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## Reflections on the Grand Master

Conor McBride

**I**SAAC ASIMOV, who is, at least according to his publishers, the Grand Master of Science Fiction, has had quite a lot of bad press in this magazine over the years: so much so that its current [read "some long-forgotten" ... -Ed] editor has specifically asked for contributions in his defence. I like a challenge.

I suspect that defending the great man's prose is unlikely to be easy: consider the following excerpt from the posthumous "Forward The Foundation" found more or less at random and surreptitiously copied down on the back of a credit card receipt before the shopkeeper noticed:

"Forty! He was not young any longer. Life no longer stretched before him as a vast uncharted field, its horizon lost in the distance. He had been on Trantor for eight years and the time had passed quickly. Another eight years and he would be nearly fifty. Old age would be looming."

Copy like that gets laughed out of Jomsborg Writers' Workshop.

For similar reasons, Isaac Asimov cannot possibly be held as great on the strength of his characterisation. Even his most convincing effort, Elijah Baley, tends to be a counterfeit Philip Marlowe, but lacking both the charm and the wit. As for female characters, well, the depth of the man's insight is so indicative of a lifetime spent in New Hall Bar that it is a wonder he never turned up to CUSFS - perhaps he was afraid of getting an earful, or maybe he was put off by the raffle prizes.

So what is the basis of Asimov's importance? Is it simply that so many people, even those who dislike his work, believe he is important? It cannot always have

been that way. Is he important because no second-hand bookshop worthy of the name is without its tattered paperback copies of "Nightfall Two" and "Second Foundation", or its shiny hardback remainder of "Fantastic Voyage II - Destination Brain"? Actually, even though I have just nipped out for some chocolate and fizzy pop at May's Cafe, with the consequent pause for contemplation, I am not at all sure I know the answer to this question, so I shall leave it for later.

It seems to me that, as far as defending Asimov goes, I am not doing a particularly good job, and yet, there are some of his books which I enjoyed reading. For instance, his detective-story robot books, "The Caves Of Steel" and "The Naked Sun" are actually quite good. The robotics ideas are still fresh and central to the plot, which moves and twists at a pleasing pace, and above all, the books are short, as his novels generally were in those days, before publishers became obsessed with the extended trilogies of inch-thick blockbusters so many of which can be found holding up the furniture in student flats all over the world. Indeed, the sole exception to the rule that Asimov's rather fat latter day books are several shades of dire darker than dismal is the third Baley novel, "The Robots Of Dawn", although it does leave one feeling that it would have been better the length of the first two. In between the smugness, the gratuitous sex and the ludicrous story of the little girl who accidentally gave her favourite robot amazing psychic powers, we find a tale of Auroran political infighting with potentially significant impact on the future of Earth and its people. Ultimately, Baley resolves the political problem without making any great impact on the actual crime. This latter he only solves once the murderer is assured of

a satisfactory outcome and is willing to be discovered. In contrast, "Robots And Empire" genuinely is appalling - the heroes are unconvincing, the villains are straight from a pantomime, the sex is laughable and the robots have just gone too far.

It seems to me that Asimov's strength lies in his science, not in his fiction. He is at his plausible best when he takes a fresh idea and places it at the heart of a stripped-down plot which he presents with a minimum of fuss. When he strays into waters requiring any kind of empathy with the human condition, he soon runs aground. Perhaps it is not too cynical to suggest that Asimov's best work concerns robots, mainly because he does not understand humans.

Asimov's greatest hero, Hari Seldon, does understand humans, at least when they act en masse. "Foundation" and "Foundation And Empire" are also present on my Asimov shortlist. These books are actually collections of novella-length stories, principally orientated towards the presentation of psychohistory, Asimov's putative mathematics of social behaviour, which is interesting, despite its inappropriate name. The format of the stories tends to lead Asimov away from exploring his characters too thoroughly, which is probably a good thing, while we watch, through their individual actions, the evolution of the Foundation's internal and external politics in accordance with Seldon's

predictions. "Second Foundation" feels more like a novel: Asimov annoys us by trying to write characters, including the kind of precocious teenager so sadly beloved of the worst American Science Fiction. More distressingly, he gets carried away with the "psycho" in "psychohistory", giving its practitioners startling telepathic powers over individuals, despite the fact that the discipline is concerned with the broad statistical behaviour of societies. Further, the Mule, a warped sterile telepath, hellbent on galactic domination, fails to achieve full satiation of his lust for power, solely due to his unrequited feeling for a woman who was kind to him - *amor vicit omnia*, Hari Seldon's third law. The other Foundation novels are typical Asimov fat books - the ideas are well past their sell-by dates and the stories are padded out with fulsome cleverness, gratuitous gadgetry and rather grim intercourse, culminating in the mystery of Seldon's girlfriend: is she a robot? does he care? does he...

So, Isaac Asimov, Grand Master Of Science Fiction? Maybe not. Isaac Asimov, throw it in the bin? Probably, but pause for consideration. If the book is thin, it might be all right. If it's the story of one human's crusade to blah blah blah, the bin. If it's a political thriller or detective story centred on a technological innovation, it might just be worth reading.

## SF in the Media

IT'S ODD HOW media interest in science and science fiction waxes and wanes. The national papers often ignore the topic for weeks (if not months) at a time, and often the TV listings don't even deem SF on TV worthy of description. Then, suddenly, SF is everywhere. It happened rather memorably with articles in the

Times about the early production woes of the latest addition to the growing collection of Star Trek series, Voyager, and of the latest of the Trek films, Generations.

The story with Voyager was this: chosen to play the role of the captain of the USS Voyager was one Genevieve Bujold. Unfortunately for Paramount, who dithered

some time before deciding on a woman captain, the actress quit after only days of filming. Rumour has it that she had no wish to play "a comic book character". Interesting, captain. Certainly The Times thought so; both the daily and the Sunday editions carried articles on the "fiasco", and were only too quick to point out that this was only one dispute of many to plague the production of the world's favourite science fiction television show.

Even more recently, with Generations, there was disagreement between William Shatner and Patrick Stewart over their roles as captains of the Enterprise past and present (not to say their respective acting abilities)... From Gene Roddenberry's "megalomaniac" attitude to his actors (underlings?) to the almost universal dislike of William Shatner by the cast of the original series, the vision of a hap-happy future where man can "boldly go" in peace is belied by acrimony behind the scenes.

Voyager did make it to the screens, though, to varied reactions from Star Trek fandom. The woman captain remained, played by Kate Mulgrew, and Generations made it to the big screen, both ironically

helped rather than hindered by the media interest.

