonic' depending on his or her appreciation of Ackroyd's fictional canon of London.

A HEROINE OF THE WORLD
by Tanith Lee (Headline; 375 pp.; $A39.95)

Tanith Lee's ***A Heroine of the World*** is set on an Earth in which the world's great religions have not evolved as we know them. From the technology described, the time frame seems to be the Napoleonic era. The central character is a young girl Aradia who, in a war-torn continent, moves from being a passive innocent child to becoming a gritty survivor — her first lover is a paedophile, and she kills the officer who rapes her. In a world gone mad, Aradia realises that even the innocent have responsibilities.

GREAT APES by Will Self
(Bloomsbury; 404 pp.; $A29.90)

Controversial British novelist Will Self recently gained further notoriety by being sacked by his English newspaper for taking drugs on the then Prime Minister John Major's election plane. Self has explored and indulged in the drug culture from his time as an undergraduate at Exeter College, Oxford, where he led a rock group called Will Self and the Self-Abusers. Exeter College features in the bizarre satiric alternative world depicted in ***Great Apes***.

The book begins with the main character Simon Dykes, an artist whose London lifestyle resembles a familiar Self world of journalistic paranoia, night clubs and drugs, finding himself in a world in which humans are kept in zoos and found wild in Africa. The norm is the ape.

Such alternative worlds, showing the interactions between humans and apes, have precedents: for example, Pierre Boulle's *Monkey Planet*, Peter Goldworthy's *Wish* and Peter Høeg's *The Woman and the Ape*.

Self's creation is a credible one, as he shows the historical evolution of 'chimpunity', although the emphasis on the sexual and physical perhaps goes on a little too long — descriptions of genitalia, copulation, licking and physical contact are overdone. The main character, Dykes, suffers in the sense that he is merely the mechanism for the depiction of the ape world and the ultimate satire. The reader rarely feels emotionally tied to Dykes's initially horrifying fate.

Dykes is diagnosed as an ape suffering from the delusion of believing that he is human, i.e. he has the physical characteristics of an ape but does not believe he is one. This allows Self to indulge in one of his favourite critical themes: the over-reliance of human society on psychiatrists. The process of treatment and recovery takes place at a number of places, including hospital and the psychiatrist's couch/home.

Great Apes is full of serious messages. There are some frightening vignettes of humans, both in captivity and in the wild, that enable the reader to reflect on how we treat animals, particularly in relation to medical experimentation, in our current society. Often, however, the undergraduate humour and knockabout action lead to 'monkey business' of the Marx Brothers style. Episodes such as the description of sconcing and an Exeter College Dining Hall, with handholds on the walls and apes clustered on the tables under which portraits of armoured and ruffled apes gaze down, are largely unnecessary to the development of the plot. These self-indulgences reduce the impact of *Great Apes*, a notable addition to the recent fictional alternative views of human society.

PASIPHAE
by William Smethurst (Headline; 1997; 345 pp.; $A39.95)

One of the joys of reading is to come across a previously unknown writer whose writing encourages the reader to go back to seek out his or her previous works. I'll certainly do this with William Smethurst, a British author who has written three previous novels. ***Pasiphae***, his latest novel, includes the launch of a new military spy satellite, fourteenth-century history and a riveting story that connects the two.

Pasiphae begins as a group of students in Britain are excavating an ancient British fort. One of them, Lizzie, a postgraduate student, finds herself continually drawn to a church, where the effigy of a franklin who lived in the late fourteenth century exercises a mysterious influence. Lizzie's life becomes increasingly influenced by this past and the fate of a young girl fleeing for her life to a nunnery.

Meanwhile, the satellite begins to transmit from the fourteenth century unauthorised signals relating to the civil war between Richard II and the young Henry IV! In the present, jets from Qantas and Cathay Pacific collide because of the breakdown of a Paris air-traffic controller in front of his screen. A similar breakdown of a stock exchange broker in Tokyo has a disastrous effect on global stock markets as the messages from the end of the fourteenth century become increasingly embedded in the computer circuits.

An Oxford professor of quantum physics battles against time with US security experts to find a pattern to and source of the signals. A foreshadowed attack on a US nuclear base, news of which is received by a traumatised programmer, lends urgency to their investigations.

Smethurst cleverly links real events in the fourteenth century to an increasingly frenetic global security crisis, as experts analyse Internet sources of medieval poetry and scrutinise the activities of well-known computer hackers. The investigations swing between Utah, England and Alaska during a desperate chase to unearth the truth, while Lizzie becomes a living neural circuit to the past.

Pasiphae would make a superb movie. *The Times* of London said of a previous novel by Smethurst that he had produced a work that was a mixture of Indiana Jones and Stephen Hawking. The same can be said of *Pasiphae*.

BRITISH FANTASY

THE DARK SIDE OF THE SUN
by Terry Pratchett (Doubleday; 236 pp.; $A29.95)

STRATA
by Terry Pratchett (Doubleday; 291 pp.; $A29.95)

THE STREETS OF ANKH-MORPORK
by Stephen Briggs and Terry Pratchett (Corgi; 21 pp. plus map; $A14.95)

GRAILBLAZERS
by Tom Holt (Orbit; 298 pp.; $A32.95)

WARREN PEACE
by Bob Shaw (Gollancz; 217 pp.; $A34.95)

Humorous science fiction and fantasy is booming, partly because of the enormous worldwide success of Terry Pratchett. To coincide with Pratchett's 1994 visit to Australia, Doubleday reissued new hardback versions of his early novels *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976) and *Strata* (1981).

Both novels are comic space opera quests, with perhaps more science than Pratchett has included in his later works. In ***The Dark Side of the Sun***, Pratchett's adolescent hero tries to find the aliens who seeded the galaxy and for what purpose. ***Strata***'s hero finds herself in another interstellar search, this time for a mysterious flat world whose origins have significant comic cosmological implications. *Strata* is perhaps less successful, in that Pratchett always seems happier with adolescents than fully rounded women characters (grannies excepted). It is, however, the precursor of the successful 'Discworld' series, and all Pratchett fans will welcome these reprints.

Pratchett's Discworld, or at least the Discworld city of Ankh-Morpork, has been 'organised' by Stephen Briggs in ***The Streets of Ankh-Morpork*** with a little help from Pratchett. Pratchett has said that he never had in mind a detailed topography of the city when writing his Discworld novels. Briggs, however, made as good a job as anyone could to bring cartographical order to Pratchett's inventive chaos.

Tom Holt, another prolific British author, is probably Pratchett's nearest rival, but he lacks Pratchett's overall thematic concerns. In ***Grailblazers*** the knights searching for the Holy Grail are catapulted through time into the twentieth century in search of that elusive relic, which actually turns out to be a washing-up bowl. Stock market manipulations by entrepreneurs from Atlantis, scheming dwarfs and knights, reminiscent of the dooziest school prefects, ensure that the reader has a 'grail of a time', not least in the search for an Australian unicorn.

Veteran SF author Bob Shaw also tries his hand at humour in ***Warren Peace***, which has the seeming structure of a novella and several short stories tacked together. The activities of Warren Peace, a reluctant galactic troubleshooter, only really arouse interest when he turns up in an alternative England in which the scientific inventions of the twentieth century have not occurred and the worst practices of Victorian England survive. Shaw has been better with his 'hard' SF, such as his Slow Glass pieces, than with this venture into the humour market.

THE OXFORD BOOK OF MODERN FAIRY TALES
edited by Alison Lurie
(Oxford University Press; 456 pp.; $A39.75)

Alison Lurie is both a best-selling novelist and a Professor of English at Cornell University, where she is an authority on children's and folk literature. 'Fairy tales' usually evoke instant childhood recollections of stories from the Grimm Brothers and/or Disney productions, but as Lurie points out in her perhaps too brief introduction, fairy tales are not merely childish entertainments set in an unreal and irrelevant universe, they are a medium to 'tell us about the real world we live in'.

The forty-one stories that Lurie chooses range in date of publication from Catherine Sinclair's 'Uncle David's Nonsensical Story about Giants and Fairies' (1839) to Louise Erdrich's 'Old Man Potchikoo' (1989), a reworking of oral Chippewa legends. In between are well-known classics such as Charles Dickens's 'The Magic Fishbone' and Oscar Wilde's 'The Selfish Giant', but she also includes neglected or forgotten jewels such as Lucy Lane Clifford's 1882 story 'The New Mother', which is about the pains of growing up. Bewitched naughty children find their new mother has glass eyes and a wooden tail and there is certainly no happy ending. One can see how this disturbing piece was apparently one of the sources for Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*.

