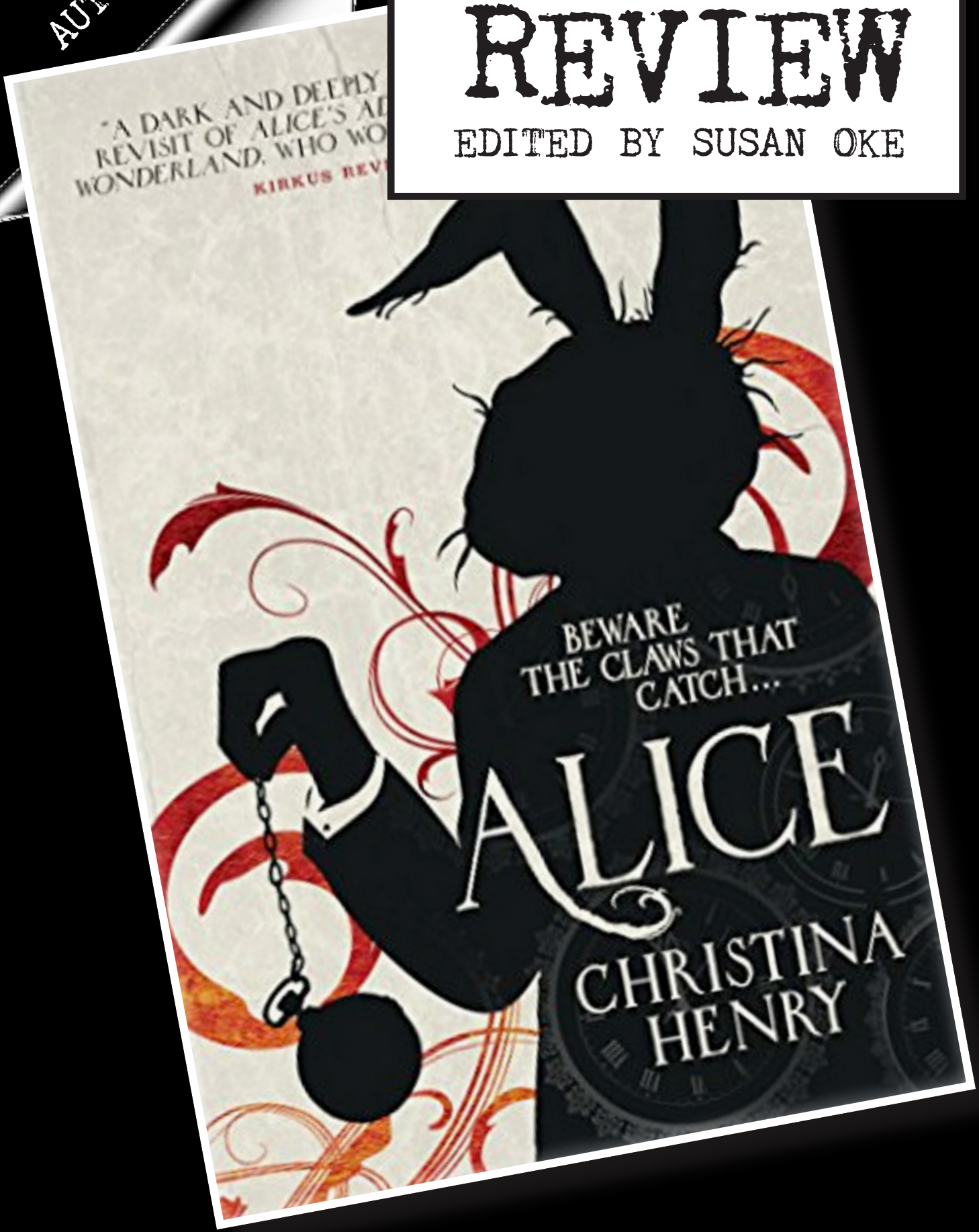
ISSUE 1
AUTUMN 2017

THE BSFA REVIEW

EDITED BY SUSAN OKE



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REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE...

VIEW FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the very first edition of ***BSFA Review***, a publication dedicated to bringing you top quality reviews and opinions in the realm of SFF. In the past these have primarily been devoted to books—of course!—but you may have noticed the occasional review of other media creeping in (e.g. Jeff Wayne's Musical of ***War of the Worlds***, and the Royal Opera House production of ***Frankenstein***). In future isses, I would like to expand the remit of our dedicated band of reviewers to include the many and varied SFF productions offered by TV, films and theatre.

Talking about our dedicated band of reviewers—it's down to their hard work and commitment to producing good quality reviews that has made the publication of the ***BSFA Review*** possible. I'd like to take this opportunity to say a big THANK YOU to them all for their unrivalled enthusiasm, their willingness to get to grips with a wide variety of sub-genres, and for producing excellent copy to agreed deadlines.

Ah yes, deadlines. The plan is to publish the ***BSFA Review*** at least four times a year, which means we will be able to clear the backlog of reviews that have been waiting patiently to see the light of day. It also means that, going forward, there will be room for more reviews and in-depth opinion pieces across a wider SFF platform. Lots to look forward to!

You may have noticed the inclusion of at least one review of a YA title in recent editions of ***Vector***. It's important to keep an eye on the quality of SFF being offered to the next generation! To that end, there will also be a series of reviews of children's SFF (the first of which appeared in ***Vector 285***), written by Christopher Owen, who is well versed in the field of children's 'fantastika'.

If you have any suggestions for other areas/topics deserving of review, please get in contact using the email address below. I'm always open to ideas.

Perhaps you'd like to join the ***BSFA Review***'s team of dedicated reviewers? Is there a book, TV series, film etc. that you feel passionate enough about to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard)? Feel free to drop me a line with a sample of your writing and suggestions of what you'd like to review.

Susan Oke
smayoke@gmail.com

The Water Knife by Paolo Bacigalupi (Orbit, 2015)

Reviewed by Anthony Nanson

The setting is near-future Arizona and there isn't enough water to go round. It's partly because of climate change, partly because of excessive consumption. So water has become money. You have to pay for every litre. The western states of America have been taken over by profiteering gangsters who ruthlessly compete to control the remaining water sources. One by one, cities are reduced to empty ruins when their supply is cut. Walls are erected along state boundaries to stop the flood of refugees. The bodies of migrants shot by the border guards are strung up as a warning, but still the people come, desperate to find their way to somewhere it's possible to survive.

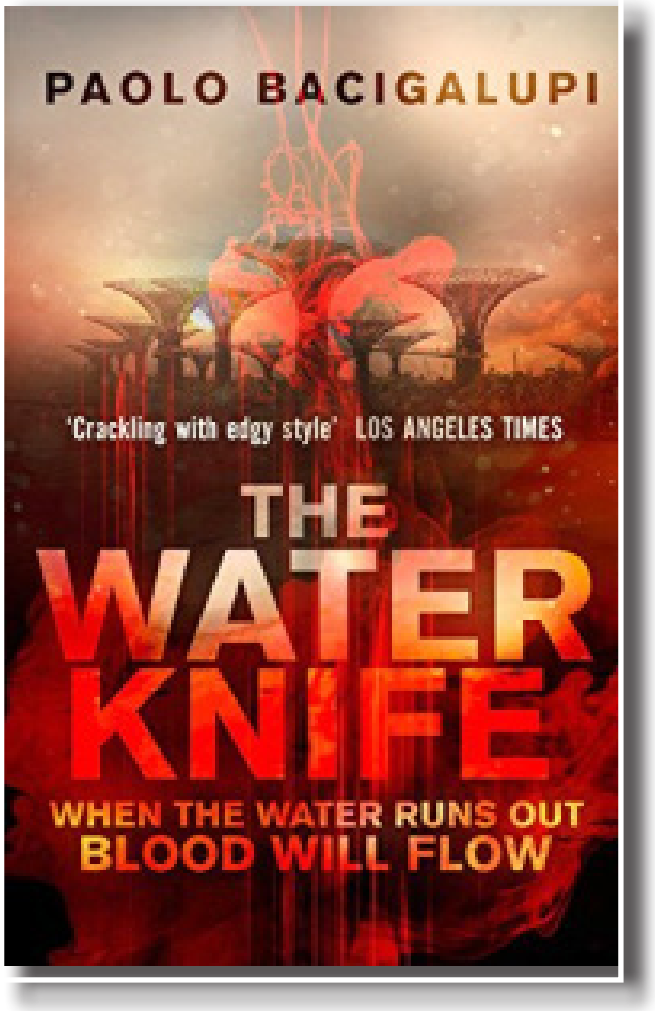
It's a terrifyingly plausible extrapolation of the logic of the neoliberal economics that rules the world today. To hell with society. To hell with the environment. To hell with the poor and the weak. All that matters is the freedom to pursue your own economic gain, and the power of violence to protect your own property. In the aftermath of the EU referendum and facing the prospect of the EU's dissolution, it was chilling to read about a disunited America in which intertribal prejudice and conflict are determined by which state you come from. Chilling too is how readily the libertarian survival of the fittest in circumstances of austerity entails the sexploitation of vulnerable women.