Why should this attract the attention of the national media? I don't know for sure, but for a world in which so many people have heard of Star Trek (and indeed of Trekkies), the attempt to introduce a female captain is an interesting yardstick by which to measure the progression of equality in 20th Century Society. Trekkies will tell you about the progressive attitude of Star Trek throughout the years (see David Damerell's article "In Praise of Star Trek" in TTBA Volume 20, Number 3 for an example), and maybe it is the spectacle of this attitude being trounced by the realities of the modern world that has attracted the press. Again here, the present belies the image of the future that the show wishes to project.

But then, idealism makes some of the best SF (and some of the worst), and perhaps it is this that has made Star Trek so popular. People like to dream and exercise the imagination. Some people would love to zip at light speed across the galaxy with these amiable if slightly two-dimensional folk. And, given the choice between British Rail on a strike day and the USS Enterprise, wouldn't you?

## Coincidence

Conor McBride

'THAT'S NO JOB for a grumpy old poker like you!' called the man sitting alone at the next table. Neuboldt had not really noticed him before. Sixtyish and wiry, his skin looked as if it had long ago turned to leather and his short white hair stood on end. From the way he stared at his pint, it almost seemed that he expected no reaction to his remark. He tapped the ash from his pipe onto the floor.

Neuboldt felt obliged to make some

kind of rejoinder - he was twenty-six, fit, healthy and well qualified - if anyone was a grumpy old poker who should be minding his old business, it was the stranger at the next table, but to say this to his face would seem childish. For a few seconds, he stared into space as if suspended from his goblet, waiting to blink at an incoming notion, and then, gulping down the last of his wine with a flourish, he shot a sly glance at his comrades and headed for the bar.

'Pour me another, landlord,' he said, bombastically, and added 'Who's he?' in a whisper.

'I thought you were a dragonslayer,' said the barman. The barman was just balding, although his hair, flopping down over his ears, was still dark brown, as was his moustache, which drooped carelessly over his drawn cheeks.

From behind the bar of the Queen Alice, he had seen Vernham change. Even in the worst of the wartime, the ladies and gentlemen would pass by outside of an evening, dressed in their silks and their satins, on their way to some lavish ball or society party. The city was always throbbing with gossip - never ending tales of Poldrath's affairs or Manzini's business methods. Nowadays, Poldrath and Manzini were merely names carried on the mist and myth surrounding the Vernham which once was, so long ago now, it seemed.

Yet it was only ten years since Skarrax, a dragon old, but still as vicious and unreliable as ever, had tired of his diminishing pickings in the East and descended suddenly, in a welter of black smoke, fire and fury, on victorious Vernham, rich with spoil, but tired of fighting, celebrating the end of vigilance in true and fulsome splendour.

Nonetheless, the clientele of the Queen Alice had changed little. During the languid season, the mathematicians and the chess players still gathered outside on the terrace beneath the vines, but now they bet mostly for drink. In the winter, they would jostle for space inside with the schemers, dealers and hard men of Vernham's less salubrious industries, and the air would be thick with smoke, but it would never be an uneasy gathering - at one stage there was not a professor of mathematics in the university who had not played chess with Manzini, and hardly a student or a hanger-on who had not lost money on the outcome.

Manzini was dead now, and his networks were in tatters - Skarrax had gorged

himself on all kinds of well-organised business, until the only ones left were the little men, fighting each other for small beer. However, if you were trying to set something up, or trying to set someone up, you still did it in the Queen Alice, and you still prevailed on the barman to be his usual discreet self. The barman refilled Neuboldt's goblet from a large earthenware jug, spilling a few dark droplets of last summer's wine, soon lost among the years.

'And so I am,' replied Neuboldt, for dragonslaying was the field in which he had specialized at the Velsdorp Academy of Military Practice. His doctoral research had received the universal acclaim, and nobody had objected when the Royal Institute of Xenocide welcomed him into its Fellowship at the youngest age in its records. It was now his intention to demonstrate his prodigious talent in the flesh - the flesh of Skarrax, black scourge of Vernham and the East. He was far from being the only one with this in mind.

'But you don't recognize Fred Grimnorth.' The name was vaguely familiar, but Neuboldt couldn't place it.

'Who?' He was certainly not a member of the Institute.

'Fred Grimnorth. He's the best, so they say. I expect he's here for the same reason as you. That'll be fourpence, please.'

Neuboldt gave the barman a shilling and wandered with a casual affection over to the table where Grimnorth was still intent on his beer. He sat down magnanimously, backwards on a chair and said 'Well, well, well, Fred Grimnorth! Lars Neuboldt.', offering his hand.

'Mr Grimnorth will do nicely, Dr Neuboldt.' said Grimnorth, looking at the hand and blinking twice. 'What can I do for you?'

Neuboldt sipped and then proceeded.

'I was wondering if we might discuss the, er, disposal of the foul dragon Skarrax, over a friendly drink.'

A pause - Grimnorth's attention was now in his pockets, agitating for a packet

with some tobacco left inside - Neuboldt's uneasy attention was on Grimnorth, and the arm which held his goblet stuck, half-way up, half-way down, a token of his bloodymindedness.

'Discuss away.' invited the older man, as he set about restoking his pipe. Neuboldt sipped again: he flashed his eyes back at his comrades as if to suggest that he was getting somewhere.

'My metallurgist, Gryst,' he began confidently, 'has really outdone himself, this time. The lance he's produced is the sharpest and hardest piece of tungsten alloy that's ever been made. You can slice through a diamond and hardly notice. I'd be honoured if you would try it out - it's very light.'

For the first time that evening, Grimnorth actually looked up at Dr Lars Neuboldt, more than thirty years his junior. He cocked his head slightly, lit his pipe and took a long draw. Then, as the smoke emerged slowly from his slightly crooked nose, he permitted himself a gentle hint at a smile. 'In my experience, dragons prefer a meal which carries its own toothpick.' he mused. 'Stick with your earlier plan.'

'My earlier plan?' Neuboldt twitched his head round and looked agitatedly towards his own table. There was Gryst, staring blankly into space, silent except for the sound of empty vodka glasses firmly returning to the table. There was Darvit, trying to make Gryst laugh by telling Vask one of his tall tiresome stories about his rude and unfaithful stepmother. Vask looked ill. Neuboldt was trying to think what Grimnorth might have overheard.

'Disposing of the foul dragon Skarrax over a friendly drink.' Grimnorth pointed his pipe as he spoke, and his eyes were full of intent. Neuboldt began to wonder.

