

The Aldera Collection

By Darby Ronning

One question guides me through the creation of the Aldera collection: How do women imagine the future and understand the present? I answer this question through feminist science fiction of the twentieth century.

I collect mass market paperbacks, magazines, fanzines, and books of criticism that reveal everyday women's reactions to social movements and technological advances. I began the collection after reading Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), a fluid, angry, funny book that opened my eyes to the feminist science fiction movement of the 1970s that Russ helped lead. Her words seemed to speak to me directly: "I didn't and don't want to be a 'feminine' version or a diluted version or a special version or a subsidiary version or an ancillary version, or an adapted version of the heroes I admire. I want to be the heroes themselves" (206).

I named the collection after the hero of Suzy McKee Charnas's *Holdfast Chronicles* (1974-1999), a four-book series which follows the young woman Aldera as she escapes the hyper-misogynistic post-apocalyptic Holdfast to the free Riding Women of the plains and their nomadic, egalitarian society. This series encapsulates what I love about feminist science fiction: women's autonomy within and against patriarchal structures. The series also registers two decades of change in the publishing industry. The first two books, from the 1970s, are mass market paperbacks with covers depicting sexualized women in chains; the latter two, from the 1990s, are longer, sturdier volumes (the final installment was published in hardcover!) with women's power on full display.

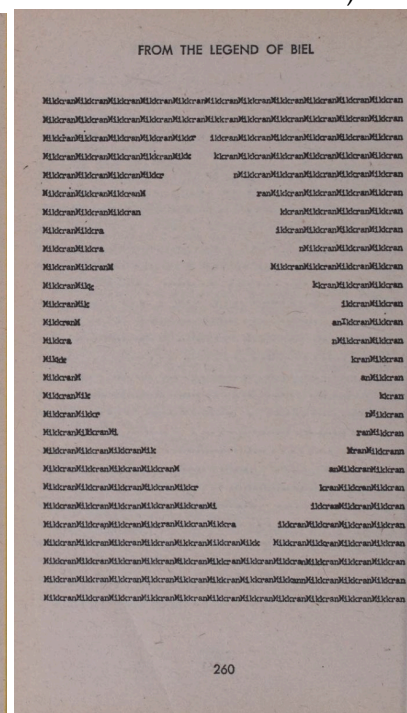
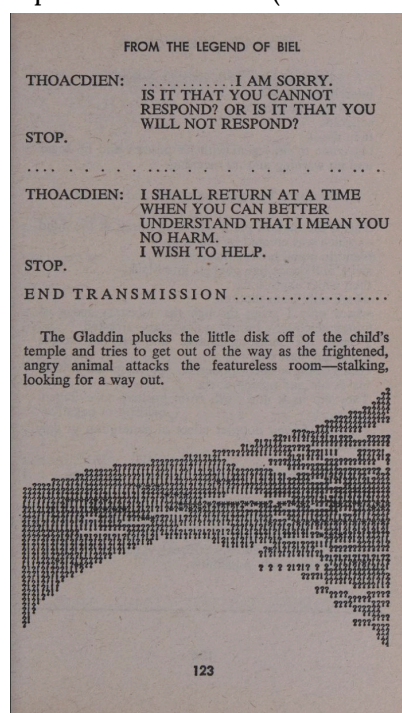
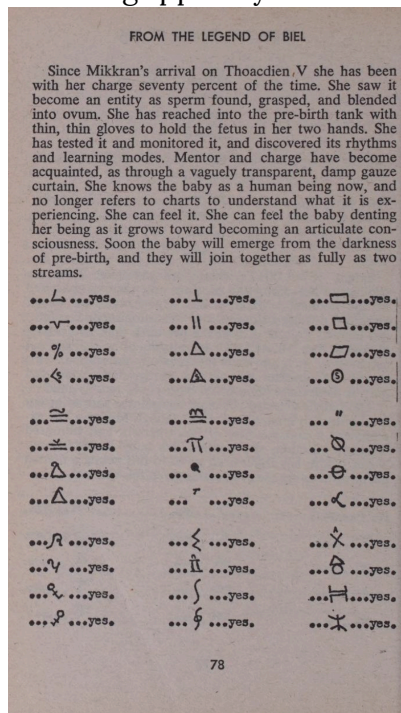
Charnas gained widespread recognition within the world of feminist science fiction, but as I dove deeper into collecting, I found myself drawn to authors who remained obscure even within the subgenre. Most of the authors on my shelves wrote science fiction as a passion rather than a profession, and their names will never appear on a list of must-read science fiction. These authors reveal how widely feminist ideas moved through the lives of ordinary women, as does feminist science fiction fan culture, disseminated through fanzines and reviews. My collection aims to get at this entire ecosystem of imagining alternative worlds.

In the 1970s, women authors, responding to the dominant male world of early science fiction, unapologetically put their perspectives on the page. The philosophy of this movement is outlined in Pamela Sargent's opening essay to the anthology *Women of Wonder* (1975). She describes early science fiction as "escapist literature for men and boys" where men are "free from the interference of females" (xxxvii). Sargent argues that this male dominance stems from women's exclusion from scientific life.

It would be a mistake, however, for women to cede their place within the world of science fiction, because their perspective can capture the social impact of technology in ways that male authors typically ignore. Science fiction, Sargent writes, “can show us the future as it might be *experienced* by its inhabitants. It can show us how different developments might affect individuals and their customs, problems that could arise, and how the future might *feel*” (lviii). Consequently, science fiction written by women often feels more lifelike and more realistic than well-regarded titles by men.

Feminist science fiction reached readers through the humble mass market paperback. I am obsessed with the physical form of these books. They are slim, rarely over 200 pages: you can fit one, or several, in a purse. Printed on cheap, acidic paper with glued bindings and the occasional full-color cigarette ad, these books are ephemeral objects. And the covers. *The book covers!* Women peel back their skin to reveal alien bodies underneath; a recursive hypnotized boy stares blankly, holding an infinity sign; a bright blue alien monster attacks. Surrealist, vibrant, and bizarre; I bought many of these books based on their covers alone.

Authors experimented with typography. *From the Legend of Biel* (1975) by Mary Staton (one of the books with a full-color cigarette ad) features pages with hand-drawn mathematical symbols and pictorial shapes to represent thought processes. I picked up this book with no expectations, only a fascination with the geometric shapes on the book cover, and was gripped by the dada-esque forms within. (Scans taken from Internet Archive.)



My collecting practice is informed by happenstance. I browse used bookstores; many have dedicated mass market science fiction sections, and I scan the shelves for women's names, initials, and pen names. Most of these paperbacks can be had for a fair price; I try not to spend more than ten dollars per title— a rule that, by design, sways the collection towards smaller names.

These writers were veterinary radiologists and gymnastics instructors, physicians and mothers, and their backgrounds inform their storytelling. *Still Forms on Foxfield* (1980), for instance, was written by Joan Slonczewski while she pursued a Ph.D. in molecular biophysics, and it draws on both her scientific practice and her Quaker faith. The book's setting is a planet inhabited by a colony of Quakers who live in harmony with the Commensals, cucumber-esque aliens who communicate through chemical signals through Quaker values of consensus-building. Here, fiction works like a diary, revealing its writer's deepest values and hopes and fears for the societies she imagines.

Many of the books I own predate the feminist science fiction wave of the 1970s. Kate Wilhelm, Leigh Brackett, Rena Vale, Margaret St. Clair, and Judith Merril are just a few authors working in the 1950s and 60s. Part of this collection's project is to find and celebrate these women who were under-appreciated in their time period. I am interested in how a feminist consciousness, or its absence, surfaces in women's writing without ties to an organized movement.

I am also drawn to the feminist science fiction movement for its rich fan culture and scholarly works. The "feminist science fiction studies" section of the collection gathers fanzines and essay collections that comment on the movement.

Science fiction in the 1970s had an active fan culture, and fans connected over reviews, art, and fiction circulated through zines. *Janus* (later *Aurora*) was perhaps the best-known feminist science fiction fanzine; its publisher, SF3, still runs Wiscon, the yearly feminist science fiction convention. These zines were not professional. In an early issue, author Vonda N. McIntyre wrote in to correct a quote, adding: "And, um, no offence, but you guys desperately need a proofreader who can spell" (*Janus* Vol 2. no. 2, 10.) For me, that amateurism is a part of the zines' appeal. Women were drawn to participate in this community no matter their publication abilities.

The authors themselves were part of this meta-commentary, submitting to fanzines and contributing to scholarship on the movement; several names feature in both fiction and non-fiction sections of my collection. These zines and works of criticism are now my chief collecting priority, because they are the format that best reveals feminist science fiction as a whole. I hunt for titles that are poorly documented and undigitized, keeping a keen eye on eBay. A recent find, *New Moon*, had ties to the publishers of *Janus* but took a more scholarly approach; I hope to acquire the other three issues.

