

WATT'S OUT

SF&F Book Releases

THE TEN THOUSAND by Michael Curtis Ford. Orion tpb, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 2001. 387 pp. A\$29.95. On sale now. Some pieces of fiction catch ones eye – this novel is not science fiction or fantasy, but fiction of history. The ten thousand of the title are those troops who, in 400 BC, set out to try to stop the advance of an army of Persians ten times their number. Later they would emerge from the mountains, in disarray. Though they had lost the war, their battle against overwhelming odds would ensure their place in history. Michael Curtis Ford has obviously done his background research and this, together with his clear writing style, ensures that the reader is captivated from the beginning to the end. The past comes alive with this novel.

APOCALYPSE by J. Robert King. Wizards pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. © 2001. 308 pp. A15.95. On sale now. Book three of the Invasion cycle. The Wizards are still publishing their Magic the Gathering cycle books and J. Robert King has created quite an intricate world with these three published. Dominaria is the world that is on the brink of being invaded by the dark lord Yawgmoth. He has decimated the friendly forces of Dominaria with plagues and his own deadly troops. Now the virtual god is about to really raise the stakes. Gerrard, as protagonist, is one of the heroes who are fighting against the invaders. The action is fast, bloody and with hand to hand fighting with swords and axes there is bound to be many victims on both sides. For those fans of sword play and who also like other weapons – you'll like this one.

THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL by Thomas M. Reid. Wizards pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. © 2001. 306 pp. A\$15.95. On sale now. A single novel, complete in itself, which is unusual in this time of continuing fantasy novel. Set in a land that has wizards, gods and ordinary mortals, THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL is the tale of how a god/demon is talking to a wizard about the god's plan to invade that world. To help him he is trying to enlist the help of a she-demon, who has been incarcerated in the earth well away from everyday activities. The wizard is given the task of finding and releasing her as a helper in the coming struggle. In the meanwhile the heroes are slowly becoming aware of what is planned and must use all their wiles and strength to combat the supernatural forces ranged against them.

THE SHATTERED MASK by Richard Lee Byers. Wizards pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. © 2001. 310 pp. A\$15.95. On sale now. The mask the title refers to is the mask of lies that some proud people think it necessary to wear to gain their ends. Shamur Uskevren was one such, and the lies she wove had been created decades ago and need to be maintained. However she planned to drop the mask at some future

time and she hoped that her three children would not need to further the lie. A different novel, with plots, counterplots and intrigue that winds its way through the novel, binding it together. It is fun working out who is doing what and why and following the thread through to the end. An interesting read.

HARSHINI by Jennifer Fallon. Voyager pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. © 2001. 648 pp. A\$17.50. On sale now. Book three of THE DEMON CHILD trilogy. The various threads of the plot are brought together in this volume and completed. The Demon Child – R'shiel – will meet her destiny, and whether she will be able to overcome her fears and her opponents will be entirely up to herself. The Defenders are not a tightly knit group any more and to defeat the invading forces they must try to come back together. And their hope will be Damin Wolfblade, Madelon and Tarja must accept their future and also strive to bring events to bend to their will. Fallon has done quite a good job with these three volumes – and this concluding one is worth the reading.

PASSAGE by Connie Willis. Voyager tpb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. © 2001. 594 pp. A\$27.95. On sale now.

The cover of the book shows a hallway leading to an arch opening to a cloud strewn sky over an ocean. Hovering just beyond the opening is a bright red life-preserver with RMS Titanic on it.

If I told you that the novel was exploring Near-death experiences and involved the Titanic I would not be surprised to have many readers say "I am sick of NDEs and/or the Titanic". If the author had been anyone other than Connie Willis I might not have attempted to read the book. However I did, and found that the background setup of the novel - experiments carried out using drugs to simulate NDEs - was well thought out and executed. In fact, I found PASSAGE to be near unputdownable. If only Willis had left Joanna doing down through the dark waters at the end... For me, the last three chapters with Joanna would have been better out of the novel.

Other than that gripe, I have not hesitation in giving it a *Highly Recommended*. There are too few many hard SF novels about personal death, and this is one of the best. I finished this novel two weeks before my mother's death and I found it helped me accept what happened.