'You can't just walk up to a dragon and say "Hi, Skarrax, are you going for a pint?"'

'No.'

'Then what are you driving at?'

'I thought it was your plan. I mean, you're the academic.'

Neuboldt looked around for help, but he only saw the barman, who smiled sheepishly and started again with his cloth at the tankard he had been drying.

'I don't think you're taking this dragon very seriously.' Protested Neuboldt, taking an angry swig from his goblet.

'Best way to stay alive.' Grimnorth responded earnestly. 'Dragons have an alarming way of picking up on village gossip.'

'I beg your pardon?' That was surely a joke.

'The barman's running a book on which of us manages to kill Skarrax.' said Grimnorth, by way of explaining his remark. The blank expression which met him revealed a lack of worldly wisdom in the young academic. 'Obviously it's in his interests to balance his bets. I believe he and the dragon are going fifty fifty.'

'How did you hear about this?'

Neuboldt was genuinely perturbed, not only that his most serious of professions should be sport for idle bookmakers, but also at the frightening thought that the betting might influence the outcome. Grimnorth, on the other hand, had become almost genial. He at least was at home in the Queen Alice.

'I like a flutter, now and then - study the form and whatnot. Anyway, it's standard practice.'

'Oh? And who did you bet on this time?' Neuboldt was becoming less and less surprised that a dragonslayer of Fred Grimnorth's reputed success had never managed to append 'FRIX' to his name.

'I'm sure I've still got the slip somewhere.' said the old man, and he began the exhumation. The relevant crumpled scrap of paper emerged eventually from beneath a grubby assortment of pocket rubbish. Neuboldt fidgeted and sipped at his wine while Grimnorth repocketed a penknife and a wedding ring. The tobacco packets, bottle corks, crumbs and teeth he swept

carelessly onto the floor, before sliding his betting slip across the damp table towards Neuboldt. Carefully unsticking it from itself, Neuboldt unfolded it and squinted to

read the details.

'But that's me!' he said, not quite knowing how to react. Grimnorth shrugged.

## All the time in the world

I HADN'T EXPECTED IT to be so ordinary. Sure, it was beautiful, but it could have been any particularly spectacular sunset. Apart from the fact that the sun was still several hours above the horizon. The world below the balcony was bathed with golden orange light, as though there were finally more sodium street lamps than anything else, and there were no patches of dark in which terrible things might hide. So there were no terrible things, and no dark patches, but there weren't any streetlights either, just the face of the Earth and on it sunlight like molten metal. And between them the balcony.

It was made of wood. The floor was smooth, pale pine, the rail a dark, sensuous hardwood I had never identified, but in this light, at this time, it was almost impossible to distinguish them. I don't remember what the table was made of, but I think the chairs were cane. The doors don't matter. I left them behind me, holding in my hand the last bottle of tokaj in the world. The last bottle of anything in the world, I placed it on the table next to the last basket of bread, fresh from the oven what might have been that morning. There was a bowl of fruits the size of grapes or cherries and the colour of the sun. But everything was now, even her eyes.

She flourished a golden-bladed knife as though producing it by a conjuring trick and waved it in the direction of a small block of cheese. I nodded. Words seemed unwanted. I fished a corkscrew from somewhere and broke the seal. It felt vaguely sacrilegious, for a moment, before

I remembered that things were beyond that now. The screw bit the cork cleanly, and eased itself clear with a tiny sound of relief in the emptiness. I proffered it for a somewhat unnecessary approval, then poured two glasses. I couldn't remember if the stems were tinted or not, and had no way of telling. She stood, with one glass, I exchanged the bottle for the other.

"To the end of the world," she said.

"To the end of the world." We raised our glasses to each other and our surroundings, and drank. Nectar, as smooth, sweet and golden as the light. We sat, and took the food she had arranged while I had been opening the bottle.

"I never imagined this," I said. "Things coming to such a tidy, complete conclusion."

"It all has to end here. There can't be any loose ends, so they may as well be made neat." We sat and ate, and drank, in silence for a moment. Then she said, "I never imagined there would be anyone to come this far with." We looked at each other, and raised our glasses again.

"To all the men and women we've known down the years."

"To all the people we've shared our wine with." We reflected on that, and all those people, and tried to remember who it was who could be persuaded to recall a previous life as a dog, given enough tokaj. Some young artist, I thought, but she remembered him being a man of the cloth. Maybe he was both. There might even have been two of them. It's been a long, long time.

We sat, and said what little remained to be said. We ate and drank until the cheese ran out and the small bottle was nearly empty, the sun that bit closer to its last horizon. From somewhere she produced a small, neat joint. I looked at her in a slightly disapproving manner, as it seemed to be rather at odds with the solemnity of the occasion. "What harm can it do?" she asked.

"And anyway, we've been drinking." I shrugged, and she lit up.

The smoke curled upwards, looking afire itself in the sun. She passed it across to me. I was still tense, despite the wine, or maybe because of it. Perhaps she was right, we should relax, accept what was going on. The taste of the hash mingled with that of the tokaj, the effects of both bringing a numb warmth to my view. I could almost feel the loose ends of my mind being neatly tied up.

A few passes later, nearing the end of the joint, a thought occurred to me. "So

which of us gets the honour of the last ever toke?"

She smiled. "I think we should share it." Leaning her elbows on the table, she inhaled, and threw the still-glowing end over the rail, off the balcony. I leaned forward to meet her. Lips. Touched, open.

Taste of the smoke, its warmth, the touch of its reality in this unreal world. Taste of tokaj, rich and sweet. Taste of cheese, a touch of sharpness and salt. Taste of us. Taste of the golden sunlight pervading everything, everywhere. Seeing gold, not black, not even pink behind the eyelids.

We broke. And looked at each other. And looked at each other.

"I never imagined..."

Again. We want for nothing more. Maybe we should finish the wine, but this is more important. Maybe later. We have all the time in the world.

## Descent from Heaven

Guy T. Martland

THE NIGHT WRAPPED ITSELF around her like a velvet cloak. The wind, cutting its way amongst the rooftops, stroked her suit. She gazed into the panel she stood opposite, the moonlight reflecting her high cheek bones and her prominent nose; her face looked slightly cadaverous. Turning round, she leant back and took in her surroundings. In the distance she could make out the dark edge of the mountains cutting into the sky. The solar panelled rooftops, winking in the moonlight, spread off in all directions to meet with the mountain face. This rooftop was a sky over the entire city on the valley floor, hence its name: Heaven.