Both those factors apply to 'Maria', a teenage Texan refugee in Phoenix who's trying to scrape a living by reselling water to construction workers. The gangsters ruling her patch viciously tax her more than she can earn, driving her to sell her body to a Californian lawyer on business in one of the air-conditioned arcologies where the wealthy live in hermetic isolation from the devastated environment outside. She thereby gets mixed up in the parallel storylines of big-time gangsters from Las Vegas and an investigative journalist, Lucy Monroe, who are all on the trail of water rights, worth billions, that date back to Arizona's Native inhabitants.

Characteristic of these various gangsters is an absence of empathy. They routinely kill and torture and it's nothing personal: they have the self-justifying neoliberal habitus of 'just doing my job' and 'it's what I have to do; there's no alternative'. Angel Velasquez, though, is the exception. He is the eponymous 'water knife', employed by a Las Vegas gang leader to do what's needed to secure that city's water supply at the

expense of Arizona's. He's very tough, he's done bad things, but he still has a human heart. He takes pity on both Maria and Lucy when their lives are in danger.

Bacigalupi is an exceptional stylist in contemporary SF. He tersely captures the hoods' tough-guy argot and weaves a kind of poetry out of the detritus of a collapsing consumer society, reminiscent of Gibson but harder, pared down, unromantic. I found *The Water Knife* more emotionally engaging than *The Windup Girl*; I suspect that's largely because in *The Water Knife* Bacigalupi has reverted to past-tense narration. (See Ursula Le Guin's *Steering the Craft* for a persuasive exposé of how present-tense narration entails a flattening of affect.) For the first third of the novel, up to where the three protagonists' stories begin to mesh, there's little sense of plot; one is gripped instead by the interest of setting and characters and by the traction of style. In the last third, style takes a back seat to plot as the novel turns into an action-adventure movie, which at times is cartoonish. What is sustained, though, is a tension of paradigms between Lucy's idealistic desire to somehow make the world better and Angel's – and Maria's – surrender to making the best for oneself in the world as it actually is.



Maria says of Lucy, 'She thinks the world is supposed to be one way, but it's not. It's already changed. And she can't see it, 'cause she only sees how it used to be.'

That speech captures in a nutshell the book's theme. This is a world in which there is no longer any hope. The damage has been done. It's too late to make a better world. Maria's words represent the ultimate victory of neoliberalism: an ecological wasteland in which the fortunate few survive in artificial environments and everyone else who survives is reduced to animal barbarism. Bacigalupi has cleverly wrought a book that ticks the boxes for success as a commercial thriller and is at the same time a powerful warning of where we're heading if we do not change our ways. Its repeated references to *Cadillac Desert*, a real book about the effect of development on environment in the American West, are an emblem of the idea that people *knew* what would happen but they *did it anyway*; an implicit invitation to us to choose differently while we still can.

Bacigalupi could make a whole career out of exploiting different facets of ecocatastrophe in different parts of the world. Nightmare is easier to sell than hope. My hope is that he'll soon have won such repute that, like Kim Stanley Robinson, he'll be free to write whatever he wants in confidence that readers will buy it, and that he'll then begin to explore practical pathways of hope in the way that Robinson has been doing almost single-handedly. Bacigalupi has the edge on Robinson in both his command of style and his willingness to face the desperation of people's existence in conditions of poverty and squalor. In the meantime his ecopunk thrillers contribute to the norm of dystopian expectation that risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy if we carry on failing to imagine alternatives.

Crosstalk by Connie Willis (Gollancz, 2016)

Reviewed by Duncan Lawie

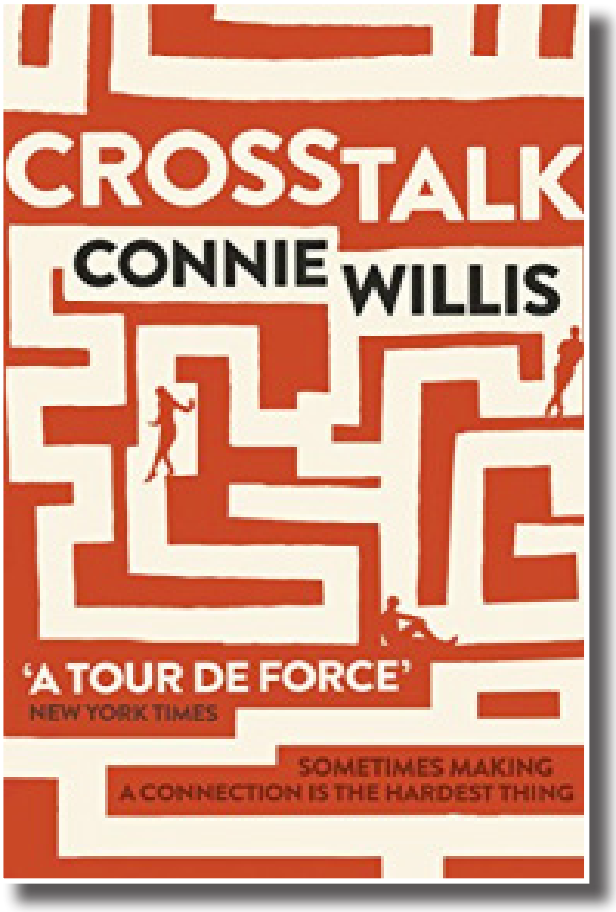
Telepathy has largely fallen out of use as a science fiction trope since it's heyday in the 1960s, but Connie Willis uses the idea effectively in **Crosstalk** to parody modern social media and instant connectedness. The trope also works remarkably well as a method of mis-communication, which is central to the "screwball comedy". As such, it feels like a success but, in keeping with the framework, the plot is reliant on our heroine working out what is happening after our hero, after the audience and, quite often, after the nine year old niece. As a result, I found myself spending much of the book feeling alternately sorry for and then annoyed with our principle protagonist. Still, when a match is made in scriptwriter heaven, it is not ours to reason why.

Briddey Flannagan is an executive at Commspan, a corporation attempting to outcompete Apple on the next generation of smartphone. She has been wooed by Trent, who is leading the new phone project, and they have agreed to an EED – a medical procedure to enhance their emotional connectedness. This is the novum, the only variation from today as we know it. All is rosy, except for the dark warnings that the EED won't have the right outcome. From a reader perspective, this is the first inkling of plot, but it is somewhat buried in the manic complexity of Briddey's family and office life.