To understand the attitudes toward women that feminist science fiction writers were responding to, I have developed a subsection called “ultra sexist books by men.” They depict fantasies of supreme male control over decimated female populations (*World Without Women*, 1960) or neo-Roman societies with no women at all (*Spartan Planet*, 1968). Elsewhere, anti-power fantasies let male readers savor the thrill of being a subjugated class from the safety of fiction. In *Gender Genocide* (1972), female Exterminators set out to rid Great Britain of every man. Rura Alexandr cannot follow through: she lets the first man she encounters (Diarmid MacDiarmid) escape, is gang raped, falls in love with Diarmid MacDiarmid, accepts her “natural” female desire to be a housewife, and is finally killed by her former lesbian lover. Most sexism in early science fiction is not so dramatic, but it is still obvious. Women often appear as no more than plot devices. Set against these fantasies, the feminist response reads as completely necessary, and has only grown more relevant in the current political climate.

I grew up taking women’s rights largely for granted, assuming that feminism had settled into common sense. My early adulthood has challenged that assumption: the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, the rise of the “trad wife,” and the loss of two women presidential candidates to an open chauvinist all alarm me for the status of women in this country. In times like these, I keep turning to the women who lived through past periods of uncertainty. The stories they told were prescient, but more importantly, they were hopeful.

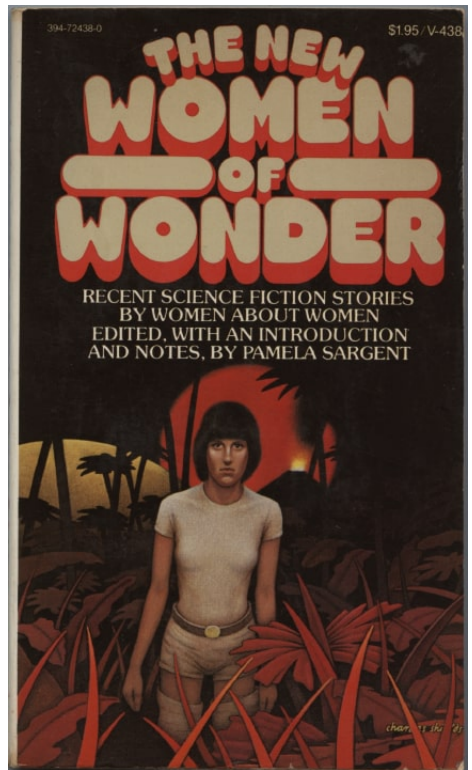
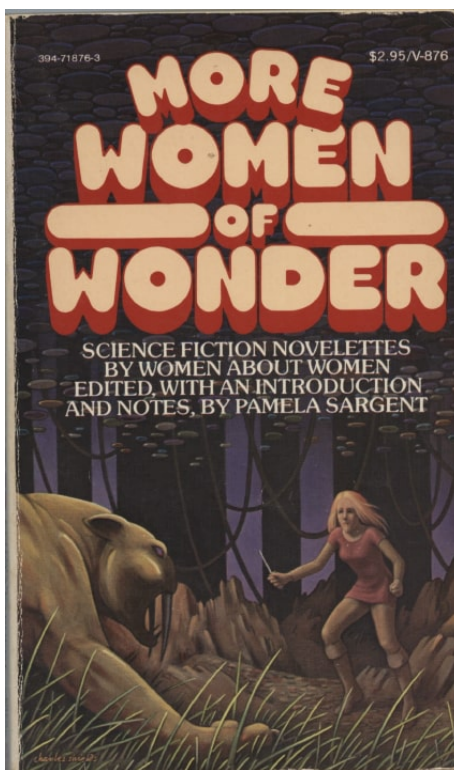
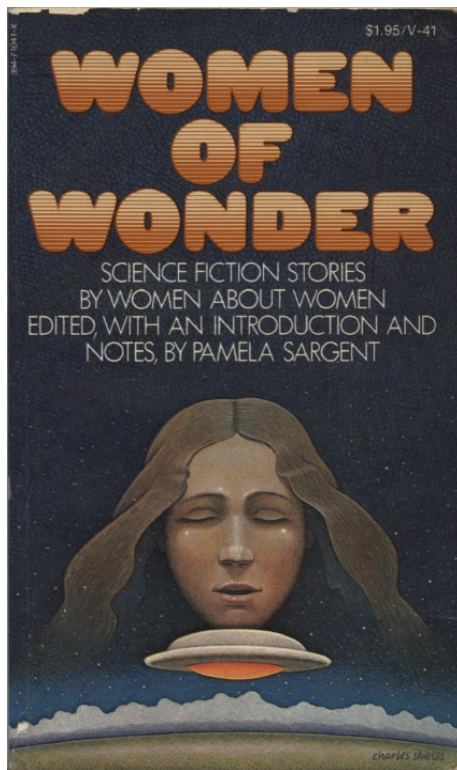
I aim to bring the Alldera Collection to the public through a visual archive and blog. I am hardly alone in caring about these works: scholars like Lisa Yaszek (*The Future is Female*, 2018) bring their scholarship to the public sphere, *Wiscon* and the *Otherwise Award* celebrate the genre’s present, and *Femspec* publishes peer-reviewed criticism in the field. My next steps are to bring my collection to a wider audience and help others care about these books as much as I do.

Selections from The Aldera Collection



20th-century Women's SF
Darby Ronning

Anthologies & Magazines

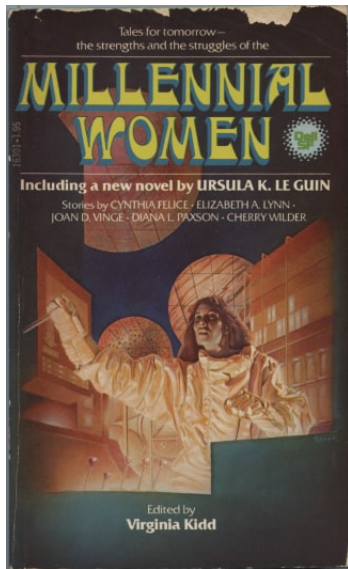


Women of Wonder, Ed. **Pamela Sargent** (b. 1948)

Vintage Books, 1975 (stories from 1948–1973). Contains stories by **Judith Merril**, **Katherine MacLean**, **Marion Zimmer Bradley**, **Anne McCaffrey**, **Sonya Dorman**, **Kit Reed**, **Kate Wilhelm**, **Carol Emshwiller**, **Ursula K. Le Guin**, **Chelsea Quinn Yarbro**, **Joanna Russ**, and **Vonda N. McIntyre**. Cover art by Charles Shields. Purchased from Midway Books, St. Paul, MN, December 2025.

The stories in this anthology are excellent, but the pièce de résistance is Sargent's introductory essay chronicling the history of women's contributions to science fiction from Mary Shelley to the 1970s. She explains the inherent limitations of a male-only perspective when writing about the social implications of new technologies. She makes the case for science fiction as an instrument of change, writing, "*Only sf and fantasy literature can show us women in entirely new or strange surroundings. It can explore what we might become if and when the present restrictions on our lives vanish, and show us new problems and restrictions that might arise*" (lxi).

More Women of Wonder (1976) and *The New Women of Wonder* (1978) include more writing by **Pamela Sargent**, as well as stories by **Leigh Brackett**, **C.L. Moore**, **Eleanor Arnason**, **Josephine Saxton**, **Pamela Zoline**, **James Tiptree, Jr.**, and **Joan D. Vinge**.



Millennial Women, ed. **Virginia Kidd** (1921–2003)

Dell, 1979. Cover art by Larry Kresek. Contains work by **Cynthia Felice, Diana L. Paxson, Elizabeth A. Lynn, Cherry Wilder, Joan D. Vinge, Ursula K. Le Guin**, and **Marilyn Hacker**. Purchased from Uncle Hugo's, St. Paul, MN, July 2026.

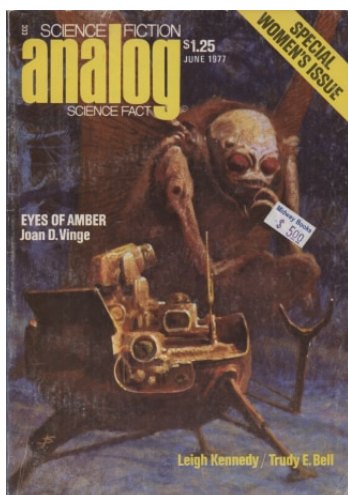
Virginia Kidd was a prolific literary agent who represented many women in the feminist science fiction movement, most notably Ursula K. Le Guin. Le Guin's novel *The Eye of the Heron* made its first appearance in print in this anthology; I own a later edition of the book.



Quark/1, eds. **Marilyn Hacker** (b. 1942) and Samuel R. Delany

Paperback Library edition, 1970. Cover art by Russell FitzGerald. Contains work by **Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Hilary Bailey, Sandy Boucher, Helen Adam, Joan Bernott**, and others. Purchased on eBay, July 2026.