She grabbed the cold bulk of the phaser hanging off her belt and punched a code

into the in-built panelling.

'Are you ready?', she asked her headset, to which a tiny buzzing in her ear replied: 'Let's go.'

She turned left and started to run along the angle between adjacent rooftops, her shoes squeaking slightly as they made contact with the solar panels beneath. The adrenaline began to pump around her body; she felt the joy of the risk and the taste of fear in the back of her throat. Tiring, she began to slow and stopped just before the rooftops gave way to a large gutter. After checking in both directions, she leapt, smoothly contacting more panelling the other side of the drainage system. Her breath rasped in her throat as she ran on, her muscles becoming steadily

heavier.

A brief flash of light crossed her path and bounced off a nearby panel; she hadn't expected this so soon. Momentarily blinded, the night thickened as her eyes re-accustomed themselves to the darkness. She crouched, the night blindness slowly passing away, the darkness seeming to encroach upon her. She edged forward and nosed her phaser around the edge of the panelling into the next gutter. The moment she saw movement, another flash passed in front of her, forcing her to retreat slightly. Aiming the phaser, a bolt of plasma shot into the distance, missed its target and rebounded off into the sky; an arm of light reaching for the stars. Leaning forward again she released the trigger five times in succession, then moving forward she jumped into the gutter before diving into another parallel groove between rooftops. As she dived a flash of light wrapped itself around her ankle. Breathing hard she heaved herself up against the reinforced glass and stammered: 'Suit, status.'

'85%.'

'Fuck,' she said to herself as she waited until the phaser signalled it was ready. She edged forward again and glanced down the artificial avenue the gutter created, scything its way through the rooftops. There. A darker shade of black. She sighted.

A detonation of light preceded a splintering sound, then erratic tinkling as shards of glass ricocheted around. A circle of light flashing above the surface instantly illuminated the whole area. She shielded her eyes and glanced to where the paneling had been gouged open. This wasn't meant to happen; it wasn't part of the game. Turning back her glance happened upon the nauseating sight of a black suited woman surrounded by a pool of blood. Angrily she switched her phaser off practice mode and sighted upon the spinning white circle. Bolts of light screamed out of the end of the phaser and hurled themselves at the floating entity. Instantly she was blown backwards, the floor directly in

front of her blown away in retaliation

The circle of light edged steadily towards her. She screamed down the headset: 'Are you alright? Speak to me!' There was no reply. Not knowing what to do, she leapt, spinning, releasing three more pulses of light as her somersault lined itself up with the object. In the brief glimpse she had it now seemed to be more precisely defined; a grey spheroid, encircled by a row of lights. She watched it falter slightly as she collapsed through the hole in the floor, catching herself on the sharp edge of the destroyed floor, the flank of her suit torn open, the skin underneath lacerated.

Her body bounced slackly as it hit the level below; the suit cushioning her from most of the impact. She groggily sat up, sharp pain unleashed itself and radiated over her side, slowly dulling itself to a more throbbing sensation. As she touched her sticky side, the sharpness reappeared. She pulled her hand away and stared at the black slick of blood that covered it. Rays of light piercing the ragged hole above swiftly dragged her mind away from the pain.

'Status, suit.'

The suit, its systems damaged, uttered a string of nonsense but managed to wrap itself around the wound, staunching the blood flow. She winced as the pressure around her abdomen increased, and looking down, watched fibrils moving out of the suit, binding the torn material. Looking up again, the light was becoming brighter. Momentarily panicking she stared at the grey expanse of service corridor in which she was lying and then started to pull herself along the floor. Her hands initially slid across the floor until the suit's texture altered, increasing her grip. Forty metres down the corridor, exhausted, she tried desperately to remain conscious as her field of vision faded to black.

Her senses flooded back to her; she smelt herself, her sweat, then as the black curtain withdrew she looked down the corridor. Unaware of how long she had

passed out, she thought to consult her suit but remembered how the voice unit had been partially destroyed. She tried anyway but the suit repeated the same unintelligible garbage. Shakily she stood up, ignoring the now numbed pain in her side, and carried on further down the corridor. Eventually a door appeared encased in the grey; she tried it to no avail. Struggling on, she lost count of how many locked doors she passed, and became more and more acutely aware of her desire for water. The thirst beckoned to her, thrusting her body forward. Slowly, she began to realise that the corridor was ending, as the glowing neon words 'Descent from Heaven' penetrated her dimmed senses.

Stairs. More stairs. A door. Light flooded its way around her. Photons stimulated her retina, waves of information passing along her optic nerves in encrypted form; the code unveiling itself in her occipital cortex. Further stimuli passing around the Erdinger-Westphal nucleus loop, constricting her pupils and thus allowing further encrypted information to be interpreted as something other than just blinding light.

She stood on a large platform. One side supported the funicular's station from which she had somehow emerged, the others held a sturdy looking metal fence. Benches facing the view were scattered liberally around the deserted viewing platform, as were a number of shoddy looking telescopic apparatuses. She slumped into a bench and looked up at the roof from which the station hung. It was daytime underneath the roof, despite the fact it was night outside. The city maintained a twenty-four hour day, while the planet cycled once every thirty-nine point five hours. Most humans still preferred to maintain the rhythm which evolution had bred into their genes, although there was a minority of new-agers who believed that being out of synch with the planet's natural rhythms damaged one's psyche.

The huge strip lights which lit the city

also supported themselves from the roof. She followed a strips course with her eyes as it passed into the distance and seemed to merge with countless other strips at the end of this unusual tunnel. They were not especially bright, as might be expected being so close, but the combined light from all the strips was enough to illuminate the entire city.

The city spread in front of her; spires, skyscrapers, ziggurats sticking out of the non-descript plethora of buildings which lined the valley floor and walls; buildings stretched right up to the roof, precariously hanging at right angles off the cliffs. A diaphanous layer of mist spread itself thinly over the metropolis; mist was always seen from this height, often clouds obscured the view if the outside climate was appropriate. Lancing its way through the mist, the funicular's cable stretched down toward the city, supported at intervals by hangings from Heaven. She couldn't make out exactly where the cable-car would end up, but she judged it to be near enough to where she lived. Now all she had to do was wait until the machine reached her.