REBEL'S CAGE by Kae Jacoby. Gollancz tpb, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 2001. 392 pp. A\$29.95. On sale now. The fourth book of Elita, which will conclude in the fifth volume. The days were dark for the land of Lusara. King Kenrick was venturing in realms that could prove his undoing and although he had the help of Nash, the rebel sorcerer, his attempt to create a vast empire of his own would again involve Robert Douglas, the man who had defeated Nash and threatened the power of Kenrick. To ensure that he would be able to delve

deeper in his use of sorcery Kenrick changed the laws to enable this. Jenn must continue in her troubles when her son Andrew also ventures into the dark world of supernatural powers. All in all a novel that is leading up to a thunderous climax.

BLACK HOUSE by Stephen King & Peter Straud. HarperCollins h/c, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. © 2001. 625 pp. A\$45. On sale now. Working together on THE TALISMAN, these two authors created a hit novel – and now they have written BLACK HOUSE.... The Fisherman is a strange man, and so is the black crow. Also strange is the black house – appearing to have been painted a uniform black over its entire surface, it was an incongruous sight in the world of French Landing, Wisconsin – a farming area that was very folksy. There were other goings on in that area that definitely not folksy – the grisly disappearances of children that occurred, whose bodies later turned up mutilated in strange ways. Ex-detective Jack Sawyer was determined to stay out of it all, but events had a way of turning him back to it. A very readable book for horror readers.

THE FRESCO by Sheri S. Tepper. Gollancz tpb, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 2000. 406 pp. A\$27.95. On sale now. A somewhat different novel this time from this author. Set in the current USA, the story of how Benita Alvarez-Shipton, while having a quiet picnic, had been accosted by two aliens who asked her if she would take something to representatives of the people of her country. They had given her a pyramid-shaped object, and when it had reached authority it had given them its message: you are invited to join the Galactic community. If you pass some tests. Because she was the one the aliens had picked to be the intermediary, her life changed considerably. She left her drunken husband and her estranged son and went off to Washington. Of course events turned complicated, especially when predator aliens had started hunting on earth, and also predatory humans had also come out of the woodwork. I think this book is aimed more at mainstream readers, than SF. Still, interesting all the same, though with the same message as her other novels.

NOONSHADE by James Barclay. Millennium pb, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 2000. 484 pp. A\$17.95. On sale now. Book 2 of the Chronicles of the Raven. When the Wytch Lords had been destroyed and their sharmen killed, the backlash of the spell that had done the deed had opened a rent in the sky to the dragon dimensions. Through that rent there had appeared bands of dragons, who had brought terror and death to the humans. The dragons, however, were not mindless beasts and the Raven band of humans were determined to make those dragons allies, or destroy them all. There were other enemies, human ones, and evil still was in the land from roving bands. James Barclay has written some good adventure fantasy with this series and will enthrall those who like their reading boisterous.

ICEBONES by Stephen Baxter. Gollancz tpb, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 2001. 278 pp. A\$27.95. On sale now.

Mammoth book three – the final book in the trilogy.

Mammoths on Mars – a catchy phrase, isn't it? When Icebones, the daughter of Silverhair, woke on a strange mountain, it did not take her long to figure out that she was on the Sky Steppe – the red light in the sky of Earth. Partly this was because she could see the

blue Earth and the moon far off. There were other mammoths there on the mountain – which was an volcano that became more active, thrusting them off the summit. Led by Icebones, the small Family had descended to the Lowlands, but not without incident or argument. Icebones had received a message sent from the other side of Mars by a male mammoth – he told her of a fair land in a giant impact crater. The human colony on Mars had failed, and the humans, the Lost, had left for Earth, leaving the animals they had transported on Mars there. Whether the animals could live on the again dying Mars was another matter...

Well told SF.

THE SILVER METAL LOVER by Tanith Lee. Voyager pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. © 1981. 335 pp. A\$17.50. On sale now.

One of Tanith Lee's early sf novels.

The protagonist of the novel is a sixteen-year old girl, who is first introduced living with her mother. Her mother is filthy rich, and lives in a house in the sky – supported on steel girders. While attending a party where one of her friends is auditioning for a play, Jane meets up with a silver-skinned robot who is a minstrel. She is struck with his beauty and later, after much angst, tries to purchase him for herself. Because her allowance does not reach the figure she wants and because she had to be over eighteen, she uses her girlfriend, Egyptia's, name in the purchase. Later she sells the contents of her apartment to raise the money to purchase him herself. After picking him up, she elopes with him to an flat they share in a poor section of the city. And their relationship grows...