Her family is a collection of caricatures: Aunt Oona, so serious about her Irish roots; sister Kathleen, dating the wrong men; sister Mary Clare, helicopter parenting a nine-year-old; and niece Maeve, who seems to be the only one with her head screwed on right. They seem to spend all their time in each other's houses and lives – everyone but Maeve has a key to Briddey's apartment and they all drop into her office unannounced. The intensity of these relationships, the non-stop phoning, texting and messaging, had my head spinning. Which shows how neatly Willis gets her characterisation deep into the reader's head. Briddey needs a bit of time to herself – her ultimate sanctuary is a place where she can be alone. So, of course, when the EED gives her full telepathy, it turns her overloaded connectivity to breaking point.

Her first connection though is to CB Schwartz, the lab geek, rather than Trent Worth, the one she believes to be her beloved. Aghast at this misconnection, her panic and confusion, her distrust and self-doubt are all convincingly told – and perhaps that explains why she isn't thinking right. Still, she doesn't seem to recognise that CB can constrain her access to his thoughts and it takes her forever to recognise Trent's ulterior motives. Perhaps this is just the workings of the screwball comedy – the reader can see the only happy ending is where CB and Briddey get together.

By comparison, the science fictional nature of telepathy in the world is subtly built up over the course of the novel. CB provides footnotes and references, from saints who hear the voice of god to a bucket list of good and bad examples from Wikipedia. This is then overlaid with the idea that early humans may well have had communal minds before they had distinct ones. As such, natural telepathy survives as a regressive gene, activated by chance events in people who do not have the dominant inhibitor gene – i.e. the Irish, a more



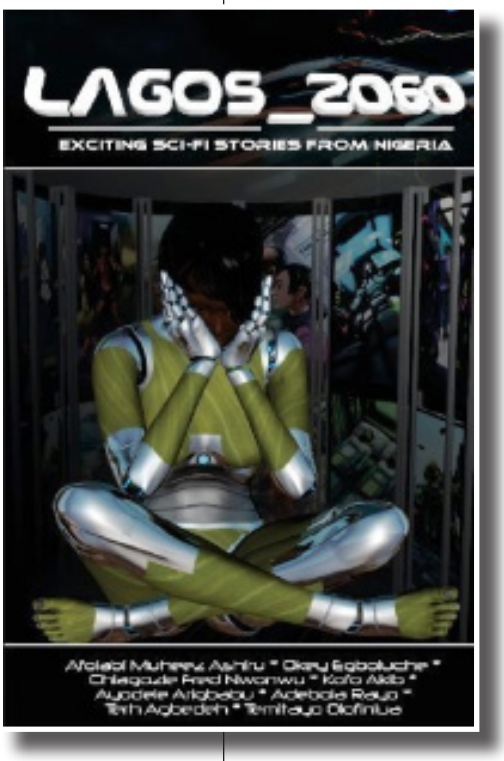
ancient, pure race. By this point the story is out of control, with telepaths everywhere and the attempt to keep telepathy out of the system seems doomed to failure. That it succeeds feels a little subservient to plot but this is a book that lives in the interstices of our world and so could not finish with the overturn of all we know. Instead we have the predicted happy ending, personal growth for Briddey and a message that we can choose to take control of our connectedness.

Lagos_2060 curated by Ayodele Arigbadu (DADA books, 2013)

Reviewed by Polina Levontin

Writing about present-day Lagos, Rem Koolhaas warns that already 'the city itself has mutated into something' unrecognizable to Westerners who think of cities in terms of European or North American models. 'What will the city be like in 2060?' This was the question posed to eight Nigerian science fiction writers during a workshop that yielded the anthology: *Lagos_2060.* The resulting eight stories, three of which were written by women, represent a diverse range of imaginaries all set in Lagos, in the year 2060. These stories engage with science and governance, city infrastructure and climate change, co-evolution of technology and social norms, urbanization and the future of global capitalism. Yet these scholarly themes emerge from stories that are first and foremost exciting, often romance-filled adventures. There are man-eating frogs and time-travel inducing herbs, girls with luminous tattoos and zero-gravity bedrooms, albeit in separate stories.

Individual writers approached the remit to imagine the future of one of the world's greatest cities each with their own genre palette and a remix of intellectual priorities. But what these stories share is a sense of dynamic liveliness that can only be a feature of a work-in-progress, their various literary forms reflective of the chaotic process by which the city itself is shaped. Their gift is the recklessness of trying out new things. These are pioneering works, regardless of how one decides to date science fiction in Nigeria.



What interested me in particular were the discourses on science. The first story of the anthology, 'Amphibian Attack' by Afolabi Muheez Ashiru, presents the dangers of leaving the sciences in the hands of the private sector. The private company 'Bright Life Group' is so efficient in curing diseases and supplying energy that it has to use science to undo the progress, secretly engineering catastrophes, so it can keep itself profitable and powerful by fixing its own 'accidents'. The discourse in the second story, 'Animals on the Run' by Okey Egboluche, is that of conflict between technological progress on one hand and society and environment on the other. The value of robotics in particular is questioned because it reduces employment in conditions where large numbers of people need jobs. Robotics is critiqued on an intimately personal scale in another story in the collection, 'Metal Feet' by Temitayo Olofinlua.

Technological advances such as land reclamation to expand Lagos are questioned as risky and a violation of 'natural order.' In 'Mango Republic' by Terh Agbedeh scientific rationalism is instituted in Lagos, making it 'the most beautiful prison in the world ever conceived by man'. But even supreme scientific achievements are shown to be powerless against the forces of nature unhinged by climate change. Floods and rising sea levels threaten Lagos, while environmental destruction elsewhere in Nigeria swells the city's population beyond capacity. In 'Mango Republic' the discourse of science is survivalist – science is our last hope to adapt to a perilous future. Yet, exemplifying the complexity of the narratives in *Lagos_2060,* other stories demonstrate the political danger of seemingly desirable scientific solutions. On the extreme opposite spectrum from 'Amphibian Attack', scientific knowledge becomes highly guarded government property in 'Cold Fusion'. A new way to produce cheap renewable electricity reinforces the government's control over the people of Lagos and stirs political ambitions to secede from the rest of Nigeria. Science promising energy independence actually does enable the politicians who rule Lagos to secede from Nigeria in another story, 'Coming Home' by Rayo Falade.

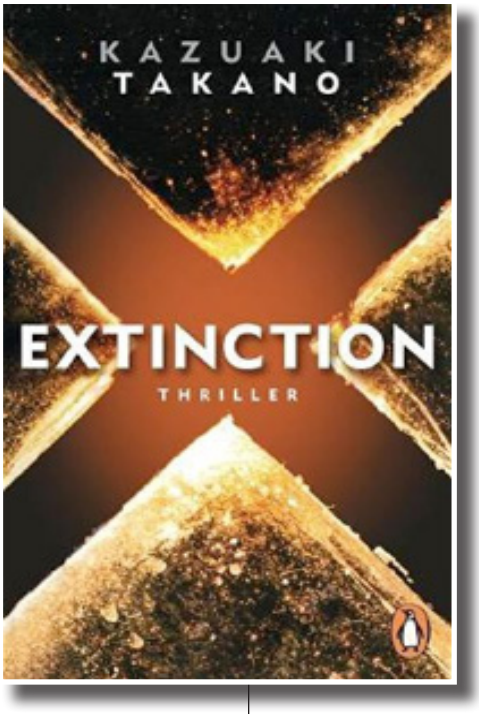
The collection is full of ideas pertinent not only to the future of Lagos but the future of humanity in general. The writers don't envision Lagos in isolation but as an integral part of the global economic and natural system. Their visions and hopes for Lagos, their individual philosophies and fears are expressed with humour and showmanship. Their ability to ask urgent questions about the direction we are heading is made invaluable by their skills to entertain.