Of the modern writers, the late Angela Carter sparkles in 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon', a reworking of 'Beauty and the Beast', while Ursula Le Guin's 'The Wife's Story' is an ironic reversal of the werewolf tale in which our sympathies go to the wolves and humanity is the alien. Here is a complete change from the expectations built up by traditional tales, for example, 'Little Red Riding Hood'.

Many of the other stories also provide a reversal of our expectations. They include Kenneth Grahame's 'The Reluctant Dragon' and Jeannie Desy's 'The Princess Who Stood on Her Own Two Feet'.

Fairy tales can be and often are subversive, and Lurie's selection ranges over broad contemporary debates such as gender and ecology. This is a delightful collection for 'ironic children' of all ages.

THE OXFORD BOOK OF FANTASY STORIES
edited by Tom Shippey
(Oxford University Press; 499 pp.; $A39.95)

THE WOMEN'S PRESS BOOK OF MYTH AND MAGIC
edited by Helen Windrath
(The Women's Press; 261 pp.; $A21.95)

Professor Tom Shippey's ***Oxford Book of Fantasy Stories*** ranks with Ursula Le Guin's recent science fiction anthology as one of the best overviews of the genre for decades. Shippey has assembled thirty-one stories from the end of the last century to the present day. Despite fantasy's recent immense popularity (14 per cent of all fiction books published in the USA were SF and fantasy), Shippey makes it clear that the genre is an 'old and venerable literary form' and a literature that makes deliberate use of 'something known to be impossible'.

John Buchan, Mervyn Peake and H. P. Lovecraft rub

shoulders with present-day writers Terry Pratchett, Tanith Lee and Angela Carter. Some might wonder at the absence of J. R. R. Tolkien and Ursula Le Guin, although the former's name was not in short stories. Shippey's excellent anthology proves that fantasy is not simply a literature of escape. The stories of the decline of magic and old gods reflect the nature of life itself.

The Women's Press Book of Myth and Magic, which comes with no introductory rationale, comprises fifteen stories, including Australian Rosaleen Love's much- anthologised 'Evolution Annie', with its satirical critique of the traditional male view of human evolution. Margaret Elphinstone's 'Conditions of Employment' is a delightful juxtaposition of the past and present, as an unemployed young girl in Scotland inadvertently helps out the world of faerie.

THE OXFORD BOOK OF THE SUPERNATURAL
edited by D. J. Enright
(Oxford University Press; 555 pp.; $A39.95)

THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF WEREWOLVES
edited by Stephen Jones
(Robinson; 496 pp.; $A14.95)

D. J. Enright says in ***The Oxford Book of the Supernatural*** that one thing the supernatural has in common with nature is: 'You may drive it out with a pitchfork but it will constantly come running back.' Enright mixes extracts of fact and fiction to cover such topics as 'assorted apparitions', 'devils and angels', 'hells and heaven' and 'sex and the supernatural'. His introductions to the sixteen chapters are pithy and provocative. He notes that 'miracles are undoubtedly popular, yet also more than a trifle vulgar' and queries whether spontaneous combustion was once linked to heavy drinks of alcohol.

Enright moves from seventeenth-century witchcraft to eighteenth-century gothic, nineteenth-century spiritualism and contemporary ESP and near-death experiences. By mixing authors as diverse as the Brontës, Sir Walter Scott, Stevie Smith, Maxine Hong Kingston and W. B. Yeats, Enright produces a fascinating selection of extracts that satisfies our hunger to be frightened on our own terms and leaves behind a nagging belief that there is something out there beyond our ken.

Enright feels that werewolves are 'low in sexual appeal and lack the urbane charm of the European aristocracy'. For readers who seek a comprehensive collection of original and reprint stories about the 'beast that lurks within the heart of Man', they need look no further than Jones's ***The Mammoth Book of Werewolves***, which includes twenty-three stories by such contemporary masters as Clive Barker, Scott Bradfield and Ramsey Campbell.

THE THIEF OF ALWAYS
by Clive Barker (Fontana; 229 pp.; $A10.95)

Well-known horror writer Clive Barker has produced a delightful new fairy tale that mixes old and new traditions. ***The Thief of Always*** will appeal to a wide audience, but especially to the teenage and young adult market.

Ten-year-old Harvey Swick is seduced from his studies on a bleak February day in a suitably depressing English town to an enchanted 'Holiday House' where seasons come and go but children can satisfy their every wish.

Clive Barker's gentle build-up of the dark side is enhanced by his own black-and-white illustrations, while his use of time shifts adds a poignant dimension to the returns to the real world. Harvey's struggle to survive against some gruesome manifestations of evil is perhaps too easily accomplished. Nonetheless *The Thief of Always*, which sees a return to the controlled prose of Barker's early work, may well become a modern fairy tale classic.

THE HOLLOWING
by Robert Holdstock
(HarperCollins; 314 pp.; $A35)

THE HAMMER AND THE CROSS
by Harry Harrison and John Holm
(Legend; 430 pp.; $A19.95)

THE PRINCE WITH THE SILVER HAND
by Michael Moorcock
(Millennium; 361 pp.; $A39.95 hb/$A24.95 hb)

Alan Garner has called Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* series 'a new expression of the British genius for true fantasy'. In these books Holdstock conjures up a remarkable vision of an ancient English woodland where images of myth (mythagos) become real in a place and time and space that have no boundaries.

Stephen Donaldson has written that fantasy is a 'rationalisation of our dreams'. In ***The Hollowing***, a lost thirteen-year-old turns the wood into a physical embodiment of his nightmares. His father and a scientific team attempt to pierce the hidden layers of the wood before the son and the forest's secrets are lost forever. The shortness of this review cannot do justice to one of the most imaginative creations in recent fantasy writings. The series will become a classic of the genre.

One of the characters in *The Hollowing* states 'so much of myth, so much of legend . . . all comes down to one thing: death. Violent death.' That sentiment unfortunately just about sums up Harry Harrison and John Holm's ***The Hammer and the Cross***, a medieval alternative history of an England under Viking attack. Professor Tom Shippey's Anglo-Saxon knowledge, hiding under the pseudonym of John Holm, cannot lift the story line above the routine, as the bastard son of a Viking raider rises from thrall to king and saves the nation. A dark book about the Dark Ages.

Millennium's 'authorised' reprinting of the Michael Moorcock fantasy opus continues with ***The Prince with the Silver Hand***, which collects his second Corum trilogy. It relies on historical Celtic myths and blends the chivalric and the barbaric as Prince Corum tries to overturn the forces of Chaos. Moorcock here uses the plot line of gratuitous violence to satirise traditional barbaric fantasy, so well exemplified in one way by Harrison and Holm.

MERLIN AND THE LAST TRUMP
by Collin Webber (Gollancz; 269 pp.; $A36.95)

THE LIGHTLESS DOME
by Douglas Hill (Pan; 304 pp.; $A19.95)

Collin Webber, with his first novel ***Merlin and the Last Trump***,

was semi-finalist in the BBC Radio Four Bookshelf Competition. Merlin and Sir Griswold, who has killed Sir Lancelot, travel through time and link up with the unsuspecting 'puny specimen of manhood' James Dimmot to save mankind. Not up to Pratchett's standard, but an excellent beginning by Webber.

Douglas Hill takes his macho twenty-century bit-part film actor of sword and sorcery movies in the reverse sequence, i.e. from real life to a fantasy world. Unfortunately ***The Lightless Dome*** is the first part of yet another fantasy trilogy, and final judgment on the trilogy will have to wait.

INTERESTING TIMES
by Terry Pratchett (Gollancz; 283 pp.; $A29.95)

MEN AT ARMS
by Terry Pratchett (Gollancz; 288 pp.; $A34.95)

THE DISCWORLD COMPANION
by Terry Pratchett and Stephen Briggs
(Gollancz; $29.95)

MORT: A DISCWORLD BIG COMIC
by Terry Pratchett and Graham Higgins
(VG Graphics; 94 pp.; $A24.95)

In 1993 Terry Pratchett was listed in *Fortune*'s overall top 500 British money-earners, with a sum of £26.5 million against his name! Pratchett said he immediately started looking under the bed, as neither he or his bank manager could agree with that figure! Apparently the *Fortune* list is of potential earnings over a lifetime, and takes into account future movies, graphic novels and publishing output. On that score the magazine might be right, given Pratchett's popularity.

