



Scratch Pad 32

Based on the non-Mailing Comments section of *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life* No. 17, a magazine written and published by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Victoria 3066, Australia (phone (03) 9419-4797; email: gandc@mira.net) for the March 1999 mailing of *Acnestis*.

Cover: 'Astro Ant' by Ditmar. This one's for you, Andy Sawyer. The top half of the picture shows the Trifid Nebula. Ditmar says to look for the little goblin-like face in the Nebula, proving that 'Von Daniken was right'.

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BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS

AUREALIS AWARD ENTRANTS 1998

My first list here is of the books I couldn't write about during 1998, i.e. the entrants for the Young Adults section of the 1998 Aurealis Award.

The award was begun four years ago by the editors of Melbourne's *Aurealis* magazine to provide Australia's first jury prize system for excellence in SF, fantasy and horror writing. Categories are Science Fiction, Fantasy, Young Adults, and Horror. Usually there are two awards in each category: Novel and Short Fiction. Heroic administrator during 1998 has been Peter McNamara, working by email from Adelaide to coordinate the four sets of judges and persuade publishers to send books to the correct set of judges.

In the Young Adults section, the other judges were Rosaleen Love and Sean Williams. Sean wasn't able to travel from Adelaide for the awards ceremony of 26 February, and Rosaleen dobbed me in to give the presentation speech for our category. Not for us the black-tie ceremony of the Arthur Clarke Awards. Not much money in evidence — only two publishers put money into the Aurealis Awards. All the catering was done by Justin Ackroyd at Slow Glass Books, Swanston Walk, Melbourne. In turn, Slow Glass sold a lot of books to people who turned up for the awards ceremony. No black tie, either. It was 25°C that afternoon, and the palatial premises of Slow Glass Books don't run to air-conditioning.

Nobody wanted long speeches, so nobody provided them. The idea was to read out the nominees; make a few remarks about the difficulty/ease of arriving at a winner; make the award; and allow the winner or the winner's representative to look suitably astonished/overcome.

Hence I threw away almost all of my speech (original version below). You won't be astonished to learn Peter Nicholls did his usual Peter Nicholls thing. As I finished saying why we weren't giving a Short Story award, Nicholls interrupted from the front of the crowd: 'There were at least 100 short stories available for the Young Adults category.'

What could I say? I could hardly say 'Show that man the door'. All I could say was the truth: 'Well, *we* didn't see them.' Ghod knows what Peter Nicholls was on about this time. As far as I know, he did not volunteer to be a judge in the category in 1998, but no doubt he was trying to hint that *he* was the real expert in the field. Okay, volunteer for active service, Mr Nicholls. *I* certainly won't be doing so again. Although the average quality of the entrants was quite high, reading a swag of books in one category during one year ruined my year's reading.

But I didn't say any of that. I gave the award to Alison Goodman, who was genuinely astonished (since the winners had been kept secret). Her novel is a first novel; I'll be watching out for everything she writes from now on.

The other winners were: **SF Novel:** *The Centurion's Empire*, by Sean McMullen (Tor); **SF Short Story:** 'The Truth About Weena' by David J. Lake (*Dreaming Down Under*); **Fantasy Novel:** *A Dark Winter* by Dave Lockett (Omnibus) and *Fire Angels* by Jane Routley (Avon); **Fantasy Short Story:** 'A Walk-on Part in the War' by Stephen Dedman (*Dreaming Down Under*); **Horror Short Story:** 'A Positive' by Kaaron Warron (*Bloodsongs* No. 10); **Conveners' Award:** *Rabbits* by Saun Tan (Lothian).

Here's the speech that I didn't quite give:

'For many years now, Children's and Young Adults' Fiction has been the Australian general publishing category with the least prejudice against science fiction, fantasy and horror. Such books often feature in the winners and runners-up of the Australian Children's Book Award. As a result, to read an Australian Young Adults' SF or Fantasy book is pretty much a guarantee of quality.

'We did not award the Short Fiction category this year because there simply weren't enough stories to choose from. There was only one anthology specifically devoted to the field, and we saw only a few other notable stories. We felt that if we could not provide a strong short list, we would not give a winner. In 1999, perhaps, the short story field will again be very strong in this area.'

