

WATT'S OUT

SF&F Book Releases

THE RISEN EMPIRE by Scott Westerfeld. Orbit pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Group. © 2003. 704 pp. A\$21.95. On sale now. There is getting to be a small outbreak of Space Operas lately by some of the best sf writers in the world, and most of them are quite good. THE RISEN EMPIRE is one such. The time is the indeterminate future – and an empire of eighty worlds has been ruled by an emperor for one thousand, six hundred years. His reign seemed to be set for another thousand, as he was immortal, as were his sister, and others that he had given the gift to. Then the alien Rix had managed to kidnap his sister, and they intended to hold her to ransom, forcing the emperor to bend to their will. The emperor had given the task of rescuing the sister to Captain Laurent Zai, who set about his task with zeal. On the War Cabinet was Senator Nara Oxham, who was Zai's lover. Between the two of them they would have to both pursue their goals, as well as try to find out the secret of the longevity of their master. An engrossing book.

DIAMOND DOGS, TURQUOISE DAYS by Alastair Reynolds. Gollancz pb, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 2003. 231 pp. A\$18.95. On sale now. A nice snug volume that is just the right size for putting in your coat pocket or purse for that long bus or train trip. This book contains two novellas – of the title of this volume. Diamond Dogs is a tale of the exploration of the Spire, an alien construct that had so far killed the explorers, and flung their remains onto the ground outside. Richard Swift was determined to understand the mystery, and with those of his crew, entered the structure. What he didn't realise was that others had more than an idea of what it really was... TURQUOISE DAYS is the name of a starship, and when it landed at the Pattern Juggler world Naqi, one of its researchers, found that the oceans with their Juggler organisms, was such an exotic conquest that it enthralled her. And when other humans arrived the existence of the Jugglers on that world was in danger. She would come close to losing herself in the events that followed. An excellent read.

PUSHING ICE by Alastair Reynolds. Gollancz tpb, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 2005. 457 pp. A\$32.95. On sale now. The book starts off in the year 2057 in the Asteroid Belt. A crew of miners is about to capture a comet and send the ice off to the factories when an unprecedented event happens – Janus, one of the moons of Saturn,

starts to move of its own accord, and to accelerate out of Sol system. The crew of the mining ship, Rockhopper, is ordered to try to get close to the moon before it escapes and do some quick exploration. Bella Lind, the captain of the ship, speaks to the hundred or so crew, and they decide, by a small margin, to try to catch up to Janus. A short time later they find that a Chinese ship is also trying to catch up to it, and the mission takes on political overtones. What follows is not what they expected at all, and later they would rue their decision to follow their orders. The journey would take them much further than they expected, and they would meet and challenge dangers they never dreamed of. Excellent speculative fiction.

PANDORA'S STAR by Peter F. Hamilton. Pan pb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. © 2004. 1144 pp. A\$19.95. On sale now. Book One of the Commonwealth Saga. Hamilton is one of the best authors of space opera writing today. This book is set in the year 2580, and humanity has spread its colonies over a volume of space with over six hundred planets occupied. This was done in a series of waves. Most of the planets are linked by wormholes. It is then that Dudley Bose, an astronomer, observes a star vanish. It is over a thousand light years away, and a special starship must be built to reach it. It is found that the reason it vanished is that a forcefield had been formed around it. As to whether it was done from inside, or outside, that was to be determined. There were political issues also, and a sabotage attempt was made to destroy the ship before it left. There were also people urging caution, in that the forcefield might be a Pandora's Box that might not be meant to be opened, if the ship managed that when they arrived. Some well-written action adventure here – engrossing science fiction.

JUDAS UNCHAINED by Peter F. Hamilton. Macmillan tpb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. © 2005. 949 pp. A\$32.95. On sale now. The second in the Commonwealth Saga. The action hots up in this volume. The invading aliens from Dyson Alpha were conquering Commonwealth worlds by the dozen, and humanity was falling back from them and sealing the wormholes to try to contain the aliens. This was not doing much good. To make humanities woes worse, the Starflyer alien, who had been rumoured to be plotting to overthrow the Commonwealth from within, was moving forward with its plans. Hamilton is running multiple plotlines in order to show the breadth of the problem and toward the end of the novel the strands were coming together. There is treachery in high places, and in places not expected. There appeared to be people selling out to the aliens, mostly to the Starflyer, and some of them were doing real damage. This series is for those who like their space opera fast and well written. Excellent.