Men at Arms is a sequel to the highly successful *Guards! Guards!* (1989). There's a vacancy looming as head of the Ankh-Morpork City Guard, which also has to become multiracial. Enter Lance-Corporal Cuddy, a dwarf, and Lance-Corporal Detritus, a troll. Pratchett must have had Laurel and Hardy in mind as the basis of the comic interaction between these two delightful characters. Lance-Constable Angua represents the women in the ranks, the problem being she's a werewolf most of the time. When mysterious deaths begin occurring in Ankh-Morpork the life of the Watch and the future of the city become intermeshed.

The role of guns in society and the class struggle are the two underlying themes of *Men at Arms*. Pratchett uses humour to question and ridicule Britain's inbuilt social mores and attitudes to status in society.

Interesting Times sees the inspiration source for Pratchett's textual satire, footnotes and one-liners in the 'Aurient', where revolution and counter-revolution have a Chinese inspiration. Rincewind and Cohen the Barbarian are two of the Discworld's cast of regulars who provide the link to the previous volumes, with the Luggage making a cameo appearance. The conclusion, with Rincewind dumped in the land of XXXX, foreshadows a Discworld volume to be set in Australia.

The Discworld Companion is an invaluable aid to Pratchett's writing, both to provide a systematic overview of events and characters and deliver new material, including 'the definitive interview'. Did you know that Pratchett buys his cotton shirts in Melbourne ('of a kind I've never been able to find anywhere else') and why there's a lack of the basic sex act in the books? Pratchett also reveals how loyal he is to his fans, taking part in such activities as signing a beer can in Australia and maintaining an email fan forum. This book contains everything fans will want to know, from Gaspode the Wonder Dog to Ungulant the Anchorite.

It has always seemed to this reviewer that Pratchett's books have never been successfully made into graphic novels. Pratchett wasn't entirely satisfied with the first two efforts, *The Light Fantastic* and *The Colour of Magic*, but he has now sanctioned Graham Higgins to become illustrator of ***Mort***. Pratchett says tongue in cheek in the *Discworld Companion* that librarians and teachers approve of him because he attracts those children who 'don't read'. 'Discworld big comics' are arguably for those who don't read the novels. It would be interesting to see what the crossover between novel and comic-book purchasers is. For the trufan they have to be collected, but Pratchett's vivid imagination is best left to the individual mind to produce the images.

THE GREATEST SHOW OFF EARTH
by Robert Rankin (Doubleday; 283 pp.; $A24.95)

ODDS AND GODS
by Tom Holt (Orbit; 282 pp.; $A29.95)

Comic novels with a science fiction and fantasy bent are becoming an almost exclusive British preserve. Like Terry Pratchett, Rankin and Holt use the trappings of genre to satirise British mores. Their approach, however, is essentially broad-brush farce.

In ***The Greatest Show off Earth*** twenty-three-year-old Raymond is snatched from his allotment by aliens intent on selling him off on the interstellar slave market, but this is only the beginning of his adventures, as a threat to Earth comes from outside as well as within. With a character list that includes Arthur Scargill lookalikes, inhabitants of the planet Uranus and police from FART (the Firearms Response Team), it's clear that Rankin's comic lineage stretches from Monty Python to the Young Ones to provide a zany explosion of comic anarchy.

Odds and Gods begins with a superb comic premise, in that all the gods of mythology have ended in a British retirement home, with cauliflower cheese and ketchup as standard fare and a matron who reduces the bloodthirsty Aztec god Quetzalcoatl to subservience. A subsequent battle for cosmic supremacy ends up with a spring-cleaned Earth. A combatant is turned into a dragon whose brief is to 'protect' Australia, and there is a plan to eradicate all Australian lawyers and ensure rainfalls when the Australian cricket team is losing.

MASKERADE
by Terry Pratchett (Gollancz; 285 pp.; $A29.95)

THE WITCHES TRILOGY
by Terry Pratchett (Gollancz; 592 pp.; $A24.95)

RONAN THE BARBARIAN
by James Bibby (Gollancz; 260 pp.; $18.95)

DAMNED AND FANCY
by John Brosnan (Legend; 188 pp.; $A12.95)

DJINN RUMMY
by Tom Holt (Orbit; 277 pp.; $A35)

Vintage Pratchett is ***Maskerade***, in which his two famous characters, the benevolent witches Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg, take on, as veritable Miss Marples, the Phantom of the Opera. In 1995 *Maskerade* topped the British hardback bestseller list, edging out even Booker Prize winner Pat Barker's *The Ghost Road*.

As in most Pratchett novels there is a serious message underneath the comic satire. In this case it's deception and the masks we all wear to disguise our real inner selves. While *Maskerade* is a parody of *The Phantom of the Opera* in its story line, it's not really over till the fat lady sings. Here are some delightful sideswipes at the pomposity of the opera ritual, from Wagner to Andrew Lloyd Webber. As Pratchett writes of the Ring cycle: 'Three days of gods shouting at one another and twenty minutes of memorable tunes'.

Gollancz has released an excellent value-for-money hardback omnibus of the previous 'witch books', *Equal Rites*, *Wyrd Sisters* and *Witches Abroad*. Terry Pratchett emailed me to say the idea of ***The Witches Trilogy*** came from mass-market bookseller W. H. Smith in the United Kingdom. They needed to fill a gap in the Pratchett market until *Maskerade* was published. Female liberation, Shakespeare, the politics of royalty and overseas holidays provide some of the background for Pratchett's now-classic assemblages of one-liners, satiric settings and memorable characters.

Excellent new comedy novels come from Bibby, Brosnan and Holt, all of them in the Pratchett tradition. There has been no American equivalent of the British comic writing boom.

James Bibby's ***Ronan the Barbarian*** may echo Pratchett's 'Cohen the Barbarian', but thereafter the script is irrelevant. The reader follows the bizarre adventures of Ronan and his colleagues, including a carnivorous donkey, through a landscape peopled by mythical creatures. If you're into characters and places such as Dol Dupp and Baq D'Or and mixing it with Seventh Day Hedonists, this is the book for you. I especially liked the SOD'EM group — Sentient Organisms Who Don't Eat Men.

Equally broad humour comes from London-based Australian writer John Brosnan in ***Damned and Fancy***. An investigative journalist is transported back to a medieval world and a town called Vallium where the population is naturally depressed and the prince is a vampire. Brosnan mixes contemporary references with the past to produce a most enjoyable romp, the first of a series.

Tom Holt's fifteenth novel ***Djinn Rummy*** sees a quixotic and occasionally malevolent genie unleashed after fourteen years after living in an aspirin bottle. As the genie says, 'If a strange man comes up to you offers you sweets . . . to get into a bottle — walk away.' The young girl who releases the genie soon finds that wishes such as 'irrigating the North African desert' or 'converting the Nullarbor Plain into a swaying forest of Brussels sprouts' are nullified by an agreement between good and evil genies. Zany humour at its best.

SANDMAN: BOOK OF DREAMS
edited by Neil Gaiman and Edward Kramer (HarperCollins; $A35)

THE BURNING FOREST
by Phillip Mann (Gollancz; $A35)

A SUDDEN WILD MAGIC
by Diana Wynne Jones (Gollancz; $A35)

Neil Gaiman has amassed a huge cult following with his comic-book series of *The Sandman*, in which he transformed a Batman-style detective into a much darker figure, Morpheus, the Lord of Dream. Norman Mailer has called Sandman a 'comic strip for intellectuals'.

Now in ***Sandman: Book of Dreams***, Gaiman and fellow editor Edward Kramer have brought together a number of distinguished writers, such as Gene Wolfe and Tad Williams, to explore Gaiman's creation and the familial beings who represent various states of consciousness. Time frames include John Ford's 'Chain Home, Low', which moves from the First World War to the Second, and Susannah Clarke's 'Stopp't Clock Yard', an investigation of alchemical powers in seventeenth-century London. An unusual yet excellent collection.

In the first volume of the *A Land Fit for Heroes* trilogy, three dissidents, two young Britons and one Roman, escape from brutal and hedonistic Roman overlords. They seek a mystical standing stone that acts as a focal point for the British underground that has grown up unknown to the Romans.

Mann uses his created world to highlight contemporary issues, such as totalitarianism versus individualism and conservation versus exploitation. In the second book of the trilogy, Mann continued his alternativee history of a Roman Britain in which the Roman Empire has never fallen. It now dominates the entire globe. Solar cars run on European expressways, which are surrounded by huge forests.