A sound to her right caught her attention and she turned. Three puthara, birds of enormous dimensions, common only to this planet, beat their way past the viewing point in formation. She felt the slight turbulence their enormous wings created as the air currents wisped around her and tousled her hair. Their sludge-green plumage and red eyes gave the birds a satanic feel, but despite their evil appearance they were purely vegetarian, although it had been rumoured that they had attacked civilians in the past. These rumours had probably been confused with the actions of certain cults which sacrificed to the birds, which they worshipped. The birds were rarely seen within city limits, and although they could enter each end, they rarely did. She shivered, musing that these birds might be some kind of strange omen, or the carriers of souls, transporting the woman who she had seen lying up in

Heaven. She watched the birds until they were pin-pricks in the distant sky.

The image of the black suit surrounded by a pool of blood came to her again. She hadn't known the woman at all; she'd only spoken to her via the Internet, and not much at that. It was a game she played, running around on Heaven, staging mock battles with willing people she found in cyberspace. It was the thrill of the chase combined with the risk of being caught by the security guards who sometimes patrolled the glass rooftops. She'd known people to be caught before, but they'd only been arrested and subsequently fined, if that. Something strange had happened tonight, if it was still tonight she thought, cursing her damaged suit for its newly created temporal inadequacy.

The cylindrical cable car hung in the air below like a child's mobile, suspending itself on barely visible cables that seemed too thin to support the weight. She saw five tropical wooden fish dangling in her bedroom window as a child, rotating to the slightest wind current; their dance on air. The cylinder expanded, the harsh metal now visible dictated that it was no longer a child's plaything. Smoothly and without a sound the metallic rod slid behind the station and stopped.

She climbed into the pendulous transport and moved toward the seating area. The cable-car was completely empty as the viewing platform had been; she surmised it must be early morning. Just how long had she been unconscious for? The machine lurched and she felt her stomach rise uncomfortably and resettle as the downward journey began.

The cable-car moved quickly, dropping quickly after each support before slowing with the steady rise to the next. Throughout the descent the mist cleared and the city below became more visible. She looked around to find herself sheltered, almost cosseted by the grey expanse of buildings which loomed everywhere she looked. A strip of green caught her eye,

any form of nature unnatural in this end of the city. No wonder people spent most of their time trying to escape somehow; hours logging themselves into cyberspace, hours climbing the nearby peaks, hours waging staged battles against each other in the dizzy heights of Heaven.

The grey and grime approached steadily before she was sucked into a dark building, and the tube halted. She clambered out and waded her way through a small number of people carrying binoculars. People interested in the Puthara presumably she thought as she exited the building to the rush of the street and hailed a cab.

A smooth electronic male voice asked her where she wished to go and the cab set off deducting money directly from her account for the expense. She grimaced as the pain in her side started to throb dully.

'Hey, this isn't where I asked you to go!' she screamed at the cab. It ignored her and the door she tried was locked. She started to bang on the panelling in frustration and continued to scream. The cab continued on its course regardless. She stopped hammering and resigned herself to her fate.

The cab halted. She looked outside the window to see five or six uniformed police standing outside. One of them opened the door and escorted her out into a plain grey building as the others followed. Inside a white coated man ran up to her immediately.

'This way miss. Lets have a look at that wound,' he said and guided her into a nearby room, where he gestured to a surgery table. Feeling faint, she felt no compulsion to argue and reclined, quickly drifting away. The last thing she saw was the doctor coming towards her with a set of electrodes and feeling the cold metal on her temples before it wrapped its way around her skull.

'Electrodes?' she questioned herself before blacking out.

She woke up.

She woke up. 'Man this is..

She woke up.

'Man this is weird', she thought to herself. She had a stinking headache. What the hell had she done last night? She remembered going back to her flat, she remembered the walk along the damp pavement, the sodium streetlight glaring above her. She only remembered going to bed after that. How long had she slept for? Had she been unnecessarily tired? Well there was that night with her boyfriend the night before but sex didn't normally make her that tired. She put it to the back of her mind and got out of bed, walked naked to the kitchen and switched the coffee machine on. Leaning on the kitchen desktop, she reached to scratch her side, it was slightly itchy for some reason. She scratched the unbroken skin before reaching over to the controller and flicking the TV on.

News about the colonial war near the ringworld of Zalek flashed on. She sat at the kitchen table watching the reports of the war as she drank her coffee and swallowed some painkillers. Boring quickly, she picked up a novel and started flicking

through it to find where she had left the heroine in dire straits, fighting three cyborgs.

The TV brought her back to reality. It was a local news report, the rooftops of Heaven were being scanned panoramically:

'Last night a body was found on Heaven. The female, in her late thirties had sustained severe laser burns...' The report then continued to outline how recently it had become a fashion to wage stage battles up in Heaven, and how there was an inquest into the case taking place.

Initially she was shocked by the realisation that Heaven was unsafe. But something nagged at her, something she couldn't quite place... She shrugged and carried on drinking her coffee.

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Date: 12:43 4/23/2500  
From: CensorshipUnit@fft25676.Sub-  
Heaven.Yert.Retfret0.cc.flii  
To: SpecialPolice@errf4556.Sub-  
Heaven.Yert.Retfret0.cc.flii  
Cc:  
Subject: CIT-062-2473-5

SHORT TERM MEMORY DISRUPTION EFFECTIVE  
MEMORY REPLACEMENT EFFECTIVE  
CENSORSHIP EFFECTIVE

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## The Colour of Language

Guy T. Martland

**S**HE FELT TRAPPED. At least, she felt what would be trapped to us, but she could not quite place the feeling. She could not really understand how to express the emotion that welled up inside her, striking her with such vigorous intensity that she often broke down. It wasn't enough. She needed a language with which to portray her emotions and release the burden her soul shouldered.

Looking down at the plastic colour visualiser she held in her hand, she felt a sense of profound helplessness. None of the others, her sisters, brothers and the

other neo-births felt the same as she did about this. They just took everything for granted, supposing that this was it, the only way. She knew that there was something more. There was no reason to think in this way, but something deep inside spoke to her; a kind of primaeval instinct.

She didn't have a name. In another world she might have been called Sarah, Felicity, but here she was a colour: light purple. That was how she was referred to. Not just any shade of light purple however, a very specific shade which her trained eye had learned to detect.

Her trained eye, although superior in its detection of colour, could never match that of the Crathaka. This alien race communicated by colour, hence massive eyes had appeared during their evolution to encompass every possible shade of the visible spectrum and more. These eyes were protected within a fold of the toughened exoskeleton that covered the creature's colossal, cone-shaped body; the carapace at the larger end flapped down over the eye like a reinforced eyelid. Movement for the Crathaka was provided by four tactomorphic tendrils which shot out from underneath the exoskeleton, pounding the earth, propelling the beast forward. Similarly arm-like analogues appeared below the bulging lenticular eyes.