Both editors contributed to the science fiction field – Delany wrote SF prolifically in the 1960s through 1980s, and Hacker contributed poetry to his books (most notably *Babel-17*) and feminist anthologies. Hacker and Delany (she a lesbian, he a gay Black man) were married from 1961 to 1980, (but ended their relationship in 1975) and had one daughter together. This anthology was the first of four, all published in 1970 and 1971.

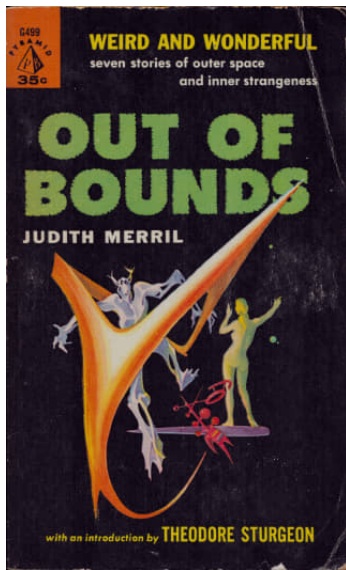


Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact, Special Women's Issue June 1977

Ed. Ben Bova. Contains work by **Joan D. Vinge, Trudy E. Bell, Raccoona Sheldon, Jaygee Carr, Leigh Kennedy, Alison Tellure, George R.R. Martin**, and **Sonya Dorman**. Purchased from Midway Books, St. Paul, MN, December 2025.

Raccoona Sheldon was the pen name used occasionally by Alice Sheldon. She primarily wrote under the name James Tiptree, Jr., but because her identity and gender were not publicly known until late 1977, she took on the Raccoona name for women-only publications. Her story in this issue, "The Screwfly Solution," is about a global wave of men killing women, told partly through letters between a wife and her entomologist husband.

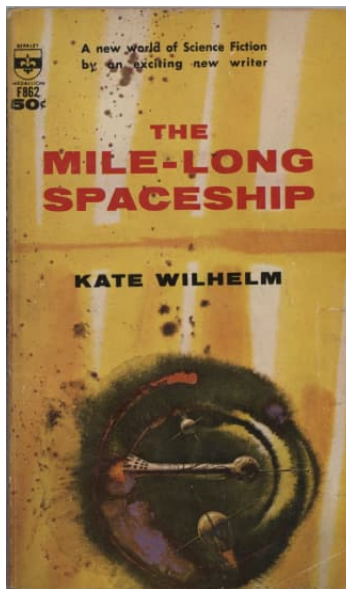
Literary Works, in Order of Publication



Out of Bounds, **Judith Merrill** (1923–1997)

Pyramid Books, 1960 (stories from 1948–1959). Cover art by Art Sussman. Purchased from Westsider Rare and Used Books, New York, NY, April 2026.

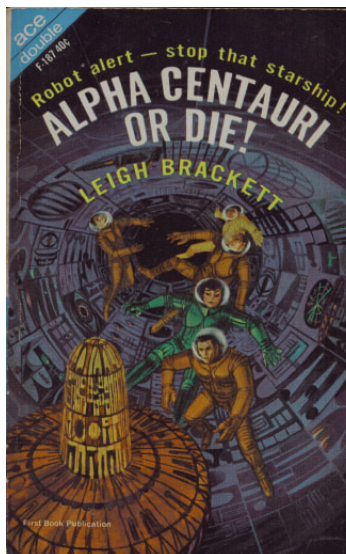
This collection opens with “That Only a Mother,” a story of a mother’s denial of radiation-induced birth defects in her newborn. An early example of atomic anxieties tackled by SF, this story had long cultural staying power; it was reprinted in *Women of Wonder* in the 1970s. Merrill was an influential editor, best known for the annual series S-F: *The Year’s Greatest Science Fiction and Fantasy* (1956–1968).



The Mile-Long Spaceship, **Kate Wilhelm** (1928–2018)

Berkley, 1963 (stories from 1957–1963). Cover art by Richard Powers. Purchased from Molly's Books and Records, Philadelphia, PA, December 2025.

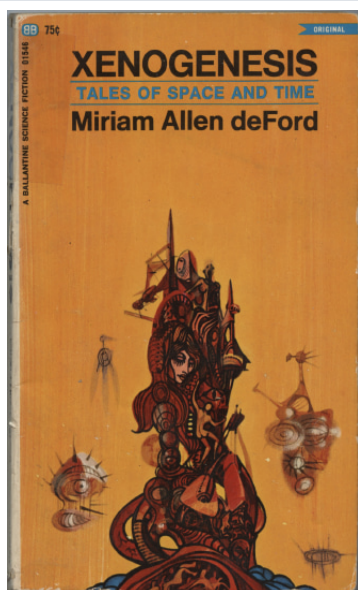
Wilhelm’s first collection gathers early genre magazine work from titles such as *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding*. She later gained mainstream acclaim for *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1976), a novel that touches on themes of individuality and environmental destruction.



Alpha Centauri or Die!, **Leigh Brackett** (1915–1978)

Ace, 1963. Ace Double with *Legend of Lost Earth* by G. McDonald Wallis. Cover art by Jack Gaughan. Purchased from Molly's Books and Records, Philadelphia, PA, December 2025.

In addition to her success as a science fiction writer, Brackett was a screenwriter, working on films such as *The Long Goodbye* (1973) and *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980, with Lawrence Kasdan). I love the woman astronaut on this cover—coincidentally, in 1963, Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman in space.



Xenogenesis, **Miriam Allen deFord** (1888–1975)

Ballantine Books, 1969 (stories from 1950–1968). Cover art by Richard Powers. Purchased from Uncle Hugo's, St. Paul, MN, July 2026.

Mirian Allen deFord was an advocate of the women's suffrage movement, a member of the Socialist Party of America, and a self-described “born feminist.” She described *Xenogenesis*, one of two collections of her work published before her death, as “all about matrimony, reproduction, and sex on other planets and in the future.”

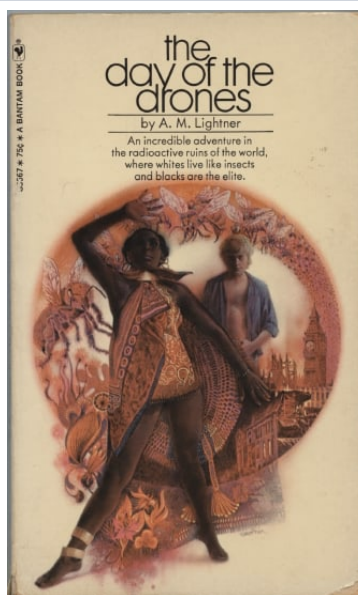
Quotes from *Partners in Wonder*, Eric Leif Davin, 130



And Chaos Died, **Joanna Russ** (1937–2011)

Ace, 1970. Cover art by **Diane Dillon** and Leo Dillon. Purchased from Uncle Hugo's, St. Paul, MN, July 2026.

Russ's second published novel centers on a gay man protagonist on an overpopulated Earth and in a telepathic society. The cover is by Leo and Diane Dillon, the interracial husband-and wife-team who illustrated the first Ace Science Fiction Specials line, including Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Russ's *Picnic on Paradise*.



The Day of the Drones, **A.M. Lightner** (1904–1988)

Bantam Books, 1970 (orig. 1969). Second edition. Cover art by Gene Szafran. Purchased from Prospero's Books, Kansas City, MO, July 2025.

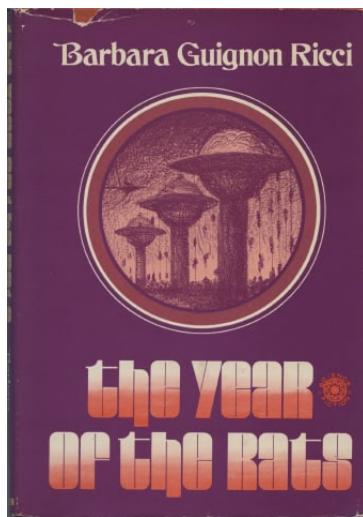
Lightner, the pen name of Alice Lightner Hopf, imagines a generic “African” society which shuns technology to avoid repeating the mistakes of the “accursed” white people who caused the “Disaster” 500 years ago. The protagonist, Amhara, leaves Africa for England by helicopter (a taboo technology), where she falls in love with a boy shunned by his (bee-based) society. Though Lightner's worldbuilding is simplistic and often reductive, the book is an interesting artifact of a white woman writer working at the close of the 1960s.



Recoil, **Rhoda Nunes** (1938–1988) and Claude Nunes

Ace, 1971. Cover art by Kelly Freas. Ace Double with *Lallia* by E.C. Tubb. Purchased from Molly's Books and Records, Philadelphia, PA, December 2025.

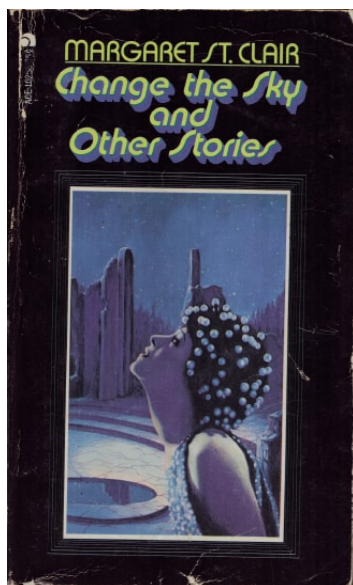
Rhoda and Claude Nunes were a husband-and-wife writing team based in Johannesburg, South Africa. *Recoil* is one of the few Ace Doubles in my collection, like all of them, it's printed as a tête-bêche.