Peter Nicholls disrupted at this point. I tried to stare at some other face — any face — in the audience. I left out the following two paragraphs, then gave a shortened version of the rest of this spiel:

‘Thanks to the hard work of Peter McNamara, the publishers were persuaded to send us virtually all their Young Adults titles for the year. Only one or two books were boring. Many were funny, and an even greater number had strong story lines. The standard of characterisation varied somewhat, according to authors’ interests. Among the SF titles, we noticed an emphasis on the doings of mad scientists. We’re not sure what this says about the current status of science in Australia.

‘We found only one general fault, and it puzzled us. We noticed that many writers can maintain a strong story line for the first three quarters of a novel, then allow too much to happen too fast at the end. The resulting confusion often spoils an otherwise fine novel.

‘The short-listed nominees for the Aurealis Award for Young Adults Fiction, Novel, for 1998, were:

- *Horsehead Boy* by Rory Barnes (HarperCollins)
- *Singing the Dogstar Blues* by Alison Goodman (HarperCollins)
- *Killing Darcy* by Melissa Lucashenko (University of Queensland Press)
- *A Dark Winter* by Dave Lockett (Omnibus Books)
- *The Night is for Hunting* by John Marsden (Pan Macmillan)

‘*Horsehead Boy* is the best example of a group of funny books about mad scientists. It tells of a boy who wakes up to find himself as a disembodied head in a vat. The result is an effective mixture of social comedy and speculative SF.

‘In *Killing Darcy* Melissa Lucashenko shows a special gift for writing about very strong, even startling characters. Although she is best known for writing about being Aboriginal in Australia, she also knows how to write very spooky fantasy scenes.

‘*A Dark Winter* override the judges’ prejudices against heroic fantasy. It is the most original, realistic, vivid and amusing example of the heroic fantasy genre to appear for years. When overseas readers discover Dave Lockett, there’ll be no stopping him.

‘*The Night is for Hunting* posed a real problem. Is it science fiction or not? Yes, it is, for it continues Marsden’s series of books about the near-future invasion of Australia by an unnamed Asian country. But no it isn’t, for its real theme is the implacable power of the Australian bush. All we can do is recommend it to a wide range of readers.

‘**And the winner is Alison Goodman’s *Singing the Dogstar Blues*, a wonderful mixture of humour, SF ideas, sense of place (Melbourne in the middle of next century) and vivid action. *Singing the Dogstar Blues* is Alison Goodman’s first published novel.’**

Alison received her award, thanked her partner, her publisher, Lucy Sussex, and several other people, then left the podium looking dazed.

‘Thanks again to Rosaleen Love and Sean Williams, who agreed with me most of the time, and Peter McNamara and the publishers who made the judging of 1998’s awards a pleasurable and instructive task.’

Here are my comments on individual books. I’ve left out a few that, although published as novels, were actually short

stories in book form. The ratings are:

- ** Books highly recommended.
- * Books recommended.
- ☹ Books about which I have severe doubts.

* **SWEETWATER NIGHT by Alison Stewart (Hodder Signature 0-7336-0570-2; 1998; 170 pp.)**

The publishers seem to think this has a horror/supernatural element merely because it has some suspense towards its end. Teenagers put themselves through a sort of trial when they return to Sweetwater Forest, where horrible things have happened.

** **KILLING DARCY by Melissa Lucashenko (University of Queensland Press 0-7022-3041-3; 1998; 230 pp.)**

Despite her surname, Melissa Lucashenko is an Aboriginal writer who is quickly building a strong reputation as a fine novelist. Of all the authors I read for the Aurealis Award, she has the greatest ability to create strong, ferocious characters that come to life in front of you. Darcy Mango has a chip on his shoulder, which is not helped by being forced to work for a White farming family. However, the members of the family are down on their luck, so reluctantly he forms a friendship with them. He also discovers an old house hidden in the bush, and in it a camera that takes pictures of the past. Lucashenko writes an urgent tale that combines realism and some elegant science-fiction effects.