VAMPIRES – The Immortal Damned. Penguin Viking h/c, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. © 2006. 123 pp. A\$24.95. On sale now. This is a beautifully produced book – the dust-cover is black, with the title

embossed in shiny red. The paper appears to be acid free, the main text is black with the novella titles in dark red at the bottom of the page. There is a red cloth tape bookmark included. The volume fits nicely into a jacket pocket or purse. However the main drawcard are the stories included: VAMPYRE by John Polidori, THE MORTAL IMMORTAL by Mary Shelley; VARNEY THE VAMPIRE by James Malcolm Rymer; THE LAST LORDS OF GARDONAL by William Gilbert; VIKRAM AND THE VAMPIRE by Sir Richard Burton; CARMILLA by Joseph Sheridan le Fanu; THE TRUE STORY OF A VAMPIRE by Count Eric Stenbock; GOOD LADY DUCAYNE by Mary Elizabeth Braddon; DRACULA by Bram Stoker (extract); AN AUTHENTICATED VAMPIRE STORY by Dr Franz Hartmann; FOR THE BLOOD IS THE LIFE by Francis Marion Crawford; DRACULA'S GUEST by Bram Stoker and THE ADVENTURE OF THE SUSSEX VAMPIRE by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. All-in-all a definite book to buy for your library and savour.

WAS by Geoff Ryman. Gollancz pb, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 1992. 454 pp. A\$22.95. On sale now. Number forty-three in the Fantasy Masterworks collection of novels. As with the other novels that have been chosen, WAS is both well written and enjoyably readable. There are three stories that are told herein, and the link that connects them is The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. The three stories take place many years apart – the earliest is in the 1870s, in Kansas, where a girl named Dorothy is struggling to keep her sanity while trying to exist. The second takes place in the 1920s, where another girl, named Baby Francis, is also finding it hard helping her make a living by singing. The third story commences in 1989. The book is fantasy, but what binds it together is the facts of life – the brutality and sameness that has endured over the centuries. But there is also courage and steadfastness, that has bound people together through the ages. An excellent book and one that has a profound message.

THE VOYAGE OF THE SABLE KEECH by Neal Asher. Tor tpb, dist in Aust by Pan Macmillan. © 2006. 506 pp. A\$32.95. On sale now. A sequel to BRASS MAN. Set on the world of Spatterjoy some time after the end of the latter novel, the book opens with the arrival on the world of the immortality virus by Taylor Bloc and his followers, who want to be resurrected in the same manner as had Sable Keech. Taylor Bloc and his followers were dead, but they had hopes of being alive again. Bloc's plan was to build a ship (to be named the *Sable Keech*) and sail it across the ocean to the isle where their dreams might come true. They would build the ship, hire some Old Captains and crew, and off they would sail. Or so their plans were to go. There were some complications – there were representatives of two hive minds, and there was a Prator warship supposedly destroyed... Asher has build some well-constructed climaxes in this space opera, and it kept this reader riveted until I had finished it. Even better than BRASS MAN.

Terry Pratchett THE ART OF DISCWORLD by Paul Kidby. Gollancz softcover. © 2004. 236x280 mm. 228 pp. A\$29.95. On sale now.

This book is full of illustrations, naturally, usually three to a double-page spread. Mostly there are two small sketches on the left page, plus 2/3 column of text explaining what the artwork is about, plus the right hand page has a full colour illustration. The first illustrations are of the Discworld being carried through the ether, next is the city of Ankh-morpork. Then the artwork concentrates on the characters in the books – and I think that most of them have been included in these 228 pages. Some of the artwork has seen publication before in the graphic novels, but I would think that many of them have their first appearance here. If you are a fan of Pratchett and Kidby and the Discworld then you will find this volume a welcome addition to your collection. If not, you will find it helpful in picturing the characters in the books.

SHADOW OF THE GIANT by Orson Scott Card. Orbit pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. © 2005. 431 pp. A\$19.95. On sale now.