The Year of the Rats, **Barbara Guignon Ricci**

Walker, 1973. Gift of Parker Thompson, purchased from Lost City Books, Washington, DC, December 2025.

This book is among the more obscure titles in my collection and one of the few hardcovers; it was never printed as a mass-market paperback. Ricci is similarly an elusive figure and an intriguing avenue for future research.



Change the Sky and Other Stories, **Margaret St. Clair** (1911–1995)

Ace, 1974 (stories orig. 1951–1961). Gift of Parker Thompson, purchased from Artifact Books, Encinitas, CA, April 2026.

This collection features eighteen of the 130 stories St. Clair published in her lifetime. She was also an established novelist; I own *The Dolphins of Altair* (1967). The stories in this collection were written before St. Clair and her husband were initiated into Wicca in 1966; her later work draws on neopagan themes.

Holdfast Chronicles, **Suzy McKee Charnas** (1939–2023)

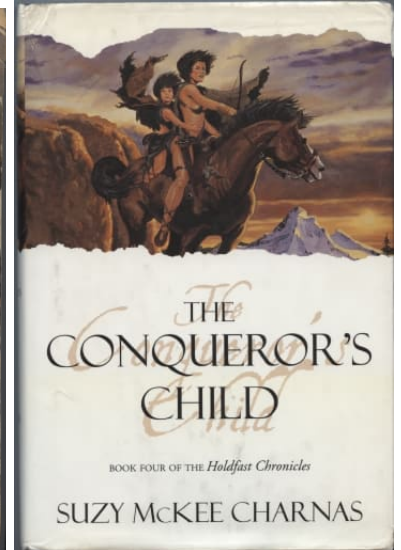
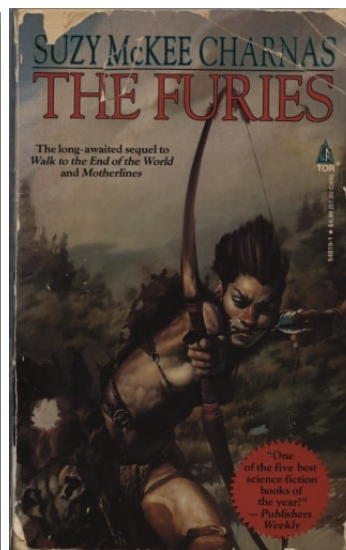
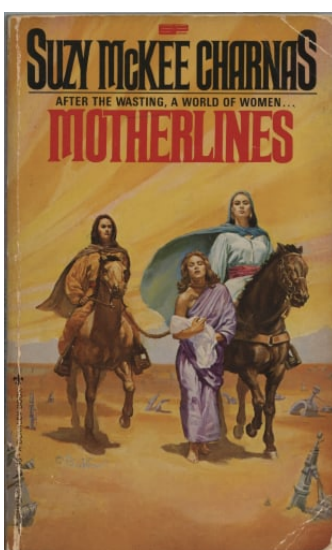
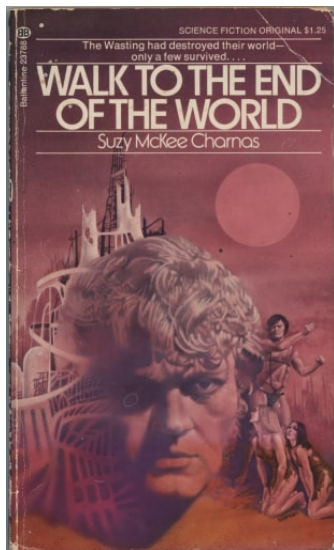
Walk to the End of the World. Ballantine Books, 1974. Cover art by Gene Szafran. Purchased in New Orleans, LA, March 2025.

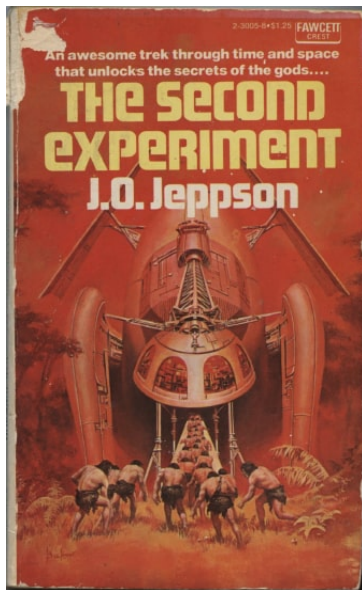
Motherlines. Berkley, 1979 (orig. 1978). Purchased at Allentown Paper and Ephemera Fair, Allentown, PA, October 2025.

The Furies. Tor, 1995 (orig. 1994). Purchased at Green Feather Book Company, Norman, OK, October 2025.

The Conqueror's Child. Tor, 1999. Purchased on eBay, March 2026.

Charnas wrote the Holdfast Chronicles over a twenty-five year span. The books follow Alldera, for whom this collection is named. In *Walk to the End of the World*, we meet Alldera the Runner, an enslaved messenger in the misogynist post-collapse society of the Holdfast. In *Motherlines*, she escapes to the plains and joins the free Riding Women, an egalitarian nomadic society of clone women. Alldera leads a group of Holdfast escapees to overthrow their former masters and emerges as Alldera the Conqueror. But building a new society is no simple task, and the final two novels grapple with questions of whether equality can be reached or whether the Holdfast is doomed to repeat cycles, merely swapping the oppressed for the oppressor.

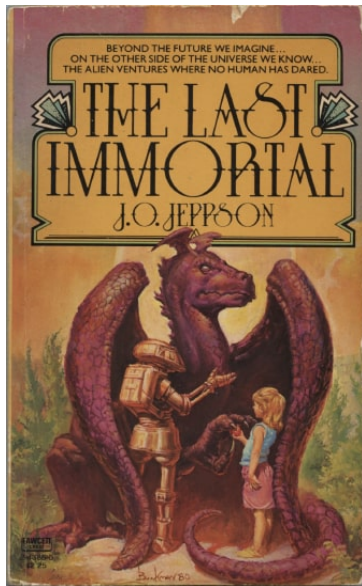




The Second Experiment, **J.O. Jeppson** (Janet Asimov, 1926–2019) Fawcett Crest Books, 1974. Purchased from Prospero's Books, Kansas City, MO, July 2025.

The Last Immortal. Fawcett, 1980. Purchased from Uncle Hugo's, St. Paul, MN, July 2026.

Throughout history, creative women have been sometimes overshadowed by more famous husbands who took credit for their work. When I saw these books were written by the wife of SF giant Isaac Asimov, I wondered if Janet might be due some of his acclaim. When I read *The Second Experiment*, I quickly realized that this was not the case. For starters, she wrote this book before marrying Asimov. Additionally, Jeppson's writing, for all its charms, does not eclipse her husband's.

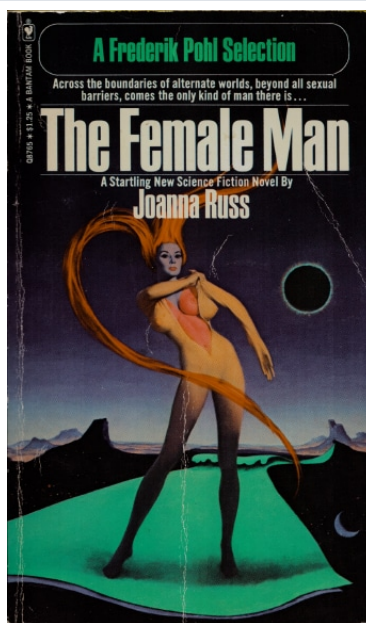


Jeppson covers seventy million years in 224 pages, from Earth's dinosaurs to after the fall of humanity. The story is mostly told from the perspective of the alien robot Tec who watches over a dragon/god child. Mutated sabertooth tigers, a suicidal sentient T-Rex, and an egomaniac worm bent on universal destruction are all minor characters. I have not yet read the sequel, but it promises more adventure of the same kind.

An online review of the book describes flaws in Jeppson's writing: "To cover so much in so little space requires rapid movement on the page. The brisk pace often comes at a cost of texture, emotion and character ... All this trimming adds up (or rather, subtracts down) to a cosmic space opera on the grandiose scale of *Dune*, but only one-third the length.

"The novel's climax comes in a great rush. You can feel Jeppson accelerating toward her target page count, then braking suddenly when it looks like she's going to overshoot." (Rushed endings aren't uncommon in mass-market SF).