** **COLD IRON by Sophie Masson (Hodder 0-7336-0583-4; 1998; 185 pp.)**

‘When the penniless Tattercoats is included in an invitation to the Earl of Malmsey’s grand ball, the servant-girl Malkin and Pug the gooseherd are determined that she will attend and claim the inheritance denied her since birth.’ Thus the blurb; and yes, the book could just have easily have been written by a British writer, and perhaps it’s already been published overseas. Masson has a lively, light style, and her group of characters (who form a family of pilgrims) make pleasant company for the reader. When Masson tries to play games with metaphysical mirrors at the end, she loses me as a reader. The social comedy of the first half of the book is more convincing than the Great Revelations at the end.

* **THE LYREBIRD’S TAIL by Sue Robinson (Lothian 0-85091-883-9; 1998; 158 pp.)**

Not even eligible for the Award. Solid but mundane tale of teenagers helping dad to regain his inheritance, which is a piece of land in the bush, before it can be stolen by legal bandits.

* **FANTASTIC WORLDS edited by Paul Collins (HarperCollins Moonstone 0-7322-5878-2; 1998; 316 pp.)**

A short-story collection with some strong stories and too many duds. Three of the stories were sort of all right: Sean McMullen’s ‘Chronicle’, Jane Routley’s ‘City of Whirlwinds’ and Garth Nix’s ‘From the Lighthouse’. But the only story with real power is Cherry Wilder ‘Old Noon’s Tale’, which is a longer version of a story that was first published in 1990 (and therefore wasn’t eligible for the Aurealis Award for Best YA Story, which we didn’t award anyway).

** **A DARK WINTER: THE TENEBRAN TRILOGY, BOOK ONE by Dave Lockett (Omnibus 1-86291-368-4; 1998; 328 pp.)**

I groaned when I began this book. Not another bloody heroic fantasy! I was soon won over. Lockett has written one of the few original and entertaining books in the genre. He uses simple means to go where no other fantasy writer dares to go: strong, realistic, often funny sentences; clear delineation of characters, from the most humble to the most headstrong; and in the final battle scenes, hair-raising and original variations on the Huge Threat From Over The Horizon. Yes, there will be a sequel. Despite that, this is one of the few contenders that had an effective ending.

- * **PIGGY IN THE MIDDLE** by Catherine Jinks (Penguin 0-14-038586-X; 1998; 238 pp.)
One of several mad-scientist novels sent to us. This, like many other contenders, begins well but finally disappears up its own infundibulum of hectic action scenes. Jinks's style is attractive, combining humour and suspense (the strangest and jolliest character is the sixteen-year-old genius who is cloning people-like pigs) but somehow she doesn't have enough puff to keep this little craft going.
- * **RED CITY** by Sophie Masson (Moonstone 0-7322-5916-9; 1998; 200 pp.)
Masson's style is always enjoyable to read, but in *Red City* she is so busy being mysterious and magical that the story disappears up its own enchanted castles and islands. I suspect Masson has been just too ambitious too early in her career, but her next few books will be worth seeking out.
- ** **VIBES: JIGSAW** by Christine Harris (Hodder 0-7336-0884-1; 1998; 136 pp.)
- ** **VIBES: SHADOWS** by Christine Harris (Hodder 0-7336-0885-X; 1998; 138 pp.)
- ** **VIBES: MASKS** by Christine Harris (Hodder 0-7336-0886-8; 1998; 136 pp.)
- ** **VIBES: SUSPICION** by Christine Harris (Hodder 0-7336-0887-6; 1998; 138 pp.)
Hodder snookered itself by issuing these books as a series of novellas instead of as one novel. Although each piece is intriguing, the four sections don't quite add up. If they had, a complete *Vibes* novel would have been hard to beat. After she wakes up in a hospital bed, Brittany Cooke cannot remember anything about her earlier life. She cannot even remember the people who claim to be her parents. Very weird things begin to happen to her. She seems to have a double, a malevolent person intent on upsetting her attempts to live a normal suburban life. Put the four books together, and they have quite a neat paranoid SF plot. Split them apart, and the story keeps restarting instead of flowing from one section to another. The strength of *Vibes* is its sharp critique of modern suburban living as seen through the eyes of an ultra-aware teenager. Funny, perceptive and memorable; ruined by a bad marketing move.
- * **FERAL** by Kerry Greenwood (Hodder 0-7336-0888-4; 1998; 220 pp.)
Feral is just one of the many Aurealis YA entrants that begins brilliantly, but falls apart at the end. Like most of the other authors in the competition, Greenwood paces the first half of the book well. Her characters, living on the outskirts of an almost completely destroyed Melbourne, gather forces in order to defeat the despotic regime. They are interesting characters, this far-future Melbourne is well observed, and everything is going well until the book collapses at the end

under the weight of its own busyness. A pity, for it's rather nice seeing the Melbourne Casino (converted by Kerry Greenwood into a fortress of the far-future tyrants) being destroyed.