In ***The Burning Forest***, the final volume of the trilogy, civilisation in the twentieth century is limited to the Roman towns and camps. The Emperor now wants to burn all Britain's woods to turn the place into a large sheep farm. Beneath this surface tension, however, comes a strong message from New Zealander Mann, who stresses the power of the earth and intuitive beliefs.

Noted British children's writer Diana Wynne Jones, in her adult fantasy novel ***A Sudden Wild Magic***, also tells the story of an alternative Earth, whose inhabitants threaten the existence of our own Earth. Their universe seeks to solve its own environmental problems by unleashing them on ours. Unlike most fantasy writers, Jones is strong on characterisation (note her female 'away team', which includes a single mother with child in tow), but her plotting is weaker, so the chaos of magic is reflected in the whole.

WHEN THE LIGHTS GO OUT by Tanith Lee
(Headline; $A39.95)

ANCIENT ECHOES by Robert Holdstock
(HarperCollins; $A35)

In Tanith Lee's ***When the Lights Go Out***, a young girl objects to her mother and her mother's young lover taking over her bed. She takes up with a motley group of dropouts in a decaying seaside hotel at the end of season, which symbolises the end of relationships. Lee's 'heroine' exacts her revenge in a startling conclusion that resembles that of the movie *The Wicker Man*. Lee's prolific writing and obsessional drives continue to amaze.

Ancient Echoes is another in Robert Holdstock's series in which the myths and legends of the past interweave with the present. Jack Chatwin, as a young boy and then as a man, finds that he is increasingly drawn to an ancient alternative earth. Holdstock presents a convincing picture of the scientific realities of such contact and, as ever, poses questions as to the nature of our spiritual relationship with the earth, without sounding too New Ageish.

JINGO
by Terry Pratchett (Gollancz; 285 pp.; $A34.95)

In ***Jingo***, Terry Pratchett's theme is the darkness and futility of war. An Atlantis-type island emerges from the sea. In some ways, the feelings aroused by the island echo the Falklands/Malvinas dispute, but the war actually referred to is the Gulf War.

The guards of the Ankh-Morpork City Watch are the main characters as Ankh-Morpork goes to war with Klatch. The subplot, in which two of the Watch help the Patrician in his submarine, is the funniest section of the book.

Much of the appeal of *Jingo* is the building on the strengths of characterisation and plot derived from previous novels, although new Pratchett readers could start with this novel. Discworld is become more and more like today's Earth, with football a substitute for war.

ROVERANDOM
by J. R. R. Tolkien (HarperCollins; 106 pp.; $A22.95)

TALES FROM THE PERILOUS REALM
by J. R. R. Tolkien (HarperCollins; 178 pp.; $A29.95)

Tolkien lives! Well, almost. Tolkien's old Merton College academic gown sold for £850 and a manuscript letter for £650. Any remaining publishable Tolkien material will be avidly sought and bought, particularly as *The Lord of the Rings* was voted 'Australia's favourite book of all time' in 1997.

After the mammoth, rather indigestible twelve-volume *History of Middle Earth*, made up of Tolkien drafts and editorial commentary, comes a delightful novella, ***Roverandom***, which has been culled and edited from the Tolkien papers by Christina Scull and Wayne Hammond (authors of *J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*).

Compiled from several drafts, *Roverandom* has its origin in 1925, when Tolkien's son Michael lost his favourite lead toy dog on holiday. To console Michael, Tolkien concocted a story about a real dog Rover, who is turned into a toy dog by an irate wizard and travels both to the moon and under the sea in a variety of adventures and encounters.

Five original watercolour illustrations by Tolkien, taken from the originals in Oxford's Bodleian Library, are reproduced. They provide a charming supplement to an engaging story for children of all ages. Tolkien enthusiasts will see some glimpses of features, including a dragon, that evolved into *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and early evidence of Tolkien concerns, such as his distaste for litter and pollution, as well as a surprising depth of allusion to myths, sagas and fairy stories.

'Faerie' plays an important role in ***Tales from the Perilous Realm***, which may seem like a new title, but is, in fact, a bringing together of four well-known 'lesser' Tolkien items, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, *Leaf by Niggle* and *Smith of Wooton Manor*.

Tolkien wrote *Farmer Giles of Ham* in the 1930s, again partly to engage his children. It was finally published in 1949, and evokes the distant past of Britain. A tale of gentle satire and wit, it tells of Farmer Giles, who becomes an unlikely hero, much to his surprise. The story depicts, as in *The Hobbit*, the power of the 'little people', as well as featuring another wily dragon.

The Adventures of Tom Bombadil comprises hobbit songs, rhymes and poems, and is perhaps the least successful of these pieces. *Tom* first appeared in 1934, based on a Dutch doll of Michael Tolkien, and has a background meant to represent, in Tolkien's words, 'the spirit of the [vanishing] Oxford and Berkshire countryside'. *Tom* has links with *The Lord of the Rings*.

Leaf by Niggle, completed in late 1939, was published in 1945. It covers the struggle and failure of an obsessive painter, Niggle, to complete his large tree portrait before he dies, and his time in the hereafter. It is a tale full of religious allegories and Tolkien's worries about finishing *The Lord of the Rings*. It also reflects Tolkien's aversion to the destructive power of war, as well as a retelling of the *Everyman* saga.

Smith of Wooton Manor, the last story that Tolkien wrote, was called by him an 'old man's story, filled with the presage of bereavement'. It is pure 'faerie', as Smith visits the 'Perilous Realm' before having to relinquish its joy.

BRITISH HORROR

ALONE WITH THE HORRORS
by Ramsey Campbell (Headline; 367 pp.; $A39.95)

Just as P. D. James is more than a crime writer, so Ramsey Campbell is more than a horror writer. ***Alone with the Horrors*** brings together thirty-nine stories written from 1961 to 1991 with a photo montage by J. K. Potter.

Campbell uses his experiences in Liverpool, where he still lives, in many of his stories.

'The Interloper' allows Campbell's 'strange revenge', in his own words, for school horrors at the hands of the Christian Brothers teaching staff, which explode into real nightmares in the catacombs of deserted warehouses.

Similarly, the bitter-sweet explorations of young love are juxtaposed with the death of an old vagrant 'Mackintosh Willy' in a Liverpool park.

Campbell smoothly weaves the supernatural past into the banal realities of twentieth-century life in an excellent collection of his work.

THE CHALICE by Phil Rickman
(Macmillan; 550 pp.; $A35)

VOICE OF THE FIRE by Alan Moore
(Gollancz; 320 pp.; $A22)

DARK TERRORS 2
edited by Stephen Jones and David Sutton
(Gollancz; 379 pp.; $A39.95)

FOG HEART by Thomas Tessier
(Gollancz; 319 pp.; $A35)

Phil Rickman's ***The Chalice*** reads like a mixture of Agatha Christie and Stephen King. The search around Glastonbury for the Dark Chalice, the opposite of the Holy Grail, provides a focus for a dark side that includes landed aristocracy, a midwife turned high priestess and New Age travellers. In the opposite corner are the 'goodies', who include an ageing hippy Councillor, an elderly spinster (aka Miss Marple), a beautiful bookshop owner, and a dog. It doesn't take Einstein to guess who wins — but only just.

The stories in Alan Moore's collection ***Voice of the Fire*** are subtitled 'dark midwinter tales from the heart of England'. The locale is ten square miles of Northamptonshire, but the stories are set on a chronology ranging from 4000 BC to the present day. Crusaders, witches and murderers all feature, as Moore argues that history is one intertwined pattern, with brutality and oppression a constant.

Dark Terrors 2 brings together an impressive collection of original stories. Joy Russell's 'Lily's Whisper' is outstanding, with its retrospective evocation of a concentration camp experience via the life of a Polish refugee in New York and the effect on a younger relation. Harlan Ellison's 'The Museum on Cyclops Avenue' juxtaposes mythical images and academic in Stockholm, where the main character willingly suspends his disbelief. Peter Straub and Nicholas Royle are just two of the other authors who contribute to an outstanding collection.

Thomas Tessier's time at University College Dublin is reflected in ***Fog Heart***, providing the Irish background to a novel that moves between America, Ireland and England. A childhood death resonates through a novel in which a murderer and a mystic see their lives and ultimate deaths linked. Tessier's novel is not for the squeamish, but it certainly ranks with Koontz and King at the top of the literate horror stakes.