Quotes from Paperback Picnic, "The Lonely Cosmos of J. O. Jeppson's 'The Second Experiment'"

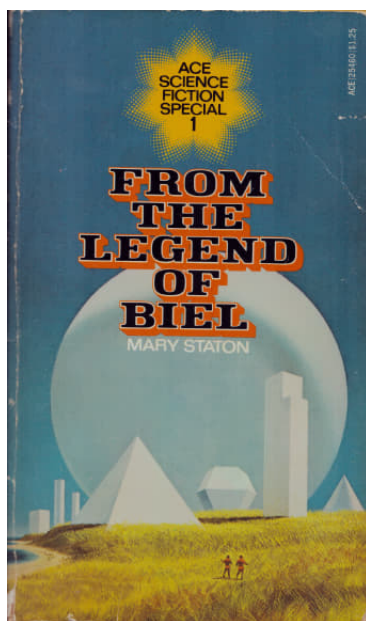


The Female Man, **Joanna Russ** (1937–2011)

Bantam Books, 1975. Cover art by Morgan Kane. Gift of Parker Thompson, purchased on eBay.

This is the book that initially piqued my interest in the women's science fiction movement of the 1970s. Russ's writing is fragmented, funny, and seething as it bounces between the perspectives of four genetically identical women who originate from radically different timelines. We visit worlds where the Great Depression never ended or where Men and Women are permanently at war. In her distinctive style, Russ anticipates criticism of the novel within the text itself, foreshadowing her later critical book *How to Suppress Women's Writing*:

“... a woman's book ... another shrill polemic which the ... a mere male like myself can hardly ... a brilliant but basically confused study of feminine hysteria which ... feminine lack of objectivity ... this pretense at a novel ... trying to shock ... the tired tricks of the anti-novelists ... how often must a poor critic have to ... the usual boring references to Lesbianism ... denial of the profound sexual polarity which ... an all too womanly refusal to face facts ... pseudo-masculine brusqueness ... the ladies'-magazine level ... trivial topics like housework and the predictable screams of ... those who cuddled up to ball-breaker Kate will ... unfortunately sexless in its outlook ... drivel ” (141)

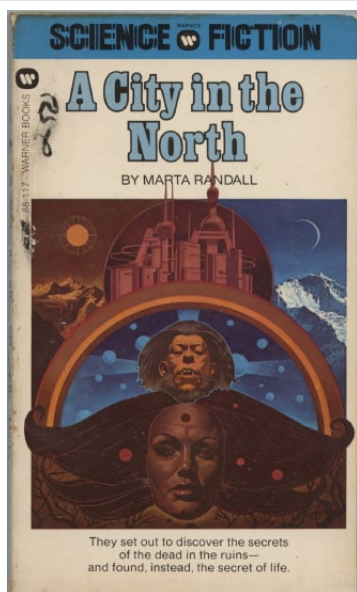


From the Legend of Biel, **Mary Staton**

Ace, 1975. Purchased in New Orleans, LA, March 2025.

Another ambitious tale by an elusive author. Staton creates a frame story of a probe team who, while investigating the mysterious geometric structures on the surface of a planer, learn of the titular “legend” of Biel, a rogue child of a telepathic, utopian civilization. Staton plays with typography; entire pages are hand-drawn symbols giving readers insight into the thought process of Biel.

This is one of several books in my collection with full-page ads (tip-ins) for cigarettes. Here, an advertisement for True cigarettes faces a page where a character experiences her baby's seizures through a telepathic mind meld.



A City in the North, **Marta Randall** (b. 1948)

Warner Books, 1976. Cover art by Vincent DiFate. Purchased from Uncle Hugo's, St. Paul, MN, July 2026.

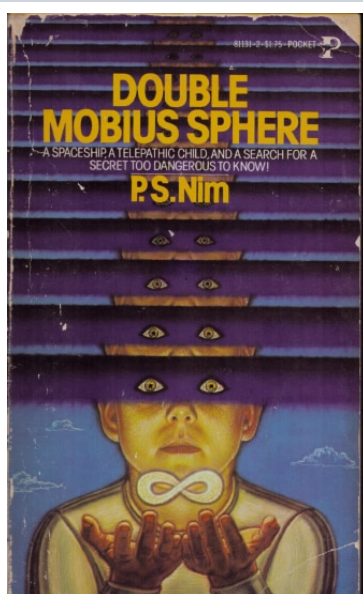
Randall was born in Mexico City and raised in the United States. Her work covers themes of ecology, colonization, and family; in this novel, an alien species must confront a colonizing human presence on their planet. Randall also edited anthologies and, in the 1980s, created interactive games for the California State Department of Mental Health.



The Outcasts of Heaven Belt, **Joan D. Vinge** (b. 1948)

Signet, 1978 (originally serialized in *Analog* magazine). Cover art by Vincent DiFate. Purchased from Uncle Hugo's, St. Paul, MN, July 2026.

This is Vinge's first novel following several years as a writer of short fiction. It follows a starship from an egalitarian society plunged into the middle of civil war among individualist male-led societies. A chart in the front matter converts hours, weeks, and years into the kiloseconds, megaseconds, and gigaseconds used in the book, a convention shared by her then-husband and fellow SF writer, Vernor Vinge.



Double Mobius Sphere, **P.S. Nim** (Meg Meirs)

Pocket Books, 1978. Purchased from The Green Hand, Portland, ME, August 2025.

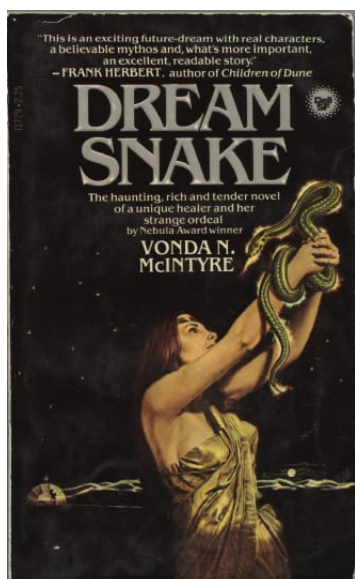
In an author's note, Nim explains "The Theory of the Double Mobius Sphere," her conception of the universe's construction. Nim argues that the universe is shaped like a "one-sided double sphere" and assures readers that evidence for the theory is about to be discovered. Nim continued to use her pen name well into the 2000s, publishing online fanfiction. For erotic stories, she wrote under the name P.S. Nimpho.



A Voice Out of Ramah, **Lee Killough** (b. 1942)

Del Rey, 1979. Cover art by H.R. Van Dongen. Purchased from Green Feather Book Company, Norman, OK, October 2025.

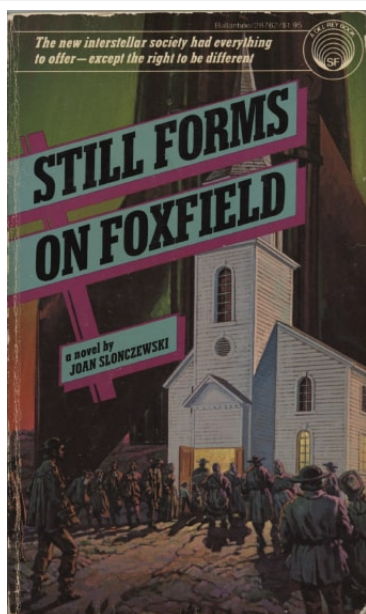
On the isolated planetary settlement of Marah, ninety percent of boys die at puberty, so the few that survive are kept sheltered as priests. A visiting Terran woman helps the priest Jared discover that boys are ritually killed rather than dying of an alien virus. Jared must disguise himself as a woman to travel to the city and reveal the murders. Killough's world inverts power structures, revealing them as socially constructed. Her day job as a veterinary radiographer is evident throughout the text; she describes alien animals with great care.



Dreamsnake, **Vonda N. McIntyre** (1948–2019)

Dell, 1979 (first published as a novelette, 1973). Purchased from Uncle Hugo's, St. Paul, MN, July 2026.

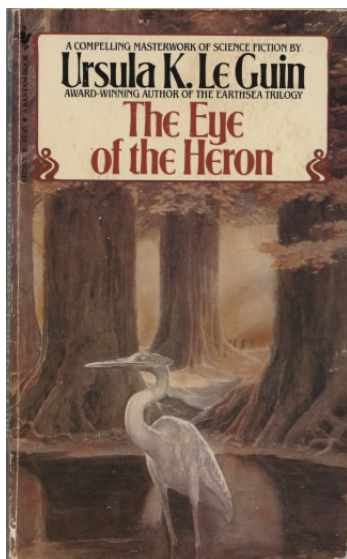
Dreamsnake began as a novelette titled "Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand" that first appeared in the October 1973 issue of *Analog* and was reprinted in *Women of Wonder*. In a post-apocalyptic society, a woman named Snake uses genetically modified serpents to cure illness and ease pain. When her dreamsnake, Grass, is killed by a narrow-minded community, she must journey to replace it. McIntyre often avoided gendered pronouns in her writing. In 1979, the book won the Hugo for Best Novel; McIntyre was the third woman to win that award.