- * **THE HOUSE OF MANY ROOMS (THE DOORWAYS TRILOGY, BOOK ONE)** by Michael Pryor (Hodder 0-7336-0926-0; 1998; 222 pp.)
I've read some very funny work by Michael Pryor, but there isn't much humour here. Instead, he gives us what is becoming one of the tiredest ideas in SF, characters who are propelled through 'doorways' from one alternative Earth to another. Their pursuers never give up; there is no ending but merely the necessity for a sequel. Pryor can do a lot better than this.
- ** **SINGING THE DOGSTAR BLUES** by Alison Goodman (HarperCollins Voyager 0-7322-5967-3; 1998; 200 pp.)
The winnah! I've already written a long review of this book for *Australian Book Review*, pointing out that *Singing the Dogstar Blues* combines the realism of a well-imagined near-future Melbourne, the transcendent experience of time travel and the disturbing experience of trying to get along with visiting aliens, and the sharpest humour shown by any current Australian SF writer.
- * **HORSEHEAD BOY** by Rory Barnes (Angus & Robertson 0-207-19663-X; 1998; 170 pp.)
One of the judges thought this book was very funny, but as with so many other contenders, all I remember is a book that begins well but collapses towards the end. Spud Wilson dies, but a team of mad scientists revive his brain in a vat, to use for their own nefarious purposes. Rory Barnes tells a story well, but I don't think he had quite enough story to fill this novel.
- * **TRANSLATIONS IN CELADON** by Sally Odgers (HarperCollins Voyager 0-7322-5908-8; 1998; 269 pp.)
The title just about says it all. This is pretentious, and dull, and self-important. I couldn't get past page 70.
- ** **MAMA'S BABIES** by Gary Crew (Lothian 0-85091-827-8; 1998; 159 pp.)
Gary Crew has a reputation as one of the finest Australian writers for children and young adults, and this book shows why he deserves that reputation. Unfortunately, it has no fantasy or SF element, and the only 'horror' quality is in the very realistic nature of the discoveries that Sarah makes during her years of living with 'Mama Pratchett' in New South Wales during the 1890s. The recreation of the period and the strong, sensible, caring personality of the story-teller are the strengths of the book, since the reader easily guesses the big surprise at the end.
- ** **THE NIGHT IS FOR HUNTING** by John Marsden (Macmillan 0-7329-0944-9; 1998; 252 pp.)
As a panel, we had problems with this book. At one level, it is the best-written book we read: it shows a lean writing style; exciting, even startling adventures; memorable characters and situations. It is also science fiction by genre: it is the seventh in the series of books Marsden is writing about a group of teenagers who are trying to survive after an unnamed Asian country invades Australia. But it is not primarily science fiction: it is one of those near-future novels that tell of events the writer believes really could happen quite soon. Marsden's purpose is to show Australian teenagers that they should not take anything for granted, especially lives that are luxurious compared to those led by

people in much of the rest of the world. He shows that, if the worst should come to the worst, the people who would survive best are those who have greatest knowledge of the Australian bush. *The Night Is for Hunting* is actually a hymn to the paradoxical nature of the Australian bushland, which I have never seen described better (except, of course, by Patrick White). It hides the survivors from the invaders, but is equally unfor- giving to the main characters, who are trying to escort a group of feral city kids to safety. This is very superior adventure fiction.