The communicative band spread across the exoskeleton above the unbelievable visionary apparatus. It flickered from second to second as the Crathaka's emotions fluxed from state to state.

When younger, Light Purple/Heliotrope had learnt to recognise the main emotional states and had to a certain extent attributed them to herself, expressing herself to others via the handheld colour visualiser. Blue was pain, green love, black hate, pink anger and so on; the language of colours. Her colleagues used a series of gesticulations and guttural grunts to supplement these colours, but still it was not enough.

The only emotion Heliotrope was sure she could attribute to herself and others was love. She'd bonded to another of the first neo-births. Their nightly mutual caresses and grunts aroused jealousy throughout other member of the colony, due more to incomprehension than a coveting of one or the other partner. His colour was dark green, a colour she thought of consistently as she performed her menial tasks; waiting for the evening when she could once again be embraced.

Once every ten days, on their day of rest, the neo-births were shown parts of the Crathaka world. The world was pretty standard and was the third out from twelve

which leisurely orbited a glowing red dwarf; gravity just under 1g. One day the red dwarf was described to them by the Crathaka, simple figures on the hologrammatic projection the neo-births sat around. Most did not understand, some had started to wail in fright, but she thought it made sense to her. (Although she had tried to communicate this with Dark Green and had not succeeded).

The Crathaka were very keen on holoprojecting a metallic-looking truncated cylindrical object. This cylinder was displayed to them repeatedly, in some kind of vain hope that it might mean something to the neo-births. The cylinder hung in the air, the silver colour expressing something which Heliotrope didn't understand, a colour which turned the Crathakas' headpieces blue. Connected with the cylinder, a portrait of a habitat was often displayed. Unlike the other habitats Heliotrope had seen, this one was marred by a vast crater in the centre with a dark path of gouged land leading away to terminate in a neighbouring savannah farmland. The Crathakas' headpiece always flashed to a darker blue when this holo was displayed.

On one of these rest days, the neo-births were taken away from their colony to a large hangar-like building outside the limits of the habitat. The Crathaka ushered the neo-births into a large hall with a cantilevered ceiling. Hanging in the middle of the room was the cylindrical object they had been often shown. Heliotrope's blurred unorganised methods of thinking flickered into a semblance of unanimity for a second; it began to dawn upon her that perhaps this cylinder was important to them, the neo-births. She looked up and saw the twisted double helix motif emblazoned on the side of the craft before the neo-births were ushered out again.

It was this depiction of DNA that had coined the Crathakas' name for the neo-births: "Helices". The probe had entered the atmosphere of the planet and plummeted downward white with heat, turning

the habitat it had landed in into an instant graveyard, though the probe and its contents remained intact.

Maybe it was unique, the final narcissistic act of some dying despot; maybe but one of hundreds of its kind, cast out like seeds in a desperate but misguided attempt to secure the continuation of the race -- the Crathaka, with nothing to go on but tissue cultures and germline cells, had no way of knowing.

The first neo-births had been conceived and gestated only after a great deal of experimentation. The babbling period ensued, a time when the children first started to explore their vocal chords. However there was no pattern to base their gurglings on; no parents to nurture the developing ability of speech. Their potential for language and subsequent intellectual rise was violated. But they were good workers, as the Crathaka soon found out, and these simpletons became slaves to them.

Heliotrope was different. She understood certain things and tried, often to no avail, to express herself as much as possible. The Crathaka, in order better to observe her, placed her in the Group Fraster's household. Her position was no more than general dogsbody, but the task of building an outhouse for the Group was hers. The Fraster's offspring often used her as a plaything under the harsh warning colours of their parent.

They scared her. The offspring stood twice as high as she did. Constant attention was essential to avoid the tactomorphic arms that shot out to touch her at lightning speed. Most of the time they just watched her, their large protruding waxy eyes staring motionlessly, their gaze only disturbed when the armoured eyelid slid down.

Today the Fraster offsprings' parent was nowhere to be seen. The beings had already taunted her by slamming their tactomorphs into her and then flashing the enjoyment spectrum at each other.

Heliotrope lay winded on the floor after one of these episodes. She did not understand why this was happening, the Crathaka never did this kind of thing. She flashed a warning signal at the two offspring. Another tactomorph shot out from under the eye and sent her spinning into the wall, her colour visualiser clattering and splitting in the corner. Pain, more pain than she had ever encountered previously flooded her body and she tasted salty blood in her mouth.

Emotions burned through her like wildfire. She wanted to show them how she was feeling, that what they were doing was wrong. She did not understand their game. A plaintive wail broached the room's silence; a wail that no-one heard.

The tactomorph slammed into her side where she lay and sent her spinning across the floor to stop underneath the other offspring's eyes. Its sub-visual tactomorphs reached out and grabbed an arm each. She felt herself stretching, it was pulling her apart.

She didn't understand why. The pain became too much for her, more than she could comprehend. Consciousness drifted from her. She woke to feel her arm popping out of its socket and watched with horrified terror as her arm was ripped slowly from her shoulder. The last connecting tendons snapped with a nauseating rush of pain as she threw up, her arm spouting blood. The next tactomorph came down strong on her head, her carotid arteries closed for ever as her neck broke.

She didn't understand this. She didn't understand anything. She only understood what love meant. And she didn't understand the blackness that started to envelop her, but she welcomed it.

*She watched as the Crathaka played with her lifeless body, watched as the parent entered in a burst of deep pink.*

*She watched as the young were punished, sentenced to colourless darkness, without language.*

*Maybe she understood more now...*

# Snow Crash by Neal Stephenson

Sion Arrowsmith

**W**HAT CAN ONE SAY about *Snow Crash* apart from "it's excellent"? It's fast, deep, darkly funny and satirical post-cyberpunk cyberpunk, and written by an American who manages to work up utter contempt for his country and all it might have stood for/stands for/will stand for. The whole is a headlong rush, as we approach the turn of the millennium, taking us towards the Vinge singularity and/or a second infocalypse.