Still Forms on Foxfield, **Joan Slonczewski** (b. 1956)

Del Rey, 1980. Cover art by H.R. Van Dongen. Purchased from Prospero's Books, Kansas City, MO, July 2025.

Slonczewski's background as both a Quaker and a microbiologist is interwoven in this book. A group of Friends (Quakers) run a small planetary colony, helped by aliens that produce useful biochemicals. They aren't buckled-hat Quakers like William Penn, but people devoted to unity in Spirit. The group's consensus-based values are challenged when Earth's UN council rediscovers the colony and pressures its inhabitants to rejoin secular government. This was Slonczewski's first novel, written when she was 24 and still in grad school.



The Eye of the Heron, **Ursula K. Le Guin** (1929–2018)

Bantam Books, 1984 (orig. 1978). Cover art by Alan Lee. Purchased in Vermont, August 2025.

The novel first appeared in Virginia Kidd's *Millennial Women* (also included in this bibliography). In it, Le Guin grapples with the strengths and challenges of nonviolent resistance. On an alien colony, the People of Peace's vows are tested against the oppression of the ruling exiled outlaws who have no such qualms about using force to get what they want.

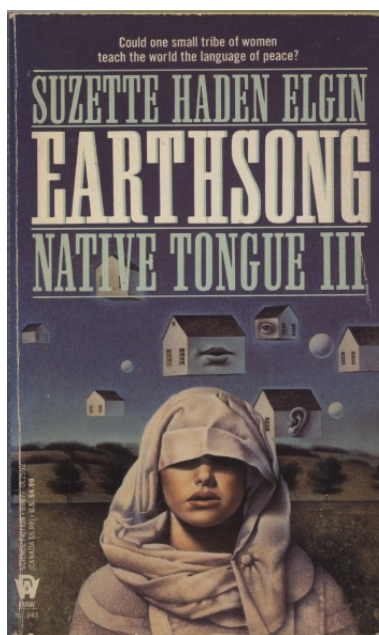
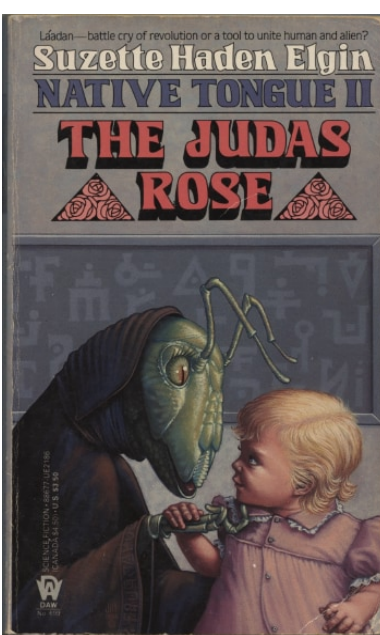
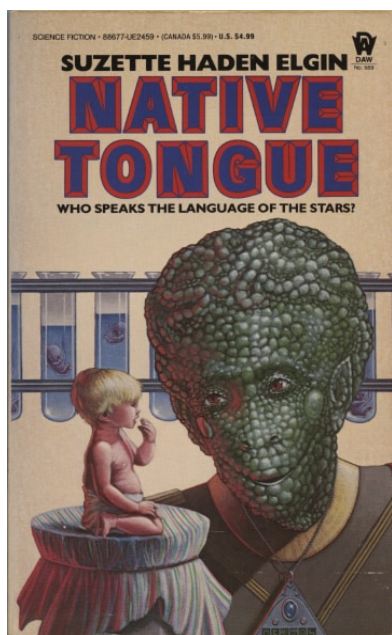
Native Tongue trilogy, **Suzette Haden Elgin** (1936–2015)

Native Tongue. DAW, 1984. Cover art by **Jill Bauman Versandi**. Sixth printing. Purchased from Uncle Hugo's, St. Paul, MN, July 2026.

The Judas Rose. DAW, 1987. Cover art by **Jill Bauman Versandi**. First printing. Purchased from Uncle Hugo's, St. Paul, MN, July 2026.

Earthsong. DAW, 1994. Cover art by John Jude Palencar. First printing. Purchased from Uncle Hugo's, St. Paul, MN, July 2026.

Elgin, who began writing science fiction to help fund her linguistics PhD, creates a world in which power is held by a small group of families—linguists—who can communicate with aliens to facilitate interstellar trade. In this world, the 19th Amendment has been repealed. Women in linguist households resist by secretly constructing a language, Láadan, to communicate ideas not expressible in other languages.

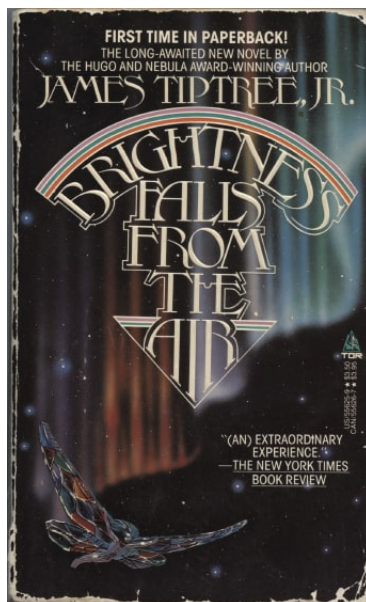




The Wanderground, **Sally Miller Gearhart** (1931–2021)

The Women's Press (Great Britain), 1985 (orig. 1978). Third edition. Purchased from Uncle Hugo's, St. Paul, MN, July 2026.

Gearhart, a prominent lesbian activist, weaves separate but related stories of the women in the Wanderground, who have fled a male-dominated city and who have developed telekinetic powers drawn from their connection with the natural world. The novel was first published by Persephone Press, a lesbian-feminist collective publishing company active from 1976 to 1983. This edition is part of the Women's Press science fiction list, perhaps the only imprint to brand books as both explicitly feminist and SF.

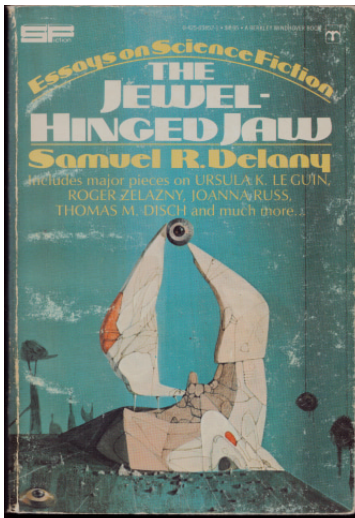


Brightness Falls from the Air, **James Tiptree, Jr.** (Alice Sheldon, 1915–1987)

Tor, 1986 (orig. 1985). Cover art by Joe Bergeron. Purchased from Uncle Hugo's, St. Paul, MN, July 2026.

Sheldon, who wrote under the name James Tiptree, Jr. for a decade before her identity was revealed in 1977, published her second and last novel two years before her death.

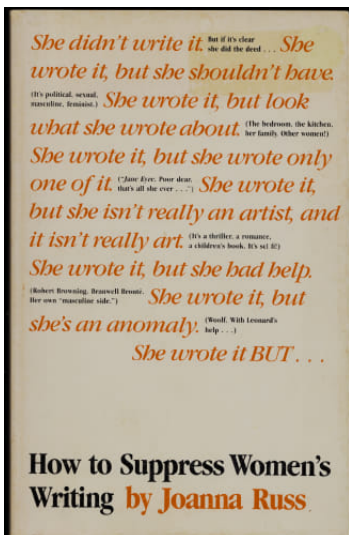
Criticism and Scholarship



The Jewel-Hinged Jaw, Samuel R. Delany

Berkley, 1977 (essays orig. 1966–1977). Purchased on eBay.

In this foundational work of SF criticism, Delany argues for the legitimacy of science fiction as a genre. Its essays include studies of Joanna Russ's Alyx stories and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*. Delany, born in Harlem to a prominent Black family, had published eleven books by 1977, two of which won the Nebula Award.



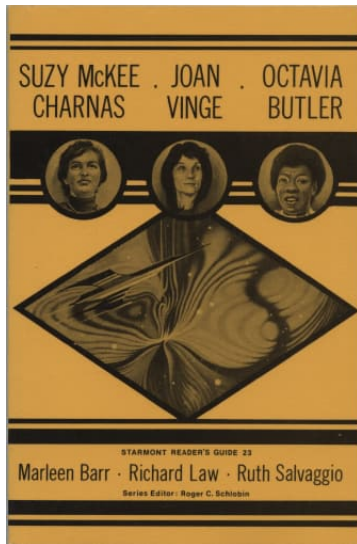
How to Suppress Women's Writing, Joanna Russ (1937–2011)

University of Texas Press, 1983.

In her first work of nonfiction, Russ surveys the mechanisms by which women's writing (and the writing of all people in marginalized groups) is rendered invisible. With typical sardonic irreverence, Russ makes her case on the cover of the book:

"She didn't write it. (But if it's clear she did the deed...) She wrote it, but she shouldn't have. (It's political, sexual, masculine, feminist.) She wrote it, but look what she wrote about. (The bedroom, the kitchen, her family. Other women!) She wrote it, but she only wrote one of it. ("Jane Eyre. Poor dear, that's all she ever...") She wrote it, but she isn't really an artist, and it isn't really art. (It's a thriller, a romance, a children's book. It's sci fi!) She wrote it, but she had help. (Robert Browning. Branwell Brontë. Her own "masculine side.") She wrote it, but she's an anomaly. (Woolf. With Leonard's help...)