- ** **FAT BOY SAVES WORLD** by Ian Bone (Lothian 0-85091-938-X; 1998; 208 pp.)
Wonderful title. Not a bad book. Lots of comedy and high melodrama about a family in which one child refuses to speak and another refuses to get on with anybody. But it turns out to be psychological fiction, à la Robert Cormier, with no SF or fantasy elements.
- * **WALKING TO BABYLON** by Kate Orman (Virgin 0-426-20521-9; 1998; 256 pp.)
Apart from *Singing the Dogstar Blues*, this is the only interstellar SF book submitted to the panel. Most of our writers hug their native soil all too firmly, but Orman likes to skylark around in time and space. The trouble is that she is so determined to be 'bright' and 'entertaining' that I remember few events past those of the first few pages. I recall that this book was well plotted, but I cannot remember anything about that plot.

OTHER BOOKS READ SINCE 31 AUGUST 1998

- ** **EXTRA(ORDINARY) PEOPLE** by Joanna Russ (St Martin's Press 0-312-27806-3; 1984; 161 pp.)
'Souls' and 'The Mystery of the Young Gentleman' are the two powerful stories in this collection. 'Souls' is about the abbess from the future who has never quite warmed to her job of protecting nuns from marauding Vikings. The relationship between the abbess and her young charge is very effective; in some of the later scenes Russ gives some clues about the time-travelling army who appear in many of her stories and novels. Are they lesbians, neuters or hermaphrodites? I'm still not sure after reading 'The Mystery of the Young Gentleman', but I'm not as puzzled as the seafaring nineteenth-century gentleman who finds himself falling in love with one of them. Russ applies all her seductive powers to showing what seduction is all about. The other stories are unsatisfactory, but they provide new clues about the culture of the time travellers (or are they merely dimension travellers?)
- ** **THE TWO OF THEM** by Joanna Russ (Berkley 0-425-04106-9; 1978; 181 pp.)
A very strange set-up here. Two of Russ's time/dimension travellers observe a culture that seems to be enclosed within a small moon, which itself seems to be in a time-satellite cut off from the rest of the universe. When one of the time travellers abducts a girl from the very restricted, Moslem-based culture, it's not quite clear by what method of travel they reach her home culture. And is this the Earth from which the travellers set out? The human relations here are vivid, but it would take a reader much cleverer than me to sort out the nature of the SF trappings.
- ** **O CANADA: AN AMERICAN'S NOTES ON CANADIAN CULTURE** by Edmund Wilson

(Rupert Hart-Davis; 1967; 245 pp.)

I'd always wanted to read *O Canada*, but found it only after Tony Thomas told me where to look. It's an odd book, which concentrates on Canada's culture and literature immediately before and after World War II, in particular French Canada, an enclosed, paranoid world about which I knew nothing. It's unlikely I'll ever read the authors Wilson talks about, but I'd like to read more Canadian history, very little of which is available in Australia.

- ** **A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES** by Ruth Rendell (Hutchinson 0-09-1800625; 1998; 352 pp.)
This is a strange book, even for non-Wexford Ruth Rendell. In a role that Jude Law should play on film, the main character starts with a chip on his shoulder, and Rendell lets that chip get bigger and bigger. Give a lonely psychotic enough rope to hang himself, and he'll do it. What will surprise even the addicted Rendell reader is the ingenuity of the hanging process.
- ** **LUMINOUS** by Greg Egan (Millennium 1-85798-552-4; 1998; 352 pp.)
Greg Egan has achieved an evenness of texture and consistency of accomplishment in these stories that makes it difficult to remember them separately. They so nearly add up to one Eganworld that it's hard to differentiate between their viewpoints. I've given four stars to most of them, and particularly liked 'Transition Dreams', 'Silver Fire', 'Chaff' and 'The Planck Dive'.
- ** **THE EXTREMES** by Christopher Priest (Simon & Schuster 0-684-81632-6; 393 pp.)
Until the night I visited Slow Glass for the Aurealis Awards, I thought I would miss out on my own copy of *The Extremes*. Alan Stewart received a hardback review copy from the local distributor five months ago. Thanks, Alan, for lending it to me. The problem seems to be that most local distributors are now not importing hardback fiction from British publishers. They are importing the large softcovers instead. But *The Extremes* appeared only in hardcover. So what did the distributor do? As far as I can tell, failed to import the book until Slow Glass put in a large enough order. Almost certainly their copies are the only ones to reach Australia.
So we nearly missed out on the latest book by Chris Priest, surely a major English author by any standards. In *The Extremes* he's doing something new and interesting. There is, as overseas reviewers have noted, an unusual amount of violence in this novel, but that's hardly the point. Is this real or virtual violence? We are told that the main character lives in a world that is very like our own, but it is an alternative world. Virtual reality stations have become as available as computer games arcades are in our own world. At which point does the main character's world separate from something we might call 'reality' and entirely enter a virtual world? My guess is that this occurs in the first few pages, but I will never know. There is no solid ground here. The shifting ground achieves its own reality through Priest's admirable prose. Or is there just a bit too much slippage? Compared to *The Prestige*, which was exactly the right length, *The Extremes* feels too long for its material. But maybe I'll feel differently when I've read it again.
- ** **DREAMING DOWN UNDER** edited by Jack Dann and Janeen Webb