Extinction by Kazuaki Takano (translated by Philip Gabriel)

(Mulholland Books, 2016)

Reviewed by Jared I. Magee

With a title as epic in scope and weight as *Extinction*, Kazuaki Takano all but had to deliver with his novel. As the first of Takano's works translated into English, it delivers on that promised immensity and, as it turns out, has an amazingly, if a bit enigmatic, fitting title. (That enigmatic title actually resonates all the more and reverberates with even greater power *after* finishing the piece.) While the title does the novel and its ideas justice, the tagline, "He is a new kind of human; He may mean the end for the rest of us…" most assuredly does not, as it is a massive oversimplification of a complex, enjoyable narrative.



When a reader first dives into *Extinction*, they might expect to find the pop-fiction account of science that is anticipated in, say, a Michael Crichton book. Enjoyable. But, far from in-depth, fully believable science. However, *Extinction* goes well beyond the surface-level science that many popular novels embrace. Like those script-turned-novel thrillers, there are plenty of thrills, chills, and overt, adrenaline-fueled chase, battle, and race-against-the-clock style scenes in the novel, but they are presented in equal parts with, at least to the armchair scientist, what seem to be hard, concrete scientific truisms and practices. For example, a meticulous explanation of differentiation of hominid species, covering *Homo floresiensis*, "Neanderthals…and Peking Man" both establishes scientific legitimacy and furthers the narrative. Mathematics, coding, advanced AI, operant conditioning, and gene sequencing all have their moment. A simple Google search certainly backs up a great deal of the more basic scientific materials put forth in *Extinction*, and, as with any good piece of science fiction, telling the difference between fact and fiction becomes difficult, the science and the reasons behind the science being quite plausible.

Along with the plausible science comes a great deal of utterly plausible history. "The Heisman Report," a very believable fiction that spawns many an hour of internet research, warns of six possible means of extinction of the human race. Modern Japanese/Chinese/Korean relations are explained in historical context. Eisenhower and his warnings to the US about "the danger of the military-industrial complex" are used as a means of demonstrating how hindsight is 20/20 in everything, including high stakes geopolitics and war.

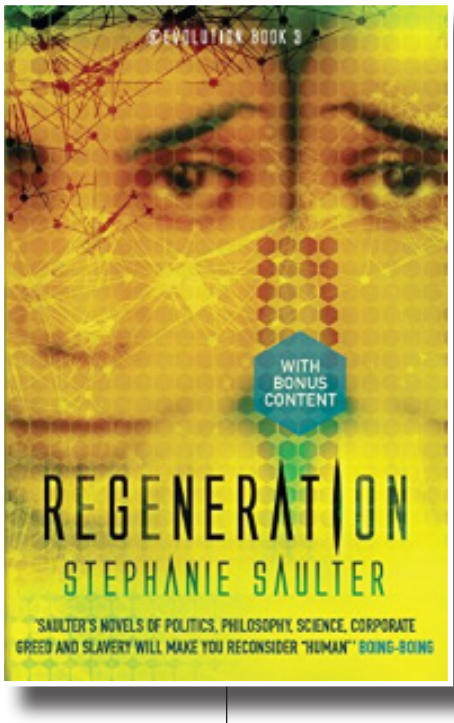
Even more striking, *Extinction*, though originally published in 2011, is eerily poignant and familiar in a post-Brexit, post-Trump world. Distressing indictments of capitalism (just a means to "sublimate violence and direct it instead into the energy behind economic activity"), US intelligence agencies ("criminal organization[s]"), fear of scientific innovation, blind nationalism, Othering, exploiting peoples, unjust wars, corrupt governmental officials, ideological extremists, increasingly authoritarian political figures, and *so* much more are present. In fact, humanity itself is put through the wringer, as it is defined time and again as naught but "cruelty."

Developed nations are further put on edge, as the aforementioned Heisman Report states, "it is less likely that this next generation of humans will appear in developed countries than in underdeveloped areas cut off from their surroundings." The next step in evolution, then, will be in the marginalized and ostracized areas of the world, taking the power out from under those that revel in control over those they so often perceive as lesser.

Extinction is gut-wrenching, electrifying, and all too familiar-feeling tale that shakes a reader to the core while never proselytizing. It begins as a political thriller, touches into adventure tale, mystery novel, true SF, and continues to defy cliché and pigeonholing. The only regret I had in disappearing into Takano's tale is that, despite the extremely talented efforts of Philip Gabriel in translating, I feel that I miss out on even more voltage, word play, and sheer goodness not being able to read this winner of a novel in its original. This is a must read.

Regeneration by Stephanie Saulter (Jo Fletcher Books, 2015) Reviewed by Nick Hubble

Reading this final volume of the ®Evolution trilogy, it is difficult not to be aware of the contemporary social parallels of Saulter's nearish-future techno not-quite-thrillers. While it is true that there are not communities of genetically-modified humans – 'gems', as distinct from non-genetically-modified 'norms' – living in trendy up-and-coming districts of London, nor has the general population yet crashed due to neural overload from digital devices, we do live in the world of social networks and competing memes that Saulter displays with sophistication and nuance. This is a tense world in which politicians representing minorities cannot afford to say anything that would 'imply that we think we're better than the people who think they're our betters'. Changes have resulted in a reduction of jobs and therefore allowed people a negative way of talking about new developments 'that they're able to convince themselves isn't bigoted'.



At a time when so much – including gender, sexuality, western-centric thought, science, climate, and the nature of work – that we hitherto took for granted is in flux and prompting a reactionary nostalgia for traditional hierarchical values, it is good to be reminded that, as the opening sentence of the novel states, 'It is a rare thing, to see change coming'. Unfortunately, we are all too aware of the truth of the second sentence: 'Embracing it is rarer still'.

The plot of *Regeneration* concerns the opening of a tidal power energy station on the Thames, which is run and owned by a team of gillungs, gems who can breathe underwater. Through the innovative use of quantum batteries, 'Thames Tidal' promises to supply the energy needs of the city but at the cost of the existing biomass industry, which is a major employer of norms in the countryside around London and controlled by an entrenched financial elite. This same elite dominate a conservative political party, the 'Traditional Democrats' or 'Trads', attempting to wrest power from the more liberal 'United People's Party', who support gem entrepreneurship and technology. Thus the scene is set for a power struggle between an inclusive, multicultural vision of the future and the determination of those with vested interests to defend them by stoking the fears of those outside the cities who feel left behind.

This archetypal conflict is intensified by the cumulative effect of the two previous volumes in the trilogy, *Gemsigns* (2013) and *Binary* (2014), which introduced us to the principal characters and established their background history. *Gemsigns* begins with the escape of a gem, who we only much later learn to be the enigmatically hunchbacked Aryel Morningstar, from a secret research facility. Thereafter, the novel is concerned with a special Congress in London to determine whether escaped gems should be given human rights or returned to the control of the corporations that have engineered them such as Bel'Natur, where power is wielded by the supremely cold Zavcka Klist. It is only when forced to save the telepathic gem child, Gabriel, from thugs over-zealously carrying out Zavcka's orders, that Aryel reveals her true nature and dramatically carries him to safety. The sense of wonder engendered by this rescue, carried out in front of the eyes of the global media, connects directly with so many human desires for transformative magic that it overcomes the norms' fear of difference and opens up a window for progressive change.

Binary, a much tighter novel, turns on Zavcka's offer to Aryel of collaboration with gems to develop a human-binary interface for digital interaction. While the plot follows Bel'Natur's attempts to replicate how the autistic gem Herran interfaces directly with binary code, it only becomes belatedly apparent that Zavcka's motivation is to transfer her own unnatural longevity into immortality by finding a means of digitally transferring her consciousness into the clone she is illegally growing in the secret labs in the basement of the Bel'Natur building. Saulter's mix of thriller elements, scientific extrapolation and character-driven drama is sometimes uneasy, especially in *Gemsigns*, and it is not always clear if we are reading a work of social vision or a police procedural. Indeed, the back cover blurbs of *Binary* and *Regeneration* give the erroneous

impression that the norm police detective, Sharon Varsi, is the main character. However, by the end of *Binary*, a genuinely powerful representation has been created of a dialectical struggle between progressive difference, as embodied by Aryel, and entitled power, as embodied by Zavcka.