She wrote it BUT . . .



Starmont Reader's Guide 23 (1986), essays by **Marleen Barr** (b. 1953), Richard Law, and **Ruth Salvaggio**

Starmont, 1986. Essays on **Suzy McKee Charnas**, **Joan D. Vinge**, and **Octavia Butler**.

This reader's guide contains monographs on three titans of women's science fiction. Books by Charnas and Vinge are represented in the collection; books by Octavia Butler, whose work has seen renewed mainstream interest in recent years, are rare to stumble upon and often expensive.



Perceptions of Science Fiction, *Pacific Quarterly Moana* Vol. 4, no. 3 (1979). Ed. Colin J. Lester

Essays by Colin J. Lester, Zoran Živković, Darko Suvin, David Wingrove, **Patricia Warrick**, Bruce Ferguson, and Norman Simms. Prose narratives by **Elizabeth Meares**, J. Edward Brown, Peter Graham, Vladimir Colin, and Hanmura Ryo. Verse by **Katerina Mataira**, George Macbeth, Robert Frazier, **Ruth Fainlight**, Nichita Stănescu, Norman Talbot, Haare Williams, Peter Payack, and Norman Simms. Reviews by Colin J. Lester, Norman Simms, Pincus Mandelbaum, Arnold Kramer, **Ginette Dunn**, and C. Bennett-Wotton.

Though the content in this periodical issue is less women-centric than other pieces of scholarship in this section (I purchased this volume for its international contributor base and interview with Stanisław Lem), it contains a review of *Women of Wonder* by Ginette Dunn that is surprisingly negative. Dunn disparages the anthology as a “polemic exercise” and “emotional/literary masturbation.” She says, “There is no one common feminist philosophy shared by all, although we are constantly told that there is.” On this point, I agree with Dunn, though her desire to be offended by feminists gets in the way of a fair reading of the text as a whole.

Fanzines

Janus/Aurora

Janus was co-edited by Janice Bogstad and Jeanne Gomoll until 1979, when Bogstad left and the zine was renamed *Aurora*. Issues contain editorials, letters from fans and SF authors, interviews, fiction, reviews, and art, all about women's contributions to science fiction. *Janus/Aurora* was one of the few fanzines devoted to this topic. Combined, *Janus* and *Aurora* ran for 26 issues.

Janus Vol. 2, no. 2 June 1976. #4

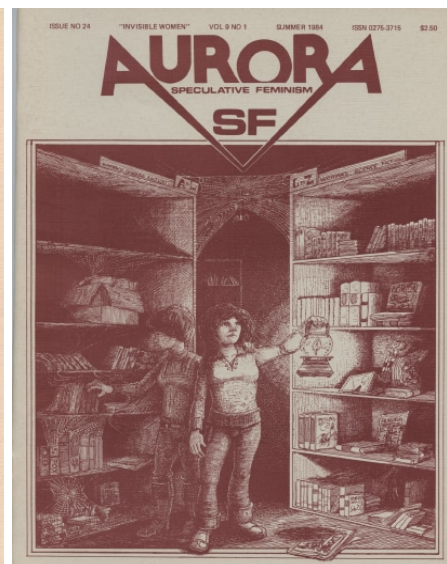
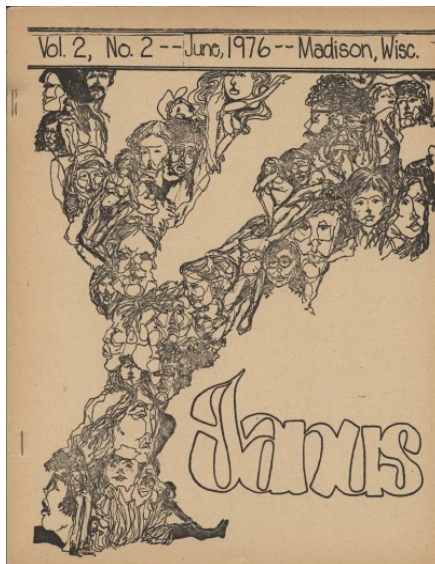
Eds. **Jeanne Gomoll** and **Janice Bogstad**. Published by the Madison Science Fiction Group. This issue features a letter from **Amanda Bankier**, who ran *The Witch and the Chameleon* (the first feminist SF fanzine, 1974–1976). Author Vonda N. McIntyre also contributes a letter, praising *Janus* as “very high quality” but adding “no offense, but you guys desperately need a proofreader who can spell.”

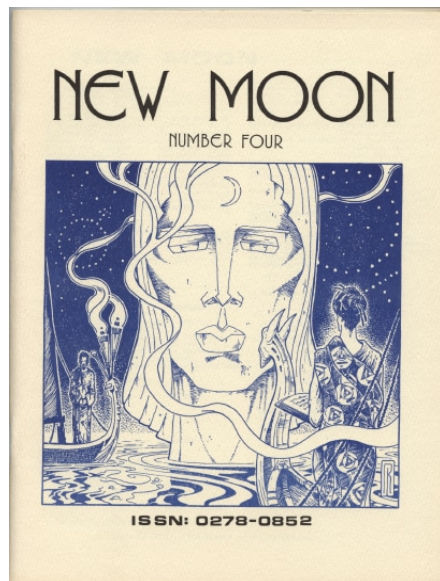
Janus Vol. 4, no. 4 Winter 1978/79. #14

Eds. **Janice Bogstad** and **Jeanne Gomoll**. Published by SF-3. This issue features poetry from author and fanzine publisher **Jessica Amanda Salmonson** and interviews with **Joan D. Vinge** and **Octavia Butler**. Vinge had recently won a Hugo Award for her story “Eyes of Amber,” which appeared in *Analog* June 1977 and *The New Women of Wonder*. Butler had just completed what would become *Kindred*—then titled *To Keep Thee in All Thy Ways*—which she describes as “a kind of nightmare that haunted me for several years” and “the best thing I’ve ever written.”

Aurora Vol. 9, no. 1 Summer 1984. #24

Ed. **Diane Martin**. Published by SF-3. The theme of this issue was “Invisible Women: Underappreciated Women in the SF/F Field.” Subjects include Andre Norton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Katherine MacLean, Lee Killough, Miriam Allen deFord, Sonya Dorman, and Evangeline Walton. **Jessica Amanda Salmonson** writes an article urging for women’s right to mediocrity in science fiction, hoping for the day when “a bad SF book by a woman has as good a chance of publication as a bad one by a man.”

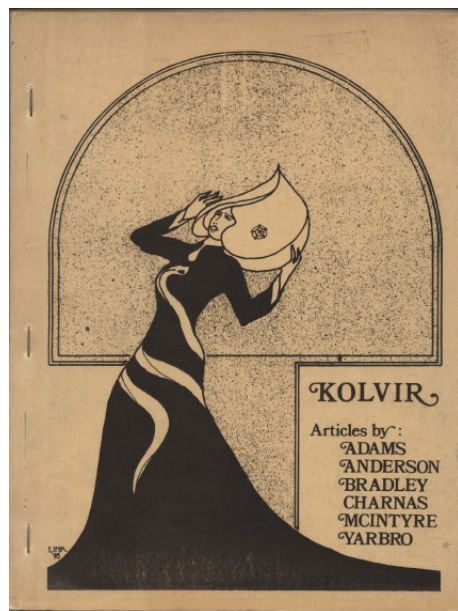




New Moon was started by Janice Bogstad after her departure from *Janus*, taking a “serious but not necessarily academic” critical feminist approach to science fiction and fantasy. It ran for four issues.

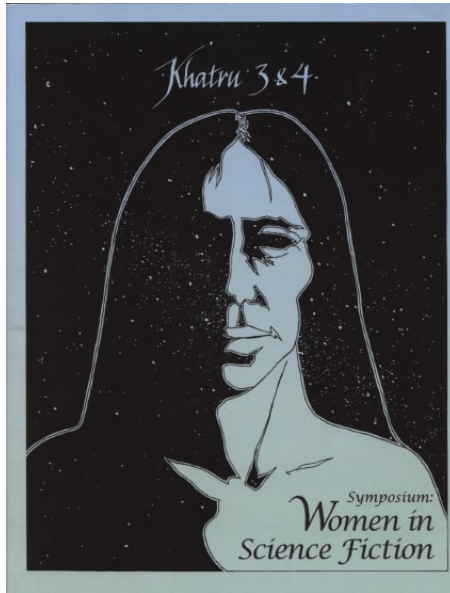
New Moon Vol. 1, no 4, May 1987. #4

Eds. **Janice M. Bogstad** and Philip E. Kaveny. Published by SF-3. The scholarly angle is on full display in this issue’s featured articles. Titles include “What Comes After Post-Modern: Echoes from the Substructure,” “Gender Identity: A Fantasy Subtext,” and “The Urban Wolf: Continental Medieval Myth in the Modern Urban Setting.” The issue also included excerpts from unpublished Samuel R. Delany fiction.