What to make of two central characters called Hiro Protagonist and Y.T. (Yours Truly)? They are, in their individual ways, tremendously believable. Y.T. is carried by youthful self-confidence which doesn't always see her through, but never flags; Hiro, at first sight a no-hoper net-head, and all too human, is slowly drawn out as a semi-mythological being who, in the right environment, is unstoppable, without ever losing his sympathy, and never letting you assume anything but that the most plausible outcome is his failure. The two weave a tangled web of information through the Metaverse (cyberspace, written by someone who knows something about computers) linking the multi-media empire of L. Bob Rife, the Mafia, the eponymous drug/virus, ancient Sumeria, Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates (complete with holy trinity of Jesus, Elvis, and Reverend Wayne) and the remains of the United States Government. Everything and everyone is hyper-real, without ever being too much larger than life; even the cast of wildly eccentric support characters -- Ukrainian grunge metal guitarist Vitaly Chernobyl, Japanese rapper Sushi K, net.god Da5id (think about it), even the Aleut harpooner wired to a nuclear warhead seem, in context, perfectly natural.

The plot is a plot in the sense of conspiracy; it is a static thing which is uncovered as the book progresses, rather than a dynamic thing driven by, or driving, the events which occur. That may seem odd in a story this fast-paced, but a dynamic plot would have an incredibly hard time trying to keep up with the pedal-to-the-metal writing. Part of that speed derives from the writing being present-tense; that's a stylistic quirk which may irritate some people, but I think it does lend an immense sense of immediacy to the situation. Another complaint I've heard is about the "wodge of Sumerian history in the middle" but tastes vary, and I would have liked a lot more of that (although it would have upset the balance of the book terribly if there had been any more).

While what is going on revolves around assorted bits of questionable polymathic science, that in many ways gets drowned under the impact of the characters and the, almost incidental, gadget science. The latter requires stunningly little suspension of disbelief, either because it is highly convincing, or it is so astoundingly cute that you don't want to question it. The Metaverse is an example of the former; more plausible than Gibson's cyberspace (for obvious reasons), an entity based on a set of thrashed-out protocols, complete with compromises, hacks, and bandwidth limitations. The latter might be exemplified by Ultima Ratio Regum, a Gatling-style rail gun which fires depleted uranium splinters at hypersonic velocities, powered by a luggable nuclear power plant (which requires a good external heat sink. Such as the Pacific Ocean.) All of it comes at you so thick and fast that there's never any sense of Stephenson saying "Look at this wonderful idea. Aren't I clever?" it's just

there, and if you don't pick it up first time, there's no second chance.

It is rather hard to put your finger on just what is so good about Stephenson's writing, and I've not really tried to. This

review is more intended to intrigue those who would enjoy *Snow Crash* and warn off those who wouldn't, and to be informative by suggestion rather than by critique.

## Temporary Agency by Rachel Pollack

Helen Steele

FOLLOWING ON FROM THE SUCCESS of her last novel, *Unquenchable Fire*, Rachel Pollack has again returned to the America of spirits and divine beings, this time to look at what happens when it all turns sour for one young woman.

For those not familiar with the background, the USA is now no longer a secular land: raised some half a century before into awareness by the Founders, everyone's lives revolve around rituals and evocations to link them to the spiritworld. Spirits guard the land and the people and create miracles. Tellers spin stories of the Founders to uplift the people, Speakers can see the future. Magic really works. And there are the Ferocious Ones: beings from the Living World, Benign and Malevolent, spreading good and evil into the lives of ordinary people.

Ambitious Paul annoys a Ferocious One and the first half of this novel is the story of his young cousin Ellen's battle to save him: finding corruption and betrayal at the very heart of all she believes in. She is helped by the crusading lawyer, Alison Birkett and the second half tells of when they meet again ten years later to again face corruption at the highest levels.

Pollack has written a novel which is at first sight quite linear and simply plotted, but her dual skills are in the background and to a lesser extent, the characterisation.

Spiritual America is a marvellous invention and, with the added dark side in this novel, it is truly fertile ground. However, to fully appreciate the background to *Temporary Agency* it is probably best to read *Unquenchable Fire* first, for though it is not a sequel in terms of plot the first book gives a better insight into this wonderful background. In this novel though, the exploration of the powerful beings and their interaction with mankind are a more focused insight into the world.

Characterisation is a less obvious skill than background and only slowly do her characters come alive. Paul, I found little more than a cipher, but his cousin Ellen and the lawyer Alison finally become realised in the second half, helped I think by Ellen having grown into being a cynical adult rather than a smart-ass kid. This second half while plotted is really a study of these two women's relationship in the face of the events around them. Of all the book I found this most interesting.

*Temporary Agency* is not a great book: its distinct change of style between halves and the thin initial characterisation let it down. But it is a good book: the background is superb, the characters do light up by the end, the plot is effective and the writing tight. I am not sure it will appeal to all, but should delight those who like the occasional quirky or peculiar piece.

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**THIS IS A SUBLIMINAL FOOTNOTE:  
YOU WILL SUBMIT! COPIOUSLY!**

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## Uncharted Territory by Connie Willis

Helen Steele

IT IS NOT OFTEN that an author arrives on the scene who is both consistent and brilliant. Consistency is not too difficult to find — John Barnes (see review this issue) is a case in point; brilliant is more difficult but not impossible; but consistent and brilliant is rare. Connie Willis is both. Since she appeared on the SF scene over a decade ago she has won both critical and popular acclaim and scooped Hugo and Nebula awards as she went. Short fiction — such as *At the Rialto* and *Last of the Winnebagos* — has always been her forte, but the novels *Lincoln's Dreams* and the Hugo-winning *Doomsday Book* have brought her to greater attention.

*Uncharted Territory* is a case in point: a collection containing the title novella and two short stories — *Firewatch* and *Even The Queen* — both winning awards. I will be surprised if the novella *Uncharted Territory* is not nominated for something as well.

*Uncharted Territory* is a snapshot: less a story in the traditional sense and more of a study of five characters in extraordinary circumstances. Fin and Carson are planetary surveyors, C.J., their oversexed base-station coordinator, Ev an enthusiastic visitor and Bult, their alien guide. Fin, Carson, C.J. and Ev are the only humans legally on the planet, where the sentient alien indigenous life is protected by a politically correct government back home on Earth. The government — 'Big Brother' to Fin and Carson — is terrified of being seen to be imperialistic or to interfere in any way with the alien people who they see as innocent and uncorrupted. In reality, Bult takes advantage of the situation to fine the surveyors in order to buy consumer goods — making the government position a nonsense. It is also no surprise to realise that,

despite the government's overt concern, when it comes down to it, Fin and Carson are better for the planet than any PC official at home. It is not difficult to see why: Willis describes the scenery, the flora and fauna, the peculiarity of the aliens so beautifully. To this she has added political bite and a smattering of lust and come up with a great piece of fiction.