The series of books that began with ENDER'S GAME and continued following Ender's exploits, was later added to with a separate series following Bean, another child in Ender Wiggins' battle group. That second series of novels is parallel in time with that of Ender, and shows many things that happened from another's perspective. That second look has added to the readers' impression of the events of the two series and made the whole richer for it. This latest book is the conclusion to the Shadow Saga, and follows Bean as he and his wife Petra struggle to live their lives on Earth before deciding to depart and live offworld. Both series are well-told and are spellbinding, and I can say conclusively that they deserve re-reading again, now that both series are concluded. Very readable and enjoyable "hard" science fiction.

CHARLES DARWIN'S The Voyage of the Beagle by Michael Kerrigan – Photographs by Wolfgang Kaehler. ABC h/c, dist in Aust by Aust Broadcasting Corporation. © 2005. 208 pp. 222x280 mm. A\$39.95. On sale now.

This is the Australian edition – it is also published by Saraband (Scotland) Ltd. What can I say about this book... The subtitle gives a hint: The Journals that Revealed Nature's Grand Plan. The main chapter titles also give hints: Setting Sail; On to the Pampas; The Santa Fe Trail; In Patagonia; Land of Fire; An Englishman's Paradise; The Broken Land; Over the Andes; Enchanted Galapagos; Oceania; On the Southern Continent and Homeward Bound. There is also an Introduction, Epilogue, Bibliography and Index. The contents are mostly Darwin's journals, interspersed with explanations by the author and profusely illustrated by maps, engravings and early photos, as well as Kaehler's colour photos from the areas Darwin is writing about. After reading it, the reader will find that they will have a clearer view of how Darwin obtained the background information to his

later ideas of the origin of species. This is a must book for the well-read home library.

SHADOWLANDS by Tad Williams. Orbit pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. © 2004. 831 pp. A\$21.95. On sale now. Volume One of the Shadowmarch Trilogy. Tad Williams latest book is in the classic fantasy framework – set in a world at roughly Middle Ages level, there are two main continents that are involved in the tale. The Southern continent of Xand, and the Northern Continent of Eion. The southerners were blessed with a topology that enabled easy travel over their lands, and had earlier began trading among themselves. The continent of Eion, on the other hand, had high mountain ranges and an icecap that extended some way down the interior. There were legends of strange lands to the far north, and over time with trade becoming more popular, trade routes would wind their way further north. To the far north were the Twilight People, who kept to themselves. South of them was the ancient castle of Southmarch. Events took a sudden change for the worst for the Northern continent and its peoples when the Autarch invaded from the south. Right in his path was Southmarch. Well-told and gripping fantasy fiction.

IN THE RUINS by Kate Elliott. Orbit pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. © 2005. 800 pp. A\$22.95. On sale now. Volume six of Crown of Stars and is the next-to-last volume of the series. Events are cascading into a whirlpool of destruction for the country ruled by King Henry. Invasion is from both from the lands around and from outside the planet itself. To add to his woes there is insane plotters working to overthrow him, and their plans also are coming to fruition. The two people who have been the main protagonists – Liath and her husband Alain – are trying desperately to gain support for their cause and try to stop the destruction of their heritage. There are four parts to this novel, which helped the author as she had originally written the final two books as one novel of about 430,000 words. Readers who have been following the series may have to wait a little for the conclusion and the gathering of the threads, but this volume is a must read as it slowly builds up to that climax that is forthcoming in the last volume. Still, Elliott has created a monumental work so far and the final volume is to be looked forward to.

DEVICES AND DESIRES by K. J. Parker. Orbit pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. © 2005. 706 pp. A\$21.95. On sale now. Book One of the Engineer Trilogy. I haven't read anything by Parker before, so had an open mind when I started this novel. It is a fantasy, set in a world that is about the level of the Middle Ages, with fencing and minstrels... One of the main character is Valens, a Duke's son. In the first few pages the Duke himself is killed, and a girl whom the son had an infatuation for had married someone else. The girl is Veatriz, the fifth daughter the leader of one of the countries in the vicinity of Valens' fief. Valens was only nineteen when he first met her, when she was a hostage at his fathers castle, but she made a lasting impression on him. Later, when war had

broken out, that short interlude would loom large in the aftermath of the fighting. Parker writes well and clearly – the reader is captivated by his prose, and this one, at least, is looking forward to the other novels in the series to come.