What enables *Regeneration* to work as a satisfactory conclusion to the trilogy is that the opposition between Aryel and Zavcka is not simply mapped on top of the power struggles between the gem-run Thames Tidal and the Trads but provides depth by running at a tangent to the main plot of the novel. The same forces trying to sabotage the new power station are also looking for Zavcka's clone, who is now being brought up as Gabriel's younger sister, Eve. In this way, the traditional financial elite also hope to gain access to Zavka's supposed immortality and thus entrench themselves in perpetuity. But what their hunger for power illustrates is a comparative lack of vision in contrast to both the gems, with their different sense of human possibilities, and Zavcka, with her different sense of time. In a nice touch, it is the latter who, while desperately trying to be the first one to get to the abducted Eve, recognises the revolutionary transformation of society taking place in the streets in which the gems and their allies have 'become the pioneers of a new landscape'. *Regeneration* closes with the promise of a future for Eve as the new woman living in an age that has space for her.

World of Water by James Lovegrove (Solaris, 2016)

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

The story engine at the heart of Lovegrove's Dev Harmer series is a sound one, with perhaps a small debt to the early adventures of a certain Time Lord who also travelled the universe unsure where his travels would take him. However, that's where the similarities end. Dev Harmer isn't a Time Lord, he works for Interstellar Security Solutions (ISS), although not by choice. A former soldier in the war against the Polis+, now he's an indentured servant for ISS, working to pay off his debts by serving as an intergalactic trouble-shooter. When there's trouble on a human colony ISS send in Harmer – via a consciousness download, uploaded into a locally cloned body – to fix it. Dev never knows where he's going, or what the problem is, until he gets there.

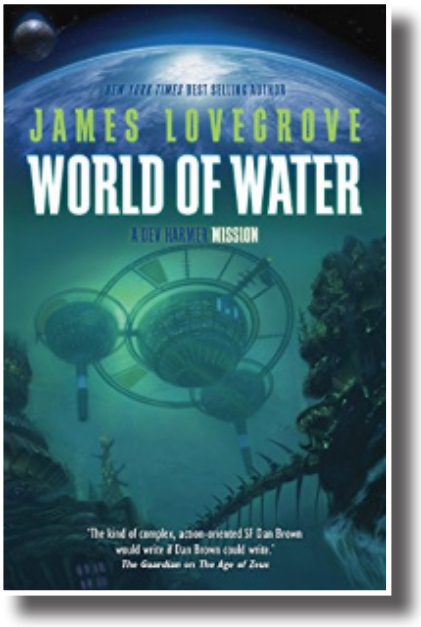
Arriving on the planet Robinson D, also known as Triton, Harmer discovers he has not one but two problems to deal with. First, is his actual mission: to discover why Triton's aquatic but intelligent inhabitants have begun attacking the Earth colonists and to look for evidence of Polis+ involvement; second, is to complete his mission before the faulty clone body he has been uploaded into breaks down completely. Harmer has just 72 hours to complete his mission. If he doesn't, his consciousness won't be downloaded from the collapsing clone body and sent onwards to its next mission and a new healthy body. He'll die!

That's the setup, revealed with shotgun speed in the first chapter, and it's a good no-nonsense start. But it's the only good thing about *World of Water*.

At first I thought Lovegrove might be parodying some of the sillier excesses of mil-sf out there, but as the story ground on and no jokes appeared, the horrible truth began to dawn: *World of Water* isn't a parody, it's serious*;* a dull, unimaginative slog played ridiculously, awfully straight. It could have been saved by taking the *Pirates of the Caribbean* route, becoming a fun action romp full of big guns, wisecracking heroes, dastardly aliens – maybe even a bit of swashbuckling on the high seas. If anyone could make this happen it would be James Lovegrove, many of whose previous books have kept me turning pages long after bedtime.

Sadly, this is not one of those books. Perhaps I'm missing something, perhaps there's a deep and subtle subtext lying full fathom five deep, but if there is it's drowned by some unadventurous world-building and lazy characterization.

This may only be Dev Harmer's second book but it's definitely my last.



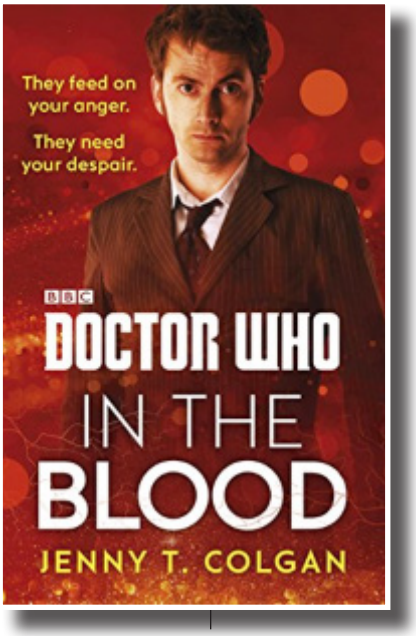
In The Blood by Jenny T. Colgan (BBC Books, 2016)

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

In the Blood is Jenny T. Colgan's third Doctor Who novel, following *Dark Horizons* (2012) and *Into the Nowhere* (2014). It is related to *Time Reaver*, her 'Tenth Doctor' audio book for Big Finish (simultaneously released in May 2016), with the same dastardly villain – Gully, a multi-tentacled gangster from the anything-goes spaceport planet of Calibris. He has now built himself a Fortress of Solitude – sorry, Ice Palace – in the middle of a South American jungle.

"THEY FEED ON YOUR ANGER. THEY NEED YOUR DESPAIR" (front-cover blurb). As the Tenth Doctor explains (I'm paraphrasing like mad, here): "They are Rempaths, from the Rafirax system). Tiny organisms, transported through blood and/or the internet, looking for living hosts. They feed off emotional energy, specifically anger, which produces hormones on which they feed. It forms a kind of furiously fatal feedback loop in the host." People are dying in online agony. The media and 'tinfoil hat websites' call it the Webmageddon or the Trollpocalypse.

Colgan doesn't bother to describe the Doctor and his Companion in any great detail. Why should she? All the reader has to do is picture David Tennant and Catherine Tate in his-or-her mind's eye. But Donna Noble comes off best over the Doctor in the characterization stakes. It's as if she comes to life on the page. Here is a typical exchange of pleasantries. Doctor: "Do you really . . . Do you really think I have an absolutely amazing life with nothing to get worried about?" Donna: "Well, if you can't, who can? So, why don't we just pretend that you do?" There is a strong emotional scene between Donna and her multi-needless-tasking friend, Hettie, which literally ends in tears.



The Doctor is Earthbound this time out – except when he's jetting around the world with Donna from London to Seoul and Rio de Janeiro and back to London again. He can't use the TARDIS because – well, he just can't, that's all. But some of the best scenes take place in exotic Chiswick, with the ever-feisty Wilf/Gramps/Bernard Cribbins.

I prefer *In the Blood* to some recent episodes of *Doctor Who*, where the writers seem to have gone buck-mad and desperate. Whenever a scene runs out of narrative steam, they have a Dalek glide into the room and cry "Exterminate!" If that isn't enough, they call up a Cyberman and/or a Weeping Angel from the vasty Whological deep. Or even an Ice Warrior – although they don't get much of a look-in, these days. I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see a homicidal wheelie-bin appear at any moment . . .