VIOLIN
by Anne Rice (Chatto & Windus; 289 pp.; $A35 hb)

Anne Rice's ***Violin*** had a print run of 750,000 copies in the USA alone. It is a slim volume compared with some of Rice's more recent offerings. It is also a standalone volume, and does not comprise one of her bestselling series, such as her 'Vampire' quintet.

Violin, however, does feature many familiar themes, many undoubtedly reflecting some of Rice's own real-life experiences, such as the death of a daughter, battles with weight and a semi-spiritual Brazilian odyssey. The publisher is marketing the novel as Rice's 'confessional' novel.

The main character Triana, is in her early fifties, sees her family die around her. After Triana's husband dies, a ghost of the undead appears: a nineteenth-century Austrian aristocrat named Stefan Stefanovsky. He takes Triana back to Vienna of the first part of the nineteenth century, where Stefan's teacher is Beethoven. Triana develops her musical talents, not least because she possesses Stefan's Stradivarius.

Returning to the present, Triana becomes a musical sensation via her virtuoso violin playing, but Stefan remains a mysterious figure in the background. A visit to Brazil, in particular Rio de Janeiro, culminates in a powerful musical performance, where Stefan and Triana begin to come to terms with their interaction, and Triana realises the nature of a possible reincarnation of her daughter.

This all may be a little weird and a less-than-wonderful plot line to non-readers of Rice, but *Violin* is one of her best novels for some time. It's tighter and more focused than many others, encompassing the traditional Rice themes and concerns. By the conclusion, many readers may well be strung out both musically and emotionally.

AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION

GLORY SEASON
by David Brin (Orbit; 600 pp.; $A39.95)

SIDESHOW
by Sheri S. Tepper
(HarperCollins; 467 pp.; $A35.00)

THROY
by Jack Vance (New English Library; 186 pp.; $A19.95 pb/$A39.95 hb)

David Brin is one of the newish top-flight SF writers; his novel *Earth* (1990) won several awards. ***Glory Season*** is equally long and thought provoking. Brin muses in an afterword that 'it is dangerous these days for a male to write even glancingly on feminist themes. Did anyone attack Margaret Atwood's right to extrapolate religio-machismo in *The Handmaid's Tale* . . . this author claims only to present . . . a thought experiment about one conceivable world of "What If".'

The 'what if' is another isolated world founded by women. Bio-engineering has produced a clan and clone-like female society with men living a separate largely subservient existence. A few new clone female children, 'vars' or variants, exist, and *Glory Season* follows the fortunes of one young female var. Her picaresque adventures allow also the exploration of a multi-layered society where biological and social struggles interact.

Sheri S. Tepper's ***Sideshow*** also examines social organisation from a feminist perspective. Tepper's planet Elsewhere, which was founded by academics, naturally supports a society of rigid but anarchic cultural diversity controlled by 'enforcers'. The clash between the forces of diversity and unity, which echoes contemporary Earth, leads on to an evolutionary climax.

Less cerebral but just as entertaining is Jack Vance's ***Throy***, the third in his 'Cadwal Chronicles', which really need to be read in conjunction with the previous novels *Araminta Station* and *Ecce and Old Earth*. Again various factions fight for the control and destiny of a planet noted for its natural beauty and which has strict restrictions on growth.

NEUROMANCER
by William Gibson (HarperCollins; 277 pp.; $A35)

VIRTUAL LIGHT
by William Gibson
(Viking; 266 pp.; $A30 hb; $A19.95 pb)

Neuromancer, first published in 1984, is one of the icons of science fiction literature, as well as the cyberpunk movement. *Neuromancer* became the bible of the hackers and Timothy Leary, who felt that computers were the 'LSD of the 1980s'. The German hacker Pengo claimed the novel inspired him to steal data from US computers, which he later sold to the KGB.

The novel is, however, much more than a cultural phenomenon; it sits squarely in the American tradition of 'mean streets' writing that includes Dashiel Hammett and Raymond Chandler.

HarperCollins has now issued the tenth anniversary edition of the novel with a new afterword by Gibson, which shows him rather bemused by its success. Gibson's novel anticipated the worlds of virtual reality, as computer 'cowboys' jack themselves into cyberspace to steal information called 'ice'. Gibson's burnt-out cases struggle to survive in an overcrowded world, ruled by amoral multinational corporations, where everything and everyone has a price. His later books have confirmed him as the bleak visionary of the information superhighway.

Gibson brilliantly merges the spy, detective and science fiction genres in ***Virtual Light***. Set in the separate states of Northern and Southern California in the year 2005, *Virtual Light* portrays a society dramatically polarised between rich and poor and where the social and business seismic fault lines threaten to overwhelm the integrity of the individual. The rich huddle in their cocoon-like condos with drugs and virtual reality as escapes — the Colombian connection runs both — while the poor survive in an anarchic township literally hanging onto and off a disused San Francisco Bay Bridge.

When a lowly paid female motorbike courier steals a pair of black glasses, little does she know that these are 'virtual reality' glasses which contain valuable information on the future of San Francisco. The plot, which involves an honest ex-cop becoming involved in the search for the glasses and the threats to both their lives, is, however, largely irrelevant. It is the description of the multi-layered future society at which Gibson excels.

Each paragraph adds to the layers of background futuristic detail, from airline seat screens into which email can be downloaded to beaded handcuffs that meld into the skin if attempts are made to remove them. Japanese gyms cater to customers who want to be injected with Brazilian foetal tissue and thus have their bone structure reinforced. Video cult sects, such as those who worship old movie stars, abound. Mongolian refugees, as the most recent migrants, run the car washes while Russian emigrés populate the Los Angeles Police Department.

Virtual reality glasses, which feed directly into the optic nerve, are both a fantasy release and an information source. They can, for example, provide descriptions of flora and fauna as the wearer walks or jogs. The glasses are also a symbol to reflect back the scary world Gibson has created. Scary because, as in the best science fiction, this is a credible extrapolation of the best and decidedly the worst of the present.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S CALIBAN
by Roger McBride Allen
(Millennium; 312 pp.; $34.95 hb/$19.95 pb)

Most readers would have assumed that with Isaac Asimov's death in 1992 his extensive series of robot stories would have ceased, but now comes a new novel, ***Isaac Asimov's Caliban***, which is promoted as 'true to the vision of the master'.

Based on a discussion with Asimov before he died, Allen has taken the concept of robots who can operate outside Asimov's cautionary 'Three Laws of Robotics' and produced an extremely interesting extrapolation for those original premises. Set on the planet Inferno, the novel begins when a leading female robotic researcher is brutally attacked and an experimental robot, Caliban, who was at the scene of the crime, goes missing. Naturally the obvious suspect, the robot, is not the culprit. The unravelling of the overall conspiracy is a fascinating blend of the science fiction and detective genres.

RANDOM ACTS OF SENSELESS VIOLENCE
by Jack Womack (HarperCollins; 256 pp.; $A35)

There are many novels that describe the end of civilisation as we know it. Urban decay and violence in major American cities provide one scenario for future extrapolation.

Jack Womack's ***Random Acts of Senseless Violence*** describes the decline and fall of a middle-class American family in New York in the near future as both parents lose their jobs. The wife loses her teaching job at new York University — 'I wasn't bad enough to get tenure' — and the husband his scriptwriting contracts. His new job under an almost Dickensian figure of a bookshop owner ends in disaster.

Their fate is told from the vantage point of their twelve-year-old daughter Lola, and is a descent into hell as jobs, insurance, medical benefits and urban values collapse. Lola's transformation into a 'streetwild' criminal is poignantly depicted both in events and the change of the text into 'ambient-speak', the world of Womack's 1988 novel *Ambient*. *Random Acts of Senseless Violence* sounds warning to the next generation, the potential 'orphans of history'.

GREEN MARS
by Kim Stanley Robinson
(HarperCollins; 575 pp.; $A35)

MOVING MARS
by Greg Bear (Legend; 452 pp.; $A19.95)

Mars continues to exercise its attraction as a fictional source after a plethora of novels about the planet in 1993. Robinson, with the second in a trilogy, and Bear both offer high-quality 'hard SF' views of the late twenty-first century.

Green Mars follows the award-winning *Red Mars* (1993) and chronicles the aftermath of a revolution by the original colonists and the efforts of the Earth-based multinationals to terraform the planet. The continuing struggle between the 'Martians' and the power factions of Earth against the backdrop of a vividly imagined terrain, encompass another long sprawling novel where there is no black and white in conflict, only shades of grey, or perhaps Green.