TRANSCENDENT by Stephen Baxter. Gollancz tpb, dist in Aust by Allen & Unwin. © 2005. 489 pp. A\$32.95. On sale now. Destiny's Children Book Three. A tale of the far future, when "the sky is full of dying worlds". The book opens with Michael Poole in Florida, a world with rising sea levels, dying forests, oil shortages. In short – the middle years of the 21st Century. It is quite distant in time to the worlds of the Transcendence, with humanity about to pass into the realm vacated by the old gods of humanity (figuratively speaking) and transcend itself. There are still some things to do, however, and one young woman is determined to revisit the worlds that formed the essence of the unity that created such a mind – a truly Stapledonian mass-mind that would achieve unity. Baxter has explored, in other novels, this creation of Stapledon, and he explores another facet of it in TRANSCENDENT. He tells of the final moments of the last humans as they prepare to bootstrap themselves into another phase of life. Mind-stretching science fiction.

AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT by Arthur C. Clarke. Ibooks, dist in Aust by Bookwise Intl. © 1968, 2005. 151 pp. A\$19.95. On sale now. The novel that helped cement Clarke as one of the foremost SF writers in the world. It was originally first published in 1953, and later expanded as THE CITY AND THE STARS. This is the shorter novel. The story about the last city on Earth, Diaspar, and the search by the young Alvin and his friend Theon as their search for the confirmation of the reason humans abandoned the stars and fell back to earth. Legend had it that in a great Interstellar war aliens drove mankind back to earth, where took place their last stand. In that search they found Lsy, the other community that had fought against the ages, and also won. There had been other cities, but they had fallen beneath the dust of the ages. Now even Diaspar was faltering... Also included in the book is the short story JUPITER V. If you haven't yet read this novel, I thoroughly *Recommend* it.

STAR WARS: CLONE WARS Vol 6 On the Fields of Battle. Dark Horse Books. Dist in Aust by Bookwise Intl. © 2005. 164 pp. On sale now. Dark Horse comics continues the Clone Wars series with the latest – volume 6. There aren't any adverts in this book, so the reader is really getting value for money as far as that goes. The action commences approximately seventeen months after the Battle of Geonosis. The volume has chapters, it starts off with what is probably the showcase of the book in Show of Force, in which Mace Windu leads an attack on an entrenched position. Then comes Forever Young, and the adventures of Master Tohno; Armor and the attack led by Aayla Secura to recover the SIP and lastly Dreadnoughts of Rendili and

Quilin's quest. As is usual, the graphics are first class and the stories very readable. Some of the text is small, but is still clear. A welcome addition to the series.

OTHER CURRENT + FUTURE RELEASES:

Pan Macmillan: *POETIC RETRIBUTION FROM MARS* by Sylvester Abanteriba
WILDWOOD DANCING by Juliet Marillier

HarperCollins: *DARKWITCH RISING* by Sarah Douglass
DRUID'S SWORD by Sarah Douglass
THE DROWNED WORLD by J. G. Ballard
ANCESTORS OF AVALON by Marion Zimmer Bradley
FLIGHT OF THE NIGHTHAWKS by Raymond F. Feist

Allen & Unwin: *TAU ZERO* by Poul Anderson
DIVINE INVASIONS – A Life of Philip K Dick by Lawrence Sutin
GRADISIL by Adam Roberts
RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA by Arthur C. Clarke
A SCANNER DARKLY by Philip K. Dick
SUNSTORM by Arthur C. Clarke & Stephen Baxter
SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES by Ray Bradbury
THE WYRDEST LINK by David Langford

Bookwise: *ALIENS/PREDATOR PANEL TO PANEL* (darkhorse)
STARWARS: CLONE WARS Vol.5

WATTS OUT #37, a supplement to THE MENTOR Magazine. Edited, printed & published by Ron Clarke of 95 Southee Cct, Oakhurst, NSW 2761, Australia. Also on the Internet at <http://www.efanzines.com>. WATTS OUT is now coming out approximately bi-monthly. June 2006

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