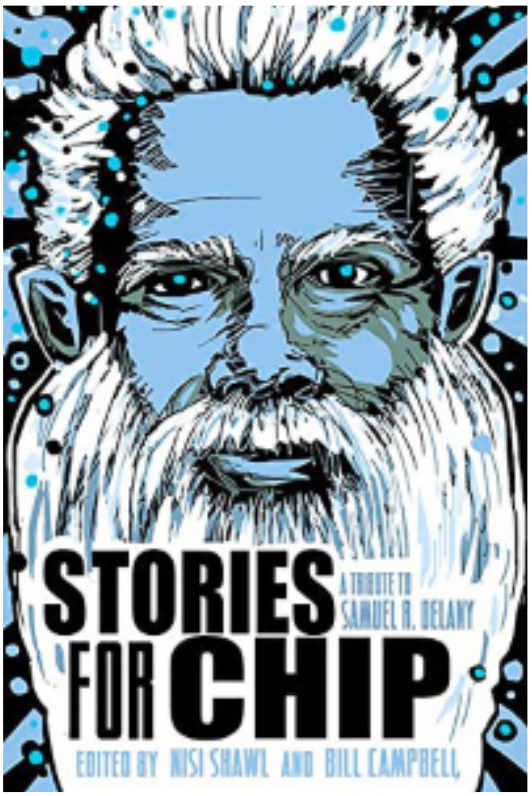
Stories for Chip: A Tribute to Samuel R. Delany by Nisi Shawl & Bill Campbell (eds) (Rosarium, 2015)

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

There's a good reason why this project is impossible. In fact, there are several good reasons: Samuel R. Delany. Delany, known as Chip to everyone who has met him, is probably the closest science fiction comes to matching Walt Whitman's claim to contain multitudes. There is too much of Delany to be neatly encompassed within one volume.

Delany is, of course, known for being both black and gay at a time when either attribute was vanishingly rare if not actually non-existent within science fiction. Both qualities deeply inform his fiction, of course, and the best piece of non-fiction in this book is a short memoir by Michael Swanwick about reading *The Einstein Intersection* for the very first time and only realising half way through that the characters were virtually all black, which he recounts as a revealing and a liberating experience. Nevertheless, anyone approaching Delany's work purely in terms of his blackness and/or his gayness is doing so in a superficial way that misses out the greater part of his contribution to science fiction, or to literature in general.

What would be missed out by such an approach? For a start, his engagement with myth, which forms the irreducible core of such varied works as *The Einstein Intersection*, *Nova* and *Dhalgren*. There are undercurrents of myth in several of these stories (I'd pick out Chesya



Burke's "For Sale: Fantasy Coffin (Ababuo Need Not Apply)" and Kai Ashante Wilson's "Legendaire" as among the best). But where these stories use myth as a way of turning back to the past, as a reassertion of the past in making the present, Delany tended to use myth as a way of shaping our understanding of the new, the future, the strange. Myth has changed, not just here but generally in its use within sf, from a guide through the disorienting to being a comfort in times of change, a subtle but very important difference.

We'd miss, also, his engagement with paraliterature, from comics to pornography. Surprisingly, for a publisher that has done so much with comics, there is no nod to Delany's involvement with this form of literature, other than a passing reference in Lavender's article. As for the pornography, the closest we get is "Holding Hands with Monsters" by Haralambi Markov, a tale of a gay relationship made both monstrous and sad. It's a good story, though we do rather miss Delany's insistence that all paraliterature is a cause for celebration rather than shame.

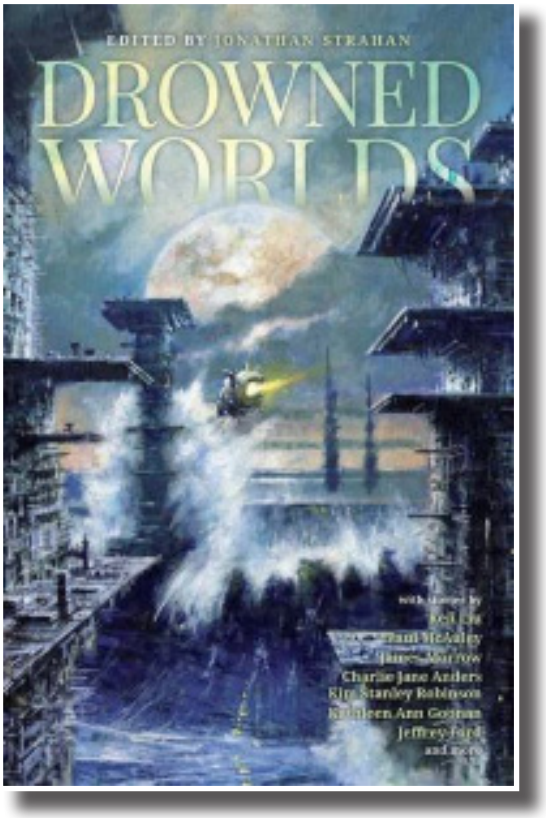
Then there's Delany the critic, whose *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* and *Starboard Wine*, among others, were instrumental in initiating much of the serious critical attention now paid to the genre. Here, the best that is on offer is "Real Mothers, a Faggot Uncle, and the Name of the Father: Samuel R. Delany's Feminist Revisions of the Story of SF" by L. Timmel Duchamp, an essay that is frankly disappointing because of the way it shapes the argument to suit a predetermined end. One of the things missing from this essay, aside from the rigor that Delany himself would have brought to it, is the basic building block of all of his criticism, which is the notion of science fiction as a language. This carries through into his advice for writers, which insists on the particularity of language, on the detailed visualisation of everything followed by the search for the exact word that most accurately conveys what has been visualized. Fortunately there are some contributors who have learned this lesson, and made use of it in "Hamlet's Ghost Sighted in Frontenac, KS" by Vincent Czyz, "Jamaica Ginger" by Nalo Hopkinson and Nisi Shawl, and "Festival" by Chris Brown, which, the latter in particular, just happen to be among the best stories in the book.

Rather too often, the stories justify their place in a festschrift for Delany by feeble means: a character might share the name (but none of the characteristics) of someone in one of his stories, or a character might be reading a book by Delany, or some object supposedly once owned by Delany serves as the McGuffin to set the story in motion. In "Clarity" by Anil Menon the McGuffin is, ludicrously, a crystal writing desk that was supposedly the secret of Delany's success; the story doesn't need the crystal desk to work (and might, I suspect, work rather better without it), but without it would not be an obvious candidate for this anthology. The best of the stories that rely on such direct reference are those whose authors know Delany well and incorporate him into the story. Good pieces that follow this practice include Eileen Gunn's surreal "Michael Swanwick and Samuel R. Delany at the Joyce Kilmer Service Area, March 2005", and Thomas M. Disch's oblique epistolary tale, "The Master of the Milford Altarpiece". But the story that belatedly made me sit up and take notice of this collection was "Characters in the Margins of a Lost Notebook" by Kathryn Cramer. The central character, "a cheerful black Karl Marx", is called Jack, but it is quite obvious who he really is: an idiosyncratic writer who serves as inspiration and support for others, equally open to the creative and the mad. Here is a deeply felt and genuinely moving tribute to the man that lifts this volume to the level it should have attained all along.

Samuel R. Delany is, for far more reasons than we can possibly enumerate, a vital voice in science fiction. A volume such as this is therefore long overdue, and at its best (Swanwick, Brown, Czyz, Markov, Hopkinson and Shawl, Cramer) it serves its purpose wonderfully, but too many others could have learned better from the master.

Drowned Worlds edited by Jonathan Strahan (Solaris, 2016)

Reviewed by Patrick Mahon



Dystopian fiction with an environmental focus has a long pedigree, including such works as J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962), to which the present volume pays clear homage. However, this sub-genre was historically a relatively rare breed. As climate change has become an issue of greater political prominence the number of stories putting it at the heart of the action has increased significantly.

Drowned Worlds is an anthology filled entirely with climate stories. By my reckoning, nine of the fifteen stories take a broadly realistic approach to the potential impacts of climate change, while four adopt a more fantastical response and two are more humorous. There's not space here to cover every story, so I'll talk about a hopefully representative cross-section of them.