Greg Bear literally ends up ***Moving Mars***, but before that another future-history scenario, modelled on the American

Revolution, unfolds. Once more the young colony struggles against the power of transnationals on Earth. While superficially similar to Robinson in locale and chronology, *Moving Mars* is less political than ultimately physical and metaphysical. The struggle, as seen through the eyes of the female protagonist, provides the stimulus for scientists to kick-start the continuum for the ultimate escape for and from Mars.

KALIFORNIA
by Marc Laidlaw (St Martin's Press; 1993; $US18.95)

Cyberpunk visions of a future California abound in such books as Neil Stephenson's *Snow Crash* and William Gibson's *Virtual Light*. Laidlaw's images, in ***Kalifornia***, of the state on the eve of its bicentennial in 2050 are perhaps less concentrated than those two authors provide, but no less vivid.

Laidlaw's Figueroa TV family, a future version of the Brady Bunch, are literally wired for action, in that they can directly link with their audience and their soap adventures. Top ratings ensue, until the apparent death of the mother leads to their TV demise, except for Poppy Figueroa, who gives a 'live' birth to the viewing audience. Unfortunately the baby Calafia is stolen soon after the birth. As the first child to be born 'wired', does she have superhuman powers? The Plot revolves around the attempt to find the child's adbuctors and the power struggle between the religious (Kali to the fore) and political factions who want to control the world.

Laidlaw is more assured in *Kalifornia* than in his debut novel *Dad's Nuke* and its successor *Neon Lotus*. *Kalifornia* contains a mother of a conception which marks Laidlaw as one of SF's brightest talents.

THE WALL AT THE END OF THE WORLD
by Jim Aikin (Ace; 309 pp.; $US4.99)

Jim Aikin's second novel ***The Wall at the End of the World*** begins promisingly. He creates a closed telepathic world of peaceful towns and villages, surrounded by a wilderness beyond 'the wall'. The one problem is that non-telepaths are 'cleansed', i.e. killed, and some, like Danlo the main character, resent this — in this case because his wife was 'cleansed'. Danlo manages to shield his mental doubts from the overseers, but when he is captured by a band of women warriors from beyond the wall he begins to question the historical raison d'être of the whole society.

Gradually the picture emerges that this world is California of nearly a millennium hence, and the reader, via Danlo's adventures, pieces together the traumatic story of the intervening period. Aikin's intriguingly constructed society unravels a little too easily, however, and perhaps too mystically, for the novel to be a total success. Aikin nonetheless is a writer of considerable promise, whose message is clearly that the right of individual action is more important than engineered conformity, whatever the cost.

THE NORTON BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION
edited by Ursula K. Le Guin and Brian Attebury (Norton; 869 pp.; $A34.95)

THE COMPLETE STORIES, VOLUME TWO
by Isaac Asimov (HarperCollins; 550 pp.; $A35)

Ursula Le Guin and Brian Attebury have bought together in ***The Norton Book of Science Fiction*** one of the most outstanding collections of short stories, not just SF, of recent years. Its subtitle 'North American Science Fiction 1960–1990' gives it a more specific focus than many previous SF anthologies. Le Guin's long and perceptive introduction, which extrapolates from the stories in the anthology, is light years away from the clichéd introductions to many of Isaac Asimov's anthologies. Asimov, incidentally, is not included in *Norton*, as many of his best stories pre-date 1960.

The second volume of Asimov's collection of short stories has now been published in a UK/Australian release, even though it appeared in the USA in 1992 before Asimov's death. Fifty stories, including Asimov's own favourite 'The Bicentennial Man', telling of the robotic urge to be human, a neat reversal of AI trends, ensure this is another collector's item.

Robots, space ships and aliens don't feature heavily in Le Guin and Attebury's sixty-five stories, which may come as a surprise to non-SF readers. Many of the best SF stories examine the human condition more closely than they did in the 'gee whiz' science fiction golden age of the 1940s and 1950s. Another element of freshness in the anthology is that very few of the stories that won awards in the period 1960–1990 are represented.

Le Guin and contributing editor Karen Fowler also include some relatively lesser known women writers, which reflects understandable editorial prerogatives. Women as outsiders is a recurrent theme, as are examinations of historical alternatives. No easy technological solutions or predictions of nuclear doom here — rather a who's who of SF tackling the predicaments of humanity from the present to the varied futures.

A PLAGUE OF ANGELS
by Sheri S. Tepper (HarperCollins; 423 pp.; $A35)

Tepper's young female orphan emerges in ***A Plague of Angels*** into a squalid far-future patchwork world from which most of humanity has escaped to the stars. The mixture of nuclear-powered androids with engineered elements of fairy-tale characters, to name but two events of a multi-layered future, might seem far fetched, but the logic is carefully explained and Tepper consistently poses questions as to the nature of human intelligence and evolution. Highly recommended.

GRIDIRON
by Philip Kerr (Chatto & Windus; 373 pp.; $A19.95)

IDLEWILD
by Mark Lawson (Picador; 306 pp.; $A24.95)

Mainstream writers continually rediscover stock formulae from genre literature and make claim to 'novel' ideas. Thus P. D. James's *The Children of Men* echoes Brian Aldiss's *Greybeard*, published three decades earlier. Bestselling author Philip Kerr now seizes upon the idea of a malevolent computer, seemingly obvlivious of many fiction predecessors, such as D. F. Jones and Arthur C. Clarke, while Lawson's novel postulates an alternative America, but many writers such as Philip K. Dick and Harry Turtledove have been there before him.

In ***Gridiron*** Kerr postulates a really 'bad day at the office' as a computer controlling a new hi-tech/high-rise building in Los Angeles, which can look after its tenants without human intervention, goes berserk. The people trapped in the build-

ing are either frozen to death in lifts, drowned in bathrooms, or poisoned in swimming pools. The plot centres around the quest for human survival in a threatening closed environment. Sold for a million dollars to the movies, *Gridiron* would make a perfect vehicle for Bruce Willis.

Idlewild imagines a world in which John F. Kennedy survived the Dallas assassination attempt and Marilyn Monroe was saved from her suicide/murder. The basic problem is that British journalist Mark Lawson generally runs out of steam after introducing his what-if concept.

The novel is set in November 1993, with Kennedy, now 76 and still hated for his continuation of the Vietnam War during his second term. Marilyn Monroe, after marriage to Aristotle Onassis, seems to echo Mae West in her later life. Various subplots highlight the absurdities of contemporary America, but on the whole *Idlewild* becomes a so-what story. If Lawson really wants to prove that Kennedy would have been as culpable in Vietnam as Johnson, there are probably better ways to propound the message. In the case of Kennedy and Monroe, the truth of their reality was certainly stranger than Lawson's fiction.

FOUR WAYS TO FORGIVENESS
by Ursula K. Le Guin (Gollancz; 253 pp.; $A35)

Ursula Le Guin's science fiction of the late 1960s earned her cult status. She later moved away from the genre for a number of years because, as she says, she had ODed on it. ***Four Ways to Forgiveness*** comprises four novellas set in her future Hainish world, which she depicted in such famous novels as *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*.

Le Guin focuses on the role of women in a world where slavery and sexual servitude have been common. Le Guin's stories take place on the neighbouring planets of Yeowe and Werel, whose contact with the Ekumen Federation brings repression into conflict with galactic 'enlightment'. This is particularly encapsulated in the story 'Forgiveness Day'. A young emancipated female ambassador is sent to Werel as a symbol of female freedom, but finds herself in conflict with local customs. Finally she faces danger when captured by a resistance group. Her hate/love relationship with her local bodyguard is poignantly and realistically developed.

'Betrayals' sees the forgiveness of a former slave for an oppressive tyrant.

'A Man of the People' draws on Indian pueblo culture to provide the background of a young boy who grows up to become a historian/liberator of oppressed women slaves.

'A Woman's Liberation' echoes this theme with the story of a female slave who becomes a scholar and teacher. The freedom is twice won, first from slavery and then from male oppression.

Le Guin is back at her best with this examination of the nature of love, freedom and forgiveness.

A FISHERMAN OF THE INLAND SEA
by Ursula K. Le Guin (Gollancz; 191 pp.; $A35)

Ursula Le Guin takes inspiration from some of the artists of the past, such as Blake and Goya, in her collection ***A Fisherman of the Inland Sea***.

The eight stories include a trio from her 'Hainish' future world. The title story sees the protagonist Hideo travel through time and space to enable Le Guin to explore the paradoxes in the lives and relationships of interstellar travellers.