(HarperCollins Voyager 0-7322-5917-7; 1998; 556 pp.)

This is the Big Australian Short Story Collection for 1998, and maybe for a few years to come. I've read better Australian original fiction anthologies, some from as many as twenty years ago, but *Dreaming Down Under* is welcome for showing us what our writers are doing right now. I'm recommending it because, although it contains many disappointing stories, it also has some very enjoyable pieces, such as Isobelle Carmody's 'The Man Who Lost His Shadow', a dark tale set in Prague; George Turner's 'And Now Doth Time Waste Me', which was unfinished when Turner died, but even without an ending is a vigorous speculative yarn; Russell Blackford's 'The Soldier in the Machine', which continues his gladiatorial interests into the twentieth century; David J. Lake's Aurealis Award-winning 'The Truth About Weena', which nicely gives a theory for Wells's *The Time Machine* and pulls the plug on many well-loved notions of time travel; Jane Routley's 'To Avalon', which shows that not all Australian tourists to England are as gullible as we look; Sean McMullen's 'Queen of Soulmates', an apocalyptic fantasy with a spectacular ending; and Simon Brown's nicely malignant 'With Clouds at Our Feet'. And much more besides. No sign of an American release yet; I'll buy you a copy and send it airmail if you sent me a crispy £20 bank note.

*** **LES MISÉRABLES** by Victor Hugo
(Collins Classics; 1862; 1372 pp.)

No, I didn't read it in French, although Elaine did so a few years ago. This 1950s translation seems complete, and it's not too awkward. This is the first time I've read *Les Misérables* since 1960 or 1961, when I was either thirteen or fourteen, but I was astonished at how many scenes had remained clearly in my memory. Or perhaps that's because I have heard this book read on radio and seen the wonderful 1933 French film. I've avoided the musical so far. Hugo's method is more breathtaking for its ambition than for its execution, particularly in the second half. For every episode, he first takes the eagle's-eye view, then the bird's-eye view, then the viewpoint of the interested observer on the ground . . . then gets back to his characters, whose next adventures we are waiting for. Hugo's overwhelming structure is meant to give the sense that every character represents an ingredient of Greater France, and, later, of mighty Paris. But the characters have their own absolute qualities; they would be even more vivid if not quite so surrounded by the World According to Hugo. The relationship between the trio formed by Valjean, Javert and the Thénardiens gives the essential energy to the book; but also vital is Hugo's ability to write outrageously successful scenes of crazy melodrama and breathless suspense. I plan not to leave it another forty years before rereading *Les Misérables*.

** **NOT THE ONLY PLANET: SCIENCE FICTION TRAVEL STORIES** edited by Damien Broderick
(Lonely Planet 0-86442-582-1; 1998; 250 pp.)

To judge from his record over the last twenty-five years or so, Damien Broderick is by far Australia's most accomplished anthologist. Asked by Lonely Planet, the publisher of travel books, to produce an SF anthology about travel, he sought out some very enjoyable stories, including some I had never read. The star of the anthology is Gene Wolfe's 'Seven American Nights', seemingly written by a very unreliable observer. He

takes drugs every night, he believes unlikely tales told by the natives, and the America he visits seems to have little to do with the America we know from other fiction. What is really going on? There must be a wealth of critical literature expended on this story. The travellers of Brian Aldiss's 'The Difficulties Involved in Photographing Nix Olympica' are both unreliable travellers and unreliable observers, burdened by their own presuppositions yet won over by the majesty of Mars's vast mountain, which they attempt to climb. With his vivid mixture of poetic and factual detail, Aldiss actually places the reader on the surface of Mars. All the other stories in this collection are interesting, especially John Varley's 'In the Bowl', which shows that when we get to suburban Venus it is likely to be a very strange tourist trap.