A very readable novel, and most enjoyable. *Recommended*

THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON by H. G. Wells. Millennium pb, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 1899. 196 pp incl critique. A\$18.95. On sale now.

I actually hadn't read this novel till I read this.

If you have seen the movie, then you will have the basic plot – of how Cavor and the author had, after first destroying Cavor's house at the first pouring of Cavorite, succeeded in creating a vessel whose walls screened off gravity. They had equipped the vessel with supplies of food, oxygen and other materials for the journey and set out for the Moon. After sailing through space for days they had reached the satellite, and managed to reach the ground unscathed. Unfortunately when they were exploring, the first thing they did was lose sight of the ship, and while they were frantically searching for it they were taken prisoner and taken down into the depths, to meet what end they did not know.

Only when the author escaped and made it back to Earth did he realise what he could have had... A deserved classic. *Recommended*.

MR MEE by Andrew Crumey. Picador pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. © 2000. 344 pp. A\$21. On sale now.

A mainstream novel that deals with some of science fictions themes – a lost eighteenth book on quantum theory, two French writers who were copying it for the author, a lecturer on Rousseau and an elderly bookworm in Scotland who was using the internet to try to find more information about the lost classic. Crumey winds the three story threads around themselves and has created a literary work that is indeed also an entertaining read. Whether SF readers will also like it is another thing entirely. The author, in these 344 pages has created a novel that many can enjoy.

THE TAWNY MAN by Robin Hobb. Voyager tpb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. © 2001. 584 PP. A\$29.95. On

sale now. Book One of Fool's Errand. Another of Hobb's novels set on the world featuring the Outislanders. Fitz has had an interval of rest: it has been over fifteen years since the Red Ship War ended, and he has spent most of that time in an outlying province. Of course that was all too good to be true and events in the outside world had been deviating from the peace that all believed to have settled over the world. Fitz had been told that the son he had sired had disappeared, shortly before his wedding night, and Fitz had been asked to find him. His journey back with his companions, would be the start of a new campaign. Well told fantasy adventure.

THE MAGICIANS' GUILD by Trudi Canavan. Voyager pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. © 2001. 517 pp. A\$17.95. On sale now. A first novel by an Aurealis Award winner. The novel is about magicians, as can be ascertained from the title. The Guild of magicians had the job of protecting the city of Imardin; one of the things they were on the lookout for was people who had the Talent, but who had not been discovered. Sometimes these people, because of various events in their lives, were not found till quite late, when they had passed through adolescence. And sometimes the event that showed them up proved quite destructive to the city and people's lives. Sonea found out that she was such a person, and the Magicians were determined to both find her, and bring her under control. Canavan looks to be a writer to watch.

THE WOUNDED HAWK by Sarah Douglass. Voyager tpb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. © 2001. 610 pp. A\$27.95. On sale now. Book two of the Crucible. The story continues with Thomas Neville getting closer to obtaining the casket from Wynkyn de Worde. He has to pay a great price for it however, and his wife, Margaret will be forever sullied by it. Richard II would also meet his fate in this latest novel, after working his will with Margaret. And his fate is one of the more shocking in the book. Joan of Arc has a slighter role in this volume, as it is focussed on the events taking place in this parallel world of England, where angels of the Lord manifest themselves, as does the demon lord. The machinations of the characters are those of the fourteenth century, but such emotions are with us still. Excellent fantasy fiction.

THE LAST HERO by Terry Pratchett, art Paul Kidby. Gollancz coffee-table, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 2001. 160 pp. A\$45. On sale now.

Cohen the Barbarian has been introduced to the reader before. On the Discworld he is a well known name. Then the Lord Vetienari, the Patrician of Ankh-Morpork got a message that Cohen the Barbarian and his Silver Horde has left the land where Cohen had been reigning as Emperor and was headed for the abode of the Gods to give them back what the first hero had stolen. It did not take Vetienari long to gather together a meeting of government heads from all over the Discworld and make up a Plan. His main doer was Leonard of Quirm, the brilliant all-rounder whose only crime was being a genius who devised weapons of mass destruction. When Leonard had got together artisans and built a giant bird that was powered by dragon's breath, Vetienari had hope that they would be able to reach Cohen before he destroyed the world.

Full colour illustrations, often double paged, and an interesting and funny storyline make this a volume to be savoured. Well worth the admission price.