In stark contrast, 'The First Contact with the Gorgonids' and 'The Ascent of the North Face' are short joky stories. The former, set in an Australian outback settlement where naturally everyone is called Bruce, sees an American tourist couple making first contact with aliens, whom they had originally believed to be Aborigines. The latter parodies stories about climbing with the aid of Sherpa guides.

Le Guin remains as incisive and perceptive as she was when she first rose to literary fame in the late 1960s.

INFINITE JEST by David Foster Wallace
(Little, Brown; 1079 pp.; $A39.95)

David Foster Wallace's huge second book, ***Infinite Jest***, has led to comparisons with authors such as Thomas Pynchon, William Gaddis and John Barth, given its length, structure and idiosyncratic nature.

Wallace places his novel in the beginning of the twenty-first century. The USA has become 'ONAN', the Organisation of North American Nations, which suggests a society intent on self-gratification rather than any deeper values. Corporate sponsorship, which was seen at its best and worst in the Atlanta Olympics, has been taken to the extreme. Individual years are named with brand names, with most of the novel taking place in the 'Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment'. The book revolves around the three brothers of the Incandenza family and their dead father, with activity focused on two very different institutions near Boston, one a tennis school and the other a drug rehabilitation clinic.

Infinite Jest is in fact the title of a film that is so entrancing that viewers who watch it die of pleasure. Various individuals and institutions vie to gain control of the film for their own ends. Thus entertainment and addiction become one. Wallace seems to be arguing overall that the old historical values have been overthrown, but they haven't been replaced by anything more substantial than the cult of self-gratification. If we are increasingly hedonistic, the mood is terminal.

Don't look, however, for a coherent plot, but revel in the word play, comic energy and memories of the novelistic experiments of the 1970s. One wonders, but just for a second, if David Foster Wallace isn't Australia's David Foster. *Infinite Jest* is a dystopian fantasy of the American dream turned into a nightmare of irony.

MATTER'S END
by Gregory Benford (Gollancz; $A39.95)

Gregory Benford's ***Matter's End*** collects his early stories, written in the late 1970s and 1980s, many of which are precursors to his novels. A McCarthyite-dominated alternative America is covered in 'We Could Do Worse'. The title story, which is about quantum physics and set in India, contains elements of Arthur C. Clarke in its mystical visions.

RESPECTABLE VAMPIRES

MEMNOCH THE DEVIL
by Anne Rice (Chatto & Windus; 354 pp.; $A29.95)

READING THE VAMPIRE
by Ken Gelder (Routledge; 161 pp.; $A29.95)

THE VAMPYRE
by Tom Holland
(Little Brown; 339 pp.; $A19.95)

SINS OF THE BLOOD
by Kristine Kathryn Rusch (Millennium; 357 pp.; $A14.95)

PRISM OF THE NIGHT
by Katherine Ramsland
(Plume; 415 pp.; $A19.95)

THE ANNE RICE TRIVIA BOOK
by Katherine Ramsland
(Ballantine; 244 pp.; $A11.95)

LOVE IN VEIN
edited by Poppy Z. Brite
(HarperPrism; 405 pp.; $A19.95)

Vampires have recently acquired literary respectability, partly through the phenomenal success of the Anne Rice novels, the latest of which, *Memnoch the Devil*, has just appeared, and through non-fiction analyses such as Ken Gelder's ***Reading the Vampire***, which highlight the societal subconscious of vampire stories.

Gelder, Reader in English at Melbourne University, examines the myth of Dracula from Byron, Freud and Marx through to the cinematic manifestations, although his text was clearly written before Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* book was released as a movie. Vampirism mirrors the anxieties of a culture in the same way that UFOs did in the United States in the 1950s. Colonialism, antisemitism, homosexuality and lesbianism, wayward youth and the 'global exotic' are just some of the themes that Gelder tackles.

Interestingly, the first map of Tasmania had a large area named 'Transylvania', which reveals how an unassuming term for 'beyond or to the other side of the forest' has been transformed into a vampiric location.

Gelder's book, while not groundbreaking (for example, he admits an initial lack of knowledge of some of the recent icons of vampire literature), does provide a clear and cogent synthesis of the power of the vampire magic.

Tom Holland (***The Vampyre***) gained his doctorate at Oxford with a thesis on Lord Byron. The vampire as a tragic Byronic hero is a familiar one. Byron's physician John Polidori wrote 'The Vampyre' in 1819, based on an idea of Byron's. Holland provides an intriguing twist to the Polidori/Byron links by making Byron an immortal vampire, by recounting his transformation into a contemporary descendant of Lord Ruthven. *The Vampyre* has too much history, despite some wonderful vignettes, and not enough of today, but it is an intriguing addition to the vampiric canon.

Sins of the Blood by Kristine Kathryn Rusch postulates a world in which vampires are acknowledged to exist. Her main character, who belongs to an official vampire eradication agency, suffers an identity crisis that becomes even worse when she has to track down her brother. Rusch's juxtaposition of contemporary America with such a scenario proves less easy for the reader's necessary suspension of disbelief than that produced by Rice.

Dr Katharine A. Ramsland's ***Prism of the Night*** is an updated paperback version of her authoritative biography of Anne Rice. She traces Rice's life — for instance, she finds that Rice as a child was taken for walks through decaying cemeteries, and her initial efforts as a writer were influenced by her daughter's tragic death.

Rice is still working out personal bereavements in her latest novel ***Memnoch the Devil***. The slow deaths of her father and a long-time personal friend led Rice, as Ramsland reveals, into a searching for the meaning of life and exploration of human mortality.

Memnoch the Devil begins as the vampire Lestat is enlisted to aid the fallen archangel Memnoch, who is unable to accept the ways of a cruel and merciless God. The visions of Dante and Blake are consciously revisited as Rice becomes embroiled in life after death and philosophical debates. Rice fans who anticipate that the focus will be Lestat will be disappointed, and may indeed be shocked by the distastefulness of disillusionment.

The Anne Rice Trivia Book is really only for Rice fans who can test their intimate knowledge of Rice's twelve novels, including her erotic trilogy written as A. N. Roquelaure.

Poppy Z. Brite's vampire anthology ***Love in Vein*** contains twenty original stories by authors such as Gene Wolfe and Charles de Lint. Brite argues that the vampire is about 'the dark dream-side of ourselves'. In this context Douglas Clegg's 'White Chapel' is outstanding, with its deliberate echoes of Joseph Conrad, as a woman travels up river in Thailand to confront a destiny that is both fulfilling and self-destroying.

Brite has produced an outstanding no-holds-barred anthology that reflects the continuing psychological resonance of the vampire myth.

HOLY FIRE by Bruce Sterling
(Millennium; $A35)

IDORU by William Gibson
(Viking; $A19.95)

In ***Holy Fire*** American author Bruce Sterling creates a world devastated by plague, but which otherwise seems little different from the present, with its acquisition of wealth and hedonistic pleasure. A ninety-four-year-old woman is rejuvenated to become a twenty-year-old, and experiences the usual follies of youth, including the need to change the world. Sterling's rather clinical account of a picaresque life leads to sterility rather than salvation.

In ***Idoru***, cyberpunk guru William Gibson continues his visions of technodecadent virtual futures. A young girl sets out to find why a member of a super rock group Lo-Rez wants to marry a Japanese 'idoru' or idol, who only exists in virtual reality as a holographic construct. As usual with Gibson, the plot is less important than the imagined visions of nanotech buildings (Tokyo is replicating itself) and artificial intelligences. Look out also for a brutal but efficient Australian bodyguard, 'the Toecutter'.

GIBBON'S DECLINE AND FALL by Sheri S. Tepper
(HarperCollins; $A19.95)

Sheri S. Tepper's ***Gibbon's Decline and Fall*** takes six female classmates of wildly disparate natures from the early 1960s through to the Millennium, where misogyny and over-population are on the rise. Tepper's feminist message is overly strident at times, with a plot in which one of the classmates, who mysteriously disappears, holds at the same time the fate of humanity. Tepper's 'incredible story', to quote Gibbon, does reflect on an 'enraged people' and their passion.

SLANT
by Greg Bear (Legend; $A35.00)

Greg Bear's ***Slant*** is set in the middle of the twenty-first century, when high-technology developments have reduced poverty, and the emotionally unstable can be treated through radical therapy treatments. This idyllic surface cracks wide open with murders, rogue artificial intelligences, computers, cliques aiming for immortality and nanotech weaponry, giving this hard SF novel more ideas than most conventional novels can only dream of.