The anthology opens with 'Elves of Antarctica' by Paul McAuley. Despite the title this is hard SF set in an apocalyptic near future Antarctica where geo-engineers are trying to prevent the collapse of the western ice sheet. It revolves around the tension between two world views: the detached, long view of Sarah, a palaeontologist who notes that the Earth is constantly changing – for example, a few hundred million years ago the Antarctic was warm, forested and full of dinosaurs – and the more anthropocentric perspective of Mike, a local helicopter pilot and briefly her boyfriend, who is concerned that although the Earth itself will almost certainly survive no matter how bad climate change gets, modern human civilisation may not. McAuley's story features consistently excellent descriptions of nature but remains agnostic between these two contrasting viewpoints, providing an excellent introduction to the issues which feature elsewhere in the volume.

Conflicting views of how to respond to rising sea levels is also at the heart of Kathleen Ann Goonan's 'Who Do You Love?' Emile and Zoe were both marine biologists whose horror at the impact of climate change on the Florida coast led to them taking radically different actions. Emile had endangered species tattooed on his body and became an internationally famous performance artist, taking his conservation message across the world, while his wife Zoe stayed at home, altering her own DNA to enable her to host endangered corals on her body and becoming a unique human-polyp hybrid. When Emile comes back half a century later, neither is quite sure what to say or do, and it is left to the next two generations to carry the story forwards. There are some truly wonderful characters and ideas here but the plot seemed rather too static to contain them.

Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Venice Drowned' personalises the impact of climate change by focusing on Carlo, a boat owner in the submerged city who is reduced to taking rich foreigners to see the underwater treasures of his home town and its neighbours so that they can steal them, legally of course, and take them home. His anger and frustration mirrors our usual response to any natural disaster that befalls us, leaving others seemingly untouched.

Rachel Swirsky adopts a more personal agenda in 'Destroyed by the Waters', in which Derek and Zack, an elderly gay married couple in their seventies, are having trouble coming to terms with a family tragedy which occurred four years earlier when the entire city of Baltimore was catastrophically flooded. This understated story brings a human scale and emotional resonance to an event which might otherwise seem too awful to comprehend.

Jeffrey Ford's 'What is' examines what happens after an aid parcel is dropped into the dustbowl that is all that remains of Oklahoma when one family decides the time for mutual cooperation is over. Ford takes the geopolitical implications of climate change and personalises them to a small group of survivors with dramatic results.

Lavie Tidhar's 'Drowned' is a mythic story told by a small child, Little Mai. It looks back to a time, many generations earlier, when the Earth was ruled by powerful 'climate clans', who controlled the means of food and energy production in a world brought low by rising sea levels. When Cassandra, the daughter of one of the clan leaders, is found dead on a beach, covered by shallow cuts, Little Mai's great-great-great-great-grandmother is ordered by the grieving father to find the murderer – or die herself. This original whodunit is told in a fresh and exciting style, full of narrative interruptions that enhance rather than obscure the main story, creating an energetic and enjoyable read.

'The Future is Blue', by Catherynne M. Valente is an extravagant allegory set on Garbagetown, a floating island of detritus in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Tetley Abednego is a nineteen-year-old climate refugee who has been ostracised for reasons which are initially unclear. As she recounts her strange life we learn how much they have all lost. This is a sad but fascinating story of love, loss and the infinite uses of litter.

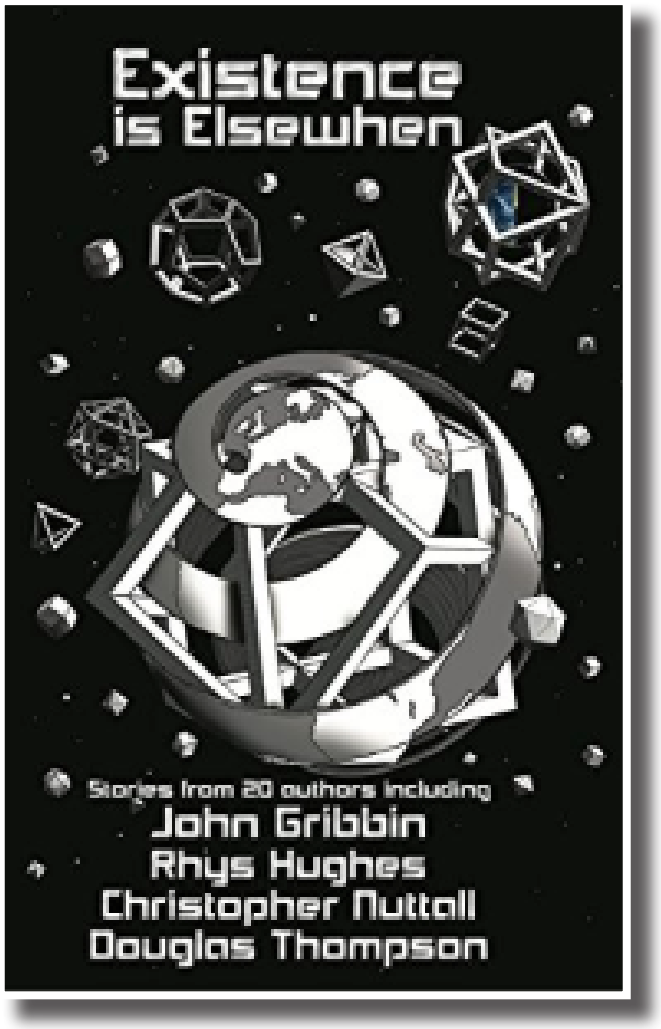
Finally, in 'Only Ten More Shopping Days Left Till Ragnarök', James Morrow brings some welcome humour to a generally dark subject as he follows the extraordinary adventures of middle class couple Simon and Lucretia Ramsey. They travel to the Arctic for the adventure of a lifetime, only to lose their guide, most of their fellow trekkers and all their equipment, before being rescued by a previously unknown tribe of Inuit who believe them to be gods sent to rescue the Earth from the demon god Qaumaniq. Morrow's entertaining story is filled with a witty, dry and cynical humour yet still makes a serious point.

Drowned Worlds collects together fifteen diverse environmental disaster stories, so I guess it's inevitable that they won't all appeal to everyone. I enjoyed around two-thirds of them, which seems like a pretty good hit rate. If you're interested in SF and climate science, this is an excellent anthology to sink into.

Existence is Elsewhen edited by Elsewhen Press (Elsewhen Press, 2016)

Reviewed by Dave M. Roberts

The title is a paraphrase of the last sentence of André Breton's 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*, as we are told by the blurb on the back cover. I have to admit I'm not entirely sure why we are told this, as it doesn't really have any bearing on the actual contents of the book or what the reader might expect. There is no introduction, no obvious manifesto and even no named editor(s). The twenty stories are arranged alphabetically by author's surname, each prefaced by a brief bio. So, really, there is no way to judge if this anthology has achieved its goals as it doesn't appear to have any. With no discernible connection, what it really amounts to is a showcase of new short fiction from Elsewhen Press, giving an overview of the type of fiction they are publishing. This is married up with adverts for books by well over half the authors featured. This is not at all a bad thing, and on the whole it does make for an interesting and reasonably varied collection of stories.



With one exception, this is all new fiction. The John Gribbin story, 'Something to Beef About' is a revised version of a story originally published in Interzone in 1991. As Gribbin's name appears on the spine, as well as being the first of the handful of authors listed on the cover, this could be said to be the lead story. Although I suspect the positioning is due more to name recognition than anything else. This story takes place in an unspecified present some time after the BSE crisis of the early nineties. There is a new variant, BSEII, which almost appears to have been designed to resist anything that was used to fight the original outbreak. In a world of climate change and rising populations, where getting people to stop eating the land-hungry meat, getting them onto grain and fish could only improve matters, the implication of a design takes on a rather more sinister tone. Although not a particular stand-out story, it could be said to be fairly representative of the anthology as a whole. A short, well-written story that takes a relatively interesting if simple premise and creates something that lingers in the mind. Edwin Haywood's story 'Ambrosia' works almost as a companion piece to this. Taking a slightly different tack on the need for alternate food sources, this concerns itself with an attempt to use 3D printing technology to build meat rather than use animals. This again takes a simple idea and turns it into something somewhat disturbing with its unstated but very heavily suggested implications.