* **THE CRUCIBLE OF CONSCIOUSNESS**
by Zoltan Torey

(Oxford University Press 19-55087-6; 1999; 273 pp.)

I copy-edited this book, but I cannot say with certainty whether it is merely an interesting side comment on the whole consciousness–mind–artificial intelligence debate, or a very important book right at the centre of the debate. Let people with expertise in the field take up Torey's challenges. I became frustrated because the author defines his main terms according to other terms which he has also defined in a very technical way. To the extent that I could sort out the concepts from the arcane language in which they are expressed, it seemed to me that Torey's argument is convincing.

** **THE RESURRECTION MAN** by Sean Williams
(HarperCollins Voyager 0-7322-5903-7; 1998; 609 pp.)

I recommend this novel by Sean Williams, although I think it is at least 200 pages too long. A future detective thriller, *The Resurrection Man's* best pages are vitiated by many other pages of boring explanations and investigations. In a world of matter transportation, the problem is not the technology but the regulation of it. Foolproof systems fail, and a criminal captures women at the moment they transfer from one booth to another. One woman arrives at her destination; her momentary 'double' is captured and murdered. The main character is persuaded that the criminal is a similarly generated double of himself. Complications unwind. Not so long ago, the publisher would have demanded this be cut to 200 pages; is it possible that publishers now demand extra thickness?

** **THE FABULOUS ENGLISHMAN** by Robert McCrum
(Houghton Mifflin 0-395-37776-5; 1984; 274 pp.)

I should be prejudiced against the writings of the man who, as the new Publisher at Faber & Faber, ended George Turner's British career. But McCrum is such an all-round winning writer, a cross between Brian Aldiss and Graham Greene, that I have to say this one of the most exciting, amusing and moving thrillers I've read for a long time. The first-person narrator is not the story-teller. He writes the novel on behalf of the real story-teller, himself a writer who can no longer write anything but advertising copy. Trapped within his own inadequacies, the main character corresponds for many years with a man in Prague. When finally he takes the journey to Prague, long after the events of 1968 which made him obsessed about Czechoslovakia, the main character discovers a bizarre situation. However, the people in Prague who regard him as the 'fabulous Englishman' have long accepted their pecu-

liar fate, which hits him all at once.

Favourite Books Read for the First Time During 1998

- 1 *The Sparrow* (Mary Doria Russell). First published 1996. Edition read: Black Swan. 506 pp.
- 2 *The Chimney Sweeper's Boy* (Barbara Vine). 1998. Viking. 343 pp.
- 3 *The Blood Kiss* (Dennis Etchison). 1988. Scream/Press. 216 pp.
- 4 *The Hidden Side of the Moon* (Joanna Russ). 1987. St Martin's. 229 pp.
- 5 *The Zanzibar Cat* (Joanna Russ). 1983. Arkham House, 244 pp.
- 6 *Hotel Paradise* (Martha Grimes). 1996. Knopf. 348 pp.
- 7 *Minor Arcana* (Diana Wynne Jones). 1996. Vista. 287 pp.
- 8 *Extra(ordinary) People* (Joanna Russ). 1984. St Martin's. 161 pp.
- 9 *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (John Berendt). 1994. Vintage. 388 pp.
- 10 *The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy by Women* (ed. Susan Williams and Richard Glyn Jones). 1995. Viking. 560 pp.
- 11 *A Sight for Sore Eyes* (Ruth Rendell). 1998. Hutchinson. 352 pp.
- 12 *Children of God* (Mary Doria Russell). 1998. Villard. 438 pp.
- 13 *The Eighth Stage of Fandom* (Robert Bloch). 1962. Wildside. 208 pp.
- 14 *The Extremes* (Christopher Priest). 1998. Simon & Schuster. 393 pp.
- 15 *Doctor Fischer of Geneva or The Bomb Party* (Graham Greene). 1980. Simon & Schuster. 156 pp.
- 16 *The Sunken Road* (Garry Disher). 1996. Allen & Unwin. 214 pp.
- 17 *We Who Are About To . . .* (Joanna Russ). 1977. Dell. 170 pp.
- 18 *The Two of Them* (Joanna Russ). 1978. Berkley. 181 pp.
- 19 *Luminous* (Greg Egan). 1998. Millennium. 295 pp.
- 20 *The Female Man* (Joanna Russ). 1975. Bantam. 214 pp.