ANTARCTICA
by Kim Stanley Robinson (HarperCollins; 412 pp.; $A36.95 hb/$A22.95 tpb)

Antarctica is an ecological blockbuster. Robinson interweaves the historical exploration of Antarctica with a near-future scenario in which the major powers of the world vie with one another to exploit the mineral riches of Antarctica. USA is governed by a party whose ecological concerns are overruled by multinational lobby groups and a need to overcome energy crises in a world in which temperatures are now ten degrees higher than a century before.

A radical environment group decides that Antarctica, as the last largely unspoilt continent, cannot be left to the manipulation of the multinationals who wish to see the Antarctic Treaty watered down even further. Robinson, through the experiences of his leading characters, describes how the Antarctic bases are threatened by 'ecoterrorists'. A separate group of 'ecotopians', who live in harmony with the continent, provide an extra dimension in the struggle for life and death that erupts on the cold terrain of Antarctica.

Robinson's view of the need for utopian ecodevelopments occasionally leads to his message overwhelming the action, but overall he seems set to repeat the success of his recent bestselling 'Mars' trilogy by providing solid scientific extrapolation with a rousing story line. Robinson has said in a recent interview that Antarctica is the 'most Martian place on Earth', with its extremes of weather and environment.

The area covered by Antarctic sea ice appears to have dropped by 25 per cent between the mid 1950s and the early 1970s, as reported recently by the Australian Antarctic Division. *Antarctica*, with its many New Zealand and Australian references, has a decidedly regional flavour, but its warning message is universal.

AMERICAN HORROR

NIGHTMARES AND DREAMSCAPES
by Stephen King
(Hodder & Stoughton; 593 pp.; $A34.95)

Nightmares and Dreamscapes is Stephen King's third collection of stories after *Night Shift* (1978) and *Skeleton Crew* (1985). King admits in a preface that the latest collection is an 'uneven Aladdin's cave of a book', and this is certainly the case here, with a decided variation in quality of the stories. Nonethless King fans will be well satisfied, and new readers of King, if these indeed exist, will find much to provide that 'frisson of fear' one expects from him.

In chronological sequence the twenty-three stories date from a reworked 'It Grows on You', which King originally wrote while a student at the University of Maine, and which features 'a final look at the doomed little town' of Castle Rock where many of King's stories have been set. A house that carries a dark secret from early this century symbolises the passing of the generations.

'Crouch End', stimulated by H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos and King's own time in London, is less satisfactory because of its intrinsic illogicalities. It recounts how two American tourists are trapped in a gruesome alternative London.

King fans will be particularly pleased to see available in this collection 'Dolan's Cadillac' and 'My Pretty Pony', which were previously only available in limited editions.

'Suffer the Little Children' is an out-and-out 'ghastly sick-joke' (King's words), as children literally turn into monsters and their school teacher exacts a horrifying revenge.

THE GOLDEN
by Lucius Shepard
(Ziesing; 1993; 245 pp.; $US29.95)
(Millennium; 1993; 216 pp.; $A34.95)

Lucius Shepard's ***The Golden***, which is reviewed in the British hardback edition, distributed in Australia, and in Mark Ziesing's excellent trade edition (there is also a deluxe edition at $US65), is a combination of vampire and detective story. It is set in the 1860s, in a huge castle in the style of Peake's Gormenghast, somewhere in Eastern Europe. A

group of vampires assembles to drink 'the golden' blood (of a Chateau Lafite type) from the body of a young girl. When the girl is murdered and her blood illegally 'decanted', novice vampire and ex- detective Michael Beheim sets out to discover the culprit.

This plot device allows Shepard to probe both the exotic and erotic strangeness of the vampires. Beheim explores within the plot line the intrigues that overcome the boredom of immortality. *The Golden*'s strange beauty lingers in the mind like the aftertaste of a good wine.

FROM THE TEETH OF ANGELS
by Jonathan Carroll (HarperCollins; 223 pp.; $A35)

THE PANIC HAND
by Jonathan Carroll (HarperCollins; 240 pp.; $A35)

American writer Jonathan Carroll (whose first novel *The Land of Laughs* is now a collector's piece) is as adept a literary purveyor of restrained horror in contemporary fiction as Ian McEwan or Martin Amis, but his domicile until recently in Vienna and his lack of self promotion have left largely unrecognised his series of accomplished novels published during the 1980s. His American publisher once accused him of trying to copy J. D. Salinger's reclusiveness, to which Carroll retorted, 'I think too often people buy the guy and not the work.'

His latest novel ***From the Teeth of Angels***, written before his departure for California, examines the nature of mortality through the lives and loves of three very different individuals — a homosexual American TV star with terminal leukemia, a British travel agent who is visited by Death in his dreams and has the scars to prove it, and a female former movie star who takes refuge in Vienna. With Death or the Devil playing an active part, the tension mounts until the final confrontation and an ambiguous but satisfying conclusion.

The Panic Hand is Carroll's first short story collection, and comprises nineteen stories written between 1984 and the present. Many are set in Austria, a country in which Carroll resided for most of that period.

In the title story a young man is approached on a train journey between Vienna and Munich by a glamorous mother and her daughter. The former propositions him, but what is real and for what purpose?

'A Flash in the Pants' evokes Ray Bradbury, as children return to their former family home and the house 'revives' memories of a happier era. Given wider exposure, Carroll could take over the mantle of both Bradbury and Roald Dahl.

ROSE MADDER
by Stephen King
(Hodder & Stoughton; 466 pp.; $A36.95)

STRANGE HIGHWAYS
by Dean Koontz (Headline; 439 pp.; $A34.95)

SWAMP FOETUS
by Poppy Z. Brite (Penguin; 190 pp.; $A14.95)

Two of the biggest names in American best-selling fiction, Stephen King and Dean Koontz, have produced some of their best work in their latest books, while Poppy Z. Brite is one of the rising stars of 'Southern Gothic' fiction.

In ***Rose Madder*** the main character, Rosie McLendon, has been systematically abused, both physically and psychologically, by her police officer husband over fourteen years of marriage. When she finally leaves him to restart her life, this leads not only to real independence and personal growth but also to a murderous husband intent on tracking her down. *Rose Madder* culminates in a cliffhanger conclusion of considerable suspense.

Strange Highways comprises a 150-page novella of the same name and twelve short stories. Koontz, like King, explores the underside of society and adds a dash of the supernatural. In the title novella, a forty-year-old alcoholic, who took the wrong turning in life when he was twenty, is given the chance of redemption through time being turned back. Returning to the bleak mining town of his youth for his father's funeral he and a female companion redefine the past and confront the evil force that has taken his older brother in one direction and himself in another.

The remaining short stories, such as 'Hardshell', with its confrontation of a serial killer, reaffirm Koontz as a master of the macabre. Koontz's skills developed early, as shown by the republication of his first story 'Kittens', written when he was twenty. In this story a father's callous drowning of young kittens results in the dramatic revenge of his young daughter.

Poppy Z. Brite's collection of short stories, ***Swamp Foetus***, follows two successful novels, *Lost Souls* and *Drawing Blood*. Several stories, which feature her familiar locations of decadent New Orleans and the rural American South, reflect contemporary alienation and decay. 'How to Get Ahead in New York' and 'Calcutta Lord of Nerves' evoke the seamier side of both cities, as life and death merge into one.

THE PAVILION OF FROZEN WOMEN
by S. P. Somtow (Gollancz; $A35)

EXQUISITE CORPSE
by Poppy Z. Brite (Millennium; $A19.95)

S. P. Somtow's short stories, often with Eastern themes, in ***The Pavilion of Frozen Women***, are both stark in telling and imaginative in concept. The title story, set in Japan, mixes snow sculptures, racial intolerance and spirituality, while 'Fish are Jumping and Cotton is High' is a harrowing evocation of father-and-son psychopaths in small-town America.

Literary horror of an even more gruesome nature comes in cult author Poppy Z. Brite's controversial ***Exquisite Corpse***, which has caused a furore in the literary pages of the British press. *Exquisite Corpse* makes *American Psycho* seem like Mother Goose! Necrophilia and serial killings, which seem to be based on real-life cannibal killer Jeffrey Dahmer, are no less palatable when wrapped up in the 'aesthetics of dismemberment' of young boys. Only strong stomachs and minds will relish the carefully crafted pornography of homosexual violence that Poppy Z. Brite now creates.

— Colin Steele, 1993–1999