CHASM CITY by Alastair Reynolds. Gollancz tpb, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 2001. A\$29.95. 524 pp. On sale now.

This is Reynolds' second novel, the first being REVELATION SPACE.

Tanner Mirabel was a soldier; at first a simple soldier who made his name as a marksman, then an assassin. He became a soldier of fortune and ended up being the security advisor for a man named Cahuella. Then an incident occurred that would alter all their lives. Some guns that Cahuella had sold to another party were stolen before they were delivered and used to wipe out most of an aristocratic family. The surviving son was determined to gain revenge by killing Cahuella and his clan. The son, Reivich, fled offworld, with Tanner, the surviving member of Cahuella's organization, set to kill him.

If you like well-written hard SF, full of adventure, action and well-plotted to boot, this is for you. This book is *Highly Recommended* - some of the best SF I've read in years.

FARENHEIT 451 by Ray Bradbury. Voyager pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. © 1953. A\$19.95-\$21.95. On sale now.

It has been a long time, but I have eventually got to read this classic, now re-issued in an outstanding matt-black cover.

Along with everyone else I have seen the movie, which came out over 30 years ago, and loved it. The story of Fireman Montag and the duties he loved of setting fire to the houses of those who could upset society by hoarding books, is well known. I suppose seeing the movie first, is one of the things that Bradbury would be against with this book - after all, having a well with all four walls television screens is almost upon us. And the growth of comics, and anime is also making his vision more likely. As is the lowering attention spans of many people. How Montag woke up to what he was doing and its consequences is for the reader to discover.

Let up hope that things won't go this far; but as the Americans say: be vigilant! A true SF classic. It hasn't lost its kick in the nearly fifty years since it was first published.

TELLER OF TALES: The Life Of Arthur Conan Doyle by Daniel Stashower. Owl tpb, dist in Aust by PanMacmillan. © 1999. 472 pp incl index. A\$35. On sale now.

The winner of the Edgar Award for the Best Biographical Work.

I have always been interested in Arthur Conan Doyle - his Sherlock Holmes stories, as well as his SF works. This excellent biography by Stashower is clearly and concisely written and was a pleasure to read. It commenced with a scene with Doyle sketching a scene of a scene of "a flea-bitten workhorse pulling a heavy baggage cart. A tall pile of packing cases weighs the cart down, and each case bears a label of a different aspect of Conan Doyle's life and work". One of the largest cases is labelled "Sherlock Holmes". This book, I think, though the author does not say so, looks at all those cases and gives a good account of Doyle's life, with the outstanding events being Sherlock Holmes, and Doyle's Spiritualism.

I found this book fascinating reading and left it with a profound sense of knowing Doyle... *Recommended*.

SPECTRUM 7: The Best in Contemporary Fantastic Art, edited by Cathy Fenner & Arnie Fenner. UnderWood softcover, dist in Aust by Bookwise Intl. © 2000. 195 full colour pages, plus index. 215x280mm. A\$75. On sale now.

The seventh annual of artwork was picked from over 3000 entries.

The book itself is glossy paper and most pages illustrate 3 works of art, though some pages have only one. Many of the pieces are from the covers of SF and fantasy novels published from all over the (mostly) English speaking world. There are articles on the Grand Masters Award by Alan Lee and The Year in Review by Arnie Fenner. There follows details of art produced from various areas, which are more detailed: Advertising, Comics, Dimensional, Editorial and Institutional. In the following pages there are shown artwork from all these areas, mostly in full colour, with Gold and Silver awards. For instance the gold award for Advertising went to the artist Rafal Olbinski, the client was the Philadelphia Opera, the title was Salome, the size was 20"x30" and the medium was acrylic.

For those interested in current SF and fantasy art this volume is a must.

TOLKIEN: The Illustrated Encyclopedia by David Day. Mitchell Beazley tpb, dist in Aust by Bookwise Intl. © 1992. 279 pp. 215x280mm. A\$45. On sale now.

Quite a physically weighty volume.