Favourite Films Seen for the First Time During 1998

- 1 *Rashomon* (directed by Akira Kurosawa) 1950
- 2 *It's Always Fair Weather* (reconstructed) (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen) 1955
- 3 *Designing Woman* (Vincente Minelli) 1957
- 4 *Tous Les Matins du Monde* (Alain Corneau) 1992
- 5 *The Right Stuff* (Philip Kaufman) 1983
- 6 *L.A. Confidential* (Curtis Hanson) 1997
- 7 *Dark City* (Alex Provas) 1998
- 8 *La Jétée* (Chris Marker) 1962
- 9 *Searching for Bobby Fischer* (Steven Zaillian) 1993
- 10 *The Sound Barrier* (David Lean) 1952
- 11 *Men in Black* (Barry Sonnenfeld) 1997
- 12 *The Thief of Baghdad* (Raoul Walsh) 1924
- 13 *Q&A* (Sidney Lumet) 1990
- 14 *Wild at Heart* (David Lynch) 1990
- 15 *The Naked Kiss* (Samuel Fuller) 1964
- 16 *Shock Corridor* (Samuel Fuller) 1963
- 17 *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling) 1995
- 18 *Gattaca* (Andrew Niccol) 1998
- 19 *The Remains of the Day* (James Ivory) 1995
- 20 *The Clairvoyant* (Maurice Elvey) 1935

Favourite Short Stories Read for the First Time During 1998

- 1 'The Old Man' (Daphne du Maurier) read in *The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy by Women*
- 2 'The True State of Affairs' (Diana Wynne Jones) *Minor Arcana*
- 3 'Deadspace' (Dennis Etchison) *The Blood Kiss*
- 4 'The Olympic Runner' (Dennis Etchison) *The Blood Kiss*
- 5 'The Dirty Little Girl' (Joanna Russ) *The Hidden Side of the Moon*
- 6 'Nightside' (Joyce Carol Oates) *The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy by Women*
- 7 'The Woman in Black' (Dennis Etchison) *The Blood Kiss*
- 8 'A Nice, Shady Place' (Dennis Etchison) *The Blood Kiss*
- 9 'The Extraordinary Voyages of Amelie Bertrand' (Joanna Russ) *The Zanzibar Cat*
- 10 'The Man Who Lost His Shadow' (Isobelle Carmody) *Dreaming Down Under*
- 11 'The New Men' (Joanna Russ) *The Zanzibar Cat*
- 12 'How Dorothy Kept Away the Spring' (Joanna Russ) *The Hidden Side of the Moon*
- 13 'Corruption' (Joanna Russ) *The Zanzibar Cat*
- 14 'My Boat' (Joanna Russ) *The Zanzibar Cat*
- 15 'And Now Doth Time Waste Me' (George Turner) *Dreaming Down Under*
- 16 'The Soft Wall' (Dennis Etchison) *The Blood Kiss*
- 17 'Elf Hill' (Joanna Russ) *The Hidden Side of the Moon*
- 18 'Visiting Day' (Joanna Russ) *The Hidden Side of the Moon*
- 19 'Nor Custom Stale' (Joanna Russ) *The Hidden Side of the Moon*
- 20 'Murder 1986' (P.D. James) *The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy by Women*

Some obvious choices from the Russ volumes, such as 'Souls' and 'The Second Inquisition', are not here because I read them when they first appeared.

— Bruce Gillespie, 1 March 1999



This one's for you, Maureen: Yvonne Rousseau's photo of Buckley's Falls, Fyansford, Geelong, 29 December 1998, on the day we went to visit John Bangsund.