*Firewatch* is an older, shorter piece, set in the same universe as Willis' later novel *Doomsday Book* (already reviewed in TTBA). Here Dunworthy, the professor of history, and Kivrin, the heroine of *Doomsday Book* are minor characters, in the story of the (unnamed) narrator who is sent for his history practical exam to Wartime London in the Blitz to help serve on the Firewatch which guarded St Paul's Cathedral against the bombs. Desparately unprepared, he is propelled back into a world of paranoia and grey darkness, where he has to fend for himself day by day and try and disguise the fact that he is a stranger to the people he must meet.

*Firewatch*, again, is not over-plotted but is extremely poignant and thought-provoking. Willis' characterisation is beautiful and her ability to help us envisage the glory of St Paul's is a superb piece of writing.

The third and final story, *Even the Queen*, is a piece of near-future quirky humour, which uses a daughter's act of unthinking rebellion as a focus to examine the relationships between females of four generations of a family: their communication, the gaps in generation, their attitudes to life. So much imagination is packed into this short story but it is very tightly written and very funny indeed — though I imagine that it will appeal to women more than men.

In total, *Uncharted Territory* is truly excellent. Willis' prose is deft, clever, moving and often quite beautiful; her characters live; her landscapes entrance; her

ideas provoke. For those who have liked her previous work, and for those who have never read any Willis, do not delay in reading this.

## Mother of Storms by John Barnes

Helen Steele

'WEATHER DISASTER' speculative fiction had a good year in 1994. Where Bruce Sterling's superb *Heavy Weather* focussed on the localised disaster of tornadoes, Barnes' most recent novel, *Mother of Storms*, deals with hurricanes and their catastrophic effect on all corners of the world.

Barnes' premise is simple: mankind screws up the environment, causes the seas to heat slightly and creates the conditions for a hurricane that doesn't blow out, that instead spawns new hurricanes, each wreaking havoc as they roam the oceans of the world. Then, through the eyes of several characters he shows the outcome of mankind's stupidity. This is 'hard' science fiction by most definitions and it exhibits both the benefits and the drawbacks of this sub-genre. Barnes has packed this novel full of science and he manages to make the meteorology of the hurricanes interesting, but, like in *A Million Open Doors*, his previous novel (previously reviewed in TTBA), he veers away from taking the novel to its natural conclusion, where mankind is helpless in the face of Mother Nature, and instead introduces an absurd subplot, jammed full of unbelievable science, to 'save the day'.

Initially, I was extremely impressed by *Mother of Storms*. In the earlier parts of the book, Barnes seems to be able to balance the fine line between too much science and too little, and he introduces characters with subtlety and finesse. His characters are diverse and he manages to draw each of the protagonists better than most

other hard SF writers seem able. In addition, he uses short character sketches to focus on the human scale of the hurricane disaster and the fatalities it causes.

The setting for this novel is not terribly original but effective enough: the UN is more powerful than currently; there are many more smaller states seceded from larger ones – following the current trend – and the media is even more influential on a greater number of people. From this, Barnes has created plots and subplots which twist and weave, bringing together the characters into a sort of coherency. Unfortunately this 'master plot' is seriously flawed, and by the end of the novel, I was left feeling disappointed. In addition, with the plots becoming more complicated (though never over-obscure) there was a lot of rather pointless subplots, included, I assume, to add colour to some of the characters, which were, instead, rather irritating padding. Add to this the 'way-out' mentioned before (the old story of man turning into superhuman to save the day); and pages of turgid exposition of a kind I find particularly inept, and I found that I was skimming pages and pages and then reading and being gripped by others. This is novel writing at its most patchy.

In defence of *Mother of Storms*, I did greatly enjoy parts of it, especially when Barnes was concentrating on characters rather than the hard science. I know I am biased: I prefer people to science any day, and I am sure many hard SF lovers will love this novel and positively delight in the more ludicrous science but there is a bal-

ance that can be reached – indeed Barnes did in the earlier parts of the novel – that more experienced writers, like Sterling, can consistently keep between character

and plot, and I think Barnes has some way to go. I think he will get there, that Mother of Storms is a taster for better to come, but in itself is not a terribly good novel.

## Editorial Ramblings

**T**HIS BEING A MAGAZINE, and me being its editor, an editorial was inevitable, so here is the end you couldn't evit – tacked onto the back simply because that way I know how much space I have to fill.

TTBA has been a very sick beast of late, and the task of resurrecting it from a 168k email of aging, and often anonymous, copy has been an - interesting one. Dark forebodings of Threadbare TTBA Brings Annoyance were happily dispelled by the variously named Guy T. Martland and his magic disc, and TTBA Transformed, Becoming Alive. A special accolade to him (with a gold star for putting up with my editorial bolshiness), and a much belated, though undiminished, serving of gratitude to all those who submitted far back in the mists of time.

A leaner, possibly meaner, but certainly much hungrier TTBA is now prowling the CUSFS savannah in search of new prey, so all you bewilderbeast out there, the time has come to submit! The Tiger Begging Authorship is in sufficiently good shape to guarantee an Easter term issue, so The Thousands Being Apathetic because they don't think That There'll Be Any more have no excuse. Submit! Submit! Submit!

Much has changed since Thoth's Titanic Bio-Accumulator, and I've tried to make the presentation look reasonably professional, whilst retaining the grand old traditions of TTBA, foremost among which being that the cover should be produced by someone with no artistic talent whatsoever. This issue's cover was produced by the

current editor, who is singularly qualified in this area. Submissions by equally qualified people for the next issue would be most welcome.

Another tradition is the CUSFS Hall of Fame (which doubles up as a nice little space filler), and accordingly, this year's categories are:

- 1) Best Novel (10 places)
- 2) Best Short story (5 places)
- 3) Best Author (10 places)
- 4) Best Film (5 places)
- 5) Best TV Series (5 places)
- 6) Most Irritating Tabloid (5 places)
- and
- 7) Best Replacement for a Kitchen Sink (10 places)

The word "best" in any of the above may optionally be replaced by "worst".

All submissions/eulogies/diatribes to the TTBA Editor

Andrew Ketley  
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or [andrewk@chiark.greenend.org.uk](mailto:andrewk@chiark.greenend.org.uk)

Blatant fixing of the results may receive special mention.

Any other submissions should be sent to the above addresses (bulky emails to chiark by preference).

All told, this has been a pretty good issue, with content varying from good to excellent, if occasionally dated. I hope it pleases\*.

*AndrewK*

\* Complaint is a offence, punishable by a minimum sentence of one year's TTBA editorship.