It is not often that you see a Tolkien encyclopedia – and this is the first time I have seen this publication. On nearly every second page there is an illustration – usually half to full page, and mostly in colour, often full colour. To begin the volume there is a four page Introduction, then an article on the Life and Literary Works of J.R.R. Tolkien. Chapter One, titled History follows. It consists of Time Charts, and articles and illustrations of the different Ages in LORT. Chapter two is Geography, with maps of the Undying Lands, Middle-Earth in the Third Age, etc, along with a Topographical A-Z of the landscape's features. Chapter Three is Sociology, with the Peoples of Arda, Men, Elves, and an illustrated A-Z of the peoples and nations. Chapter four deals with Natural History, with articles on the flora and Fauna. Chapter five is the Biography, an illustrated Who's Who and then closing with an index of Principal Sources and a General index. Lastly there is acknowledgements and list of illustrations and the 19 illustrators.

All in all good background material for fans of Tolkien.

THE MIOCENE ARROW by Sean McMullen. Tor tpb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. © 2000. 416 pp. A\$28. On sale now.

The sequel to SOULS IN THE GREAT MACHINE.

The location is North America, the time is the fortieth century. The Call has only left about forty million humans left on the continent, and the society is a static, class-ridden one. A small group of people from Australica has parachuted into the wilderness surrounding the towns of Mounthaven, the new name for North America, and years later have worked their way higher up into that society. Their aim: to obtain the technology of flight and weapons from Mounthaven and take them to their homeland. Along the way they plan to set the various Call-havens against themselves and leave a weakened society that could be picked apart at their leisure. At the end, the Miocene Arrow will be used to rid the planet of a pest that had proved hard to remove in other ways.

An excellent novel of hard SF.
Recommended.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE BUDDHA by Marc de Smedt. Frances Lincoln pb, dist in Aust by

Bookwise Intl. © 1991. 239 pp incl appendices. A\$24.95. On sale now.

Translated from the French by Ian West.

If you are like me and have an inquisitive mind, and like knowing something about some of the important religions, but haven't the time to go digging into the deeper texts, then it is books such as this that are good for getting a feeling for the background of the founder of such religions. In this case, Buddhism. What de Smedt has done is to go to India and follow the actual path of the Buddha, from his birth to his death. He goes to the cities that Siddhartha Gautama visited during his long life, cities that still exist some 2,500 years later. When the Buddha died in his eighties, he left texts that are still clear and meaningful to men and women of the 21st Century.

An enlightening look into the beliefs and sayings of that sage that still are fresh today.

ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND by Lewis Carroll. Bloomsbury h/c, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 1865. 168 pp. A\$24.95. On sale now.

A re-issue of Lewis's classic.

What can be new about this edition? Well, it has the Mervyn Peake illustrations from his 1945 illustrations. They were taken from the originals, and computer enhanced because the originals were done on non-acid free paper and board from the war years. There are 67 of them scattered through the volume, and they are worth the volume price themselves. If you do not have a hard-cover edition of Alice, then this is your opportunity to get one for your library. The edition is in a small, "pocket" size (130x190mm), which is just the size for a coat pocket, or handbag. A silken sewn-in bookmark is included. There is also an introduction by Will Self.

A beautifully produced volume –
Recommended.

BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW:

Allen&Unwin: ON by Adam Roberts
THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS by Lewis Carrol
RECKLESS SLEEP by Roger Levy
VALIS by Philip K. Dick

HarperCollins: SEA AS MIRROR by Tess Williams
LORD OF THE RINGS Visual Companion by Jude Fisher
LORD OF THE RINGS Official Movie Guide by Brian Sibley
HodderHeadline: HOUSE CORRINO by B Herbert & K Anderson
THE NIGHT OF THE TRIFFIDS by Simon Clark
DOWN TO EARTH by Harry Turtledove
SECOND CONTACT by Harry Turtledove
AMERICAN FRONT by Harry Turtledove
WALK IN HELL by Harry Turtledove
BREAKTHROUGHS by Harry Turtledove

PanMacmillan: FALLEN DRAGON by Peter F. Hamilton

FUTURE RELEASES:

Pan Macmillan: DRAGONS OF MAGIC by J Robert King
HodderHeadline: AFTERSHOCKS by Harry Turtledove

HarperCollins: FIRE AND SWORD by Simon Brown
THE MAGICIANS GUILD by Trudi Canavan
TEAR OF THE GODS by Raymond E Feist
THE DRAGON CHARMER by Jan Siegel
STONE AND SUN by Graham Edwards
WEAWEWORLD by Clive Barker

Allen&Unwin: BORED OF THE RINGS by The Harvard Lampoon.

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