Kolvir August 1978. Special Edition: Rape

Eds. Tim Daniels and Gil Fitzgerald. Published by Black Hole, Inc. Daniels and Fitzgerald conceived this issue in response to the sexual violence in the *Gor* books by John Norman and to Daniels’s interviews with an underfunded rape crisis center in Baltimore. Essay contributors include **Suzy McKee Charnas**, **Chelsea Quinn Yarbrow**, **Vonda N. McIntyre**, and **Shariann Lewitt**. Not all viewpoints are explicitly feminist. Author Robert Adams complains of “women’s bitchery oops, pardon, libbery gals,” though he thanks them for creating rape crisis centers. Charnas’s essay comments on a familiar misogynist trope in SF by men, the “good rape,” which happens for a woman’s “own good.” She names Edmund Cooper, who is featured in my “Books by Men” section, as one purveyor of this trope.



Khatri 3 & 4, third printing, 2009. (orig. 1975; additional material 1993).

Ed. Jeffrey D. Smith. Symposium participants: **Suzy McKee Charnas**, Samuel R. Delany, **Virginia Kidd**, **Ursula K. Le Guin**, **Vonda N. McIntyre**, **Raylyn Moore**, **Joanna Russ**, Jeffrey D. Smith, **James Tiptree, Jr.***, **Luise White**, **Kate Wilhelm**, and **Chelsea Quinn Yarbro**.

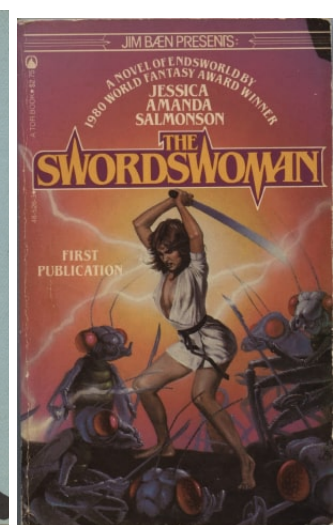
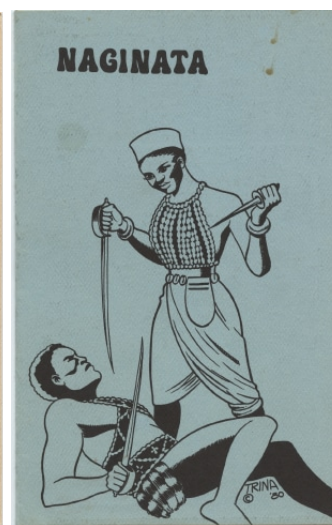
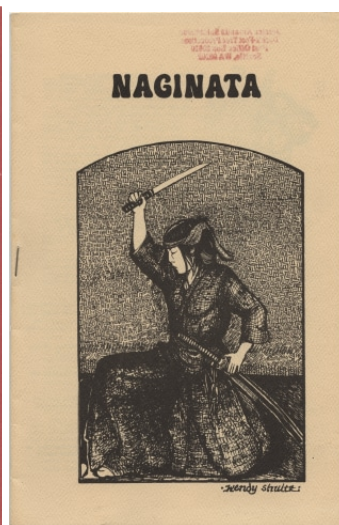
This “Women in Science Fiction” symposium was conducted by mail, asking authors questions about representation, erasure, language, and much more. Authors respond with humor and share personal struggles and triumphs. Today, some people point to *Khatri* as a beginning point in women’s science fiction, but this is not the case. As Luise White said, “There were feminist themes in science fiction long before Joanna Russ scared you all into having this Symposium.”

*James Tiptree, Jr.’s identity as Alice Sheldon was not known to participants in 1975.

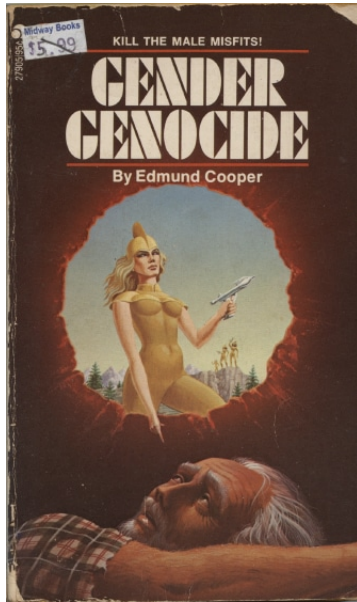
Naginata: ‘November Issue’ (1980), #6 (1981), #10 (1982)

Jessica Amanda Salmonson edited *Naginata*, a zine about “historical, legendary or fictional women warriors.” The zines consist mostly of reviews of fiction and nonfiction books, judged primarily by the quality and realism of women fighters in the books.

Salmonson also published SF professionally; *The Swordswoman* (Tor, 1982) covers similar themes of women’s fighting prowess, with illustrations by frequent *Naginata* artist **Wendy Adrian Shultz**.

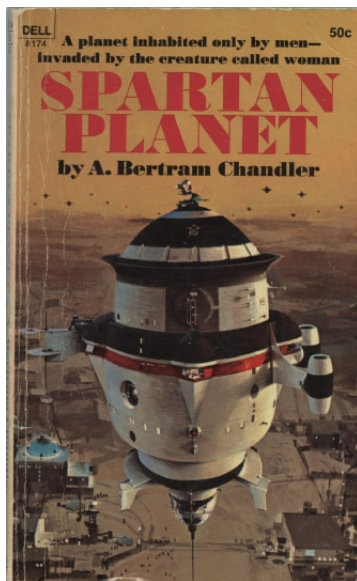


Books by Men



Gender Genocide, Edmund Cooper. Ace, 1972.

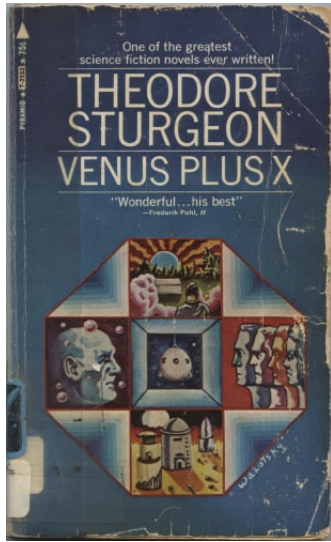
In a future England, a domineering female society trains “exterminators” to kill the few remaining men in the Scottish Highlands. Rura Alexandra, Exterminator First Class (who even won the silver nipple of bravery!), is enraptured when she comes across male enemy number one: Diarmid McDiarmid. She is gang-raped by him and his army, but doesn’t seem to mind, and spends her last days playing house with Diarmid before dying protecting him and their baby. Between the over-the-top misogyny, bad writing, and the name “Diarmid McDiarmid,” the whole endeavor borders on farce. Still, the most sexist book I have ever read.



Spartan Planet, A. Bertram Chandler. Dell, 1969.

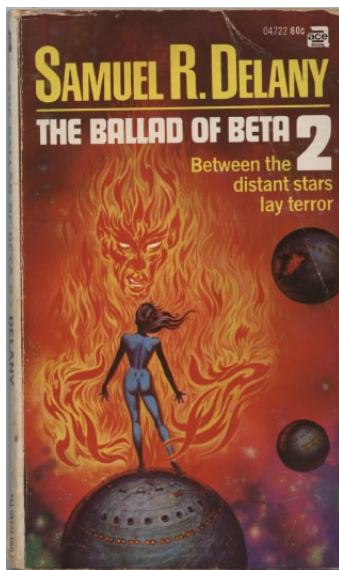
Another science fiction story where men alone on a planet devolve into pseudo-Greek/Roman military charades. When our protagonist, Brasidus, meets a woman visiting the planet for the first time, he immediately abandons his “graceful, soft-spoken young men” for heterosexuality. Late in the book, it is revealed that women are kept in a breeding house (the crèche) hidden from the rest of the planet and at the complete whim of crèche doctors. The horror of the revelation goes unremarked.

Note the dedication: “For **Susan**, whose idea it was.”



Venus Plus X, Theodore Sturgeon. Pyramid, 1971 (orig. 1960)

Theodore Sturgeon wrote the introduction to Judith Merrill's *Out of Bounds* and supported her early in her career. *Venus Plus X* alternates between Ledom, a future androgynous society, and a mid-century suburban family.



The Ballad of Beta-2, Samuel R. Delany. Ace, 1965

Delany's novel follows Joneny, an anthropology student tracing an old folk ballad from a fleet of doomed generation ships. The song is about the captain of Beta-2, a woman who stopped a deep-space being from destroying the ships and bore its child. However, the inhabitants of the ship accept only physical characteristics and social behavior that fit a strict "Norm," so the captain is executed and the ship's people degenerate, leaving her supernatural child to make contact with Joneny far in the future.