The collection itself opens with J. A. Christy's take on the advancement of medicine, and the concomitant homogenisation of people 'Inside and Out™ – From Here to ETERNITY' shows the advancement of medical technology driving the evolution of humanity. This contrasts nicely with Robin Moran's 'Degeneration', which has the collapse of society driving evolution in the opposite direction, with quite horrific results. Two stories that could be said to be tackling a similar theme, the way our society alters the human species itself, take very different approaches.

There are a few comic stories in the mix, which achieve varying degrees of success. Steve Harrison's 'Earthsale' takes the familiar idea that The Earth is not quite as envisaged by its main inhabitants. This infestation becomes something of an issue when the planet is being assessed for sale. While still entertaining, this is amongst the weaker of the stories, and highlights the difficulty of creating something interesting out of such an obvious trope, particularly when that something is intended to be humorous. Alongside this there is the somewhat more quirky 'Jekking The Dofers' from Rhys Hughes. In this, a nonsense language created on the spot is considerably more potent than the protagonist would either believe or care for it to be. Again, a fairly well-worn idea, but done with sufficient humour and gusto for it not to outstay its welcome. Ira Nayman's 'The Writer Did it!' pulls a number of deliberately stock characters from a variety of fictional universes that somehow appear to be inhabiting the same space for a whodunit that is a sort of weird mash-up of Agatha Christie, Dashiell Hammett and martial arts movies. I'm not sure it is completely successful, but it does maintain the reader's interest and there are moments when it is genuinely funny.

For me, the most effective, and affecting, story has to be Tej Turner's 'The Last Days'. It is also possibly the most straightforward. The protagonist is holding vigil at the hospital bedside of his partner, who is terminally ill and soon to die. He discovers that he is able to communicate with her telepathically while holding her hand. By this means, they go back over their time together and manage to state the previously unstated. Told in very simple terms, the relationship becomes more real as it comes to its inevitable end, and the final page is almost unbearably moving.

The stories in this anthology are of a satisfyingly consistent high standard, and cover a wide range of styles and genres. If there can be said to be a house style, it would have to be simply well written stories that appeal to the editors. While there are few real stand-out stories, neither are there any that could be described purely as being fillers. Overall, this is a solid anthology, and as a showcase for Elsewhen Press and its associated authors, it works rather well. I may even follow up on some of those adverts.

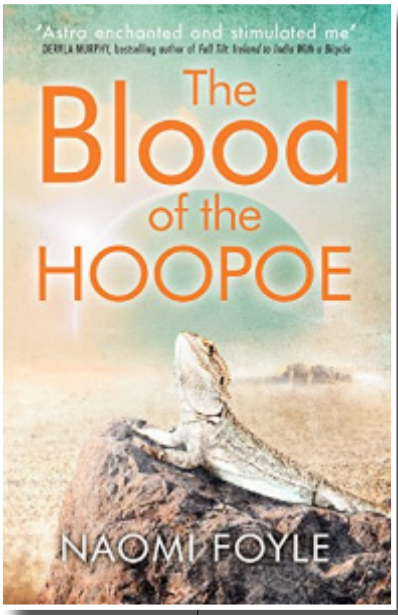
The Blood of the Hoopoe by Naomi Foyle (Jo Fletcher Books, 2016)

Reviewed by Duncan Lawie

Astra, the primary protagonist of *The Gaia Chronicles* is counselled to patience at least twice in the course of this third volume, **The Blood of the Hoopoe**. It is a counsel for the reader as well – as this is not the end of the story.

The Gaia Chronicles began with *Astra*, the story of a girl growing up in a utopia. Is-Land is a quiet society in tune with nature, a people working hard to repair the destruction wrought upon our planet in the Dark Times. The reader is indoctrinated along with the child and Foyle does a remarkable job of building her world convincingly

while introducing critique. Astra's happy childhood is troubled by a gradual realisation that her place is maintained by exclusion of every other view point. She has several "shelter parents" in this hippy heaven but they do not agree on the path for her future. Her cohort is being indoctrinated and injected as part of a national program but one mother, Hokma, convinces Astra that this development is unnatural. Astra's non-compliance is eventually revealed, along with the information that Astra's father was not from Is-Land. By the book's end, Hokma has been killed and Astra expelled.



The second book, *Rook Song*, is a more transparent dystopia. Non-Land is a zone of nuclear pollution and environmental devastation bordering Is-Land. The people there were cast out when Is-Land was created; they are trapped between peacekeepers, distant governments and a visceral hatred for (and by) the Is-Landers. Foyle uses multiple viewpoints to describe this vibrant, disorganised place, putting the reader in the heads of the powerful and the powerless – and also Astra's former cohort. Peat, her "shelter brother", rapes and kills yet his only worry is that he is not doing this well enough for his leaders. Authorial disgust with what we are doing to our world is palpable, but the battle over the borders of Is-Land becomes a too strident parable of Palestine. Astra rejects the temporary respite she has found amongst the international peacekeepers in favour of engaging with the struggle, whose youth leaders have decided she is an incarnation of Istar. At this book's end, Astra falls in with Muzi and they head away from the border to find her father.

The Blood of the Hoopoe follows on directly, with Astra and Muzi soon arguing. He is from a patriarchal society, and certain that it his duty to take the decisions to protect those in his care, while Astra can't bear anyone deciding for her. She has learned deep distrust, alongside her expectations of equality. Nor can she accept Muzi hunting animals for food. Left alone whilst he goes for supplies, she buries the lizards he killed, but finds them talking to her, telling her that humanity must stop being slaves to metal. As they journey across the desert with a camel, they find destroyed cities from the oil age, an ancient statue of Shlemun (Solomon) and a temple to Istar. This slow progress opens out the book to talk about myths and history, to tell us that the hoopoe was the bird messenger between Shlemun and the Queen of Theopia. This reflective element disappears as Astra's old friend Lil appears with a dune buggy to speed their journey onward. It is almost as if we have run out of pages for this part of the journey and must move the action to Shiimti, the great oasis where Astra's father lives.

Elsewhere, the depraved and corrupt nature of Is-Land's security forces comes to the fore. Their commander, Odinson, uses Peat's loyalty training to turn him into a sex slave, whilst torturing Muzi's family for his own amusement. Odinson's lover, Blesserson, is a clever, weak man, a beautifully nuanced portrayal. For a period in the middle of the novel it appears that his disgust with Odinson's actions may overcome his long, enduring love, which makes his reaction to events later in the book all the more effective.

Indeed, every viewpoint character in these books is distinct. Astra's father is introduced from his own perspective, giving the reader sympathy with him, enriching the subsequent arguments with Muzi and Astra even though we rarely return to his perspective. Others are introduced simply to provide broader perspective on the plot, but even these one-time views feel well rounded – people with their own reasons for the things they do.

Astra herself is well established in the first book where her perfect, innocent childhood becomes a mess of teenage emotions, complicated by the huge secret she must keep. Her anger and frustration build through the second book, as she realises how huge the forces arrayed against her are. But most of those forces take little account of her as an individual actor – it's the system, conspiring to maintain the status quo. Those who want to change the system themselves want her as a symbol – Istar – rather than a person. Astra wants to act, must act, but fears that everything she does, even caring about another person, makes things worse. She doesn't want to be a false idol, but can't see how else she can contribute.

Amidst this, Astra's conversations with plants and animals, alive and dead, about the deep agendas of creation mesh a little too neatly with a drug trip late in the book. This rings a small false note in a series that works so convincingly as both near future dystopia and social critique of our world. Perhaps this is a necessary set-of up of a larger picture for the rest of the series. If so, it is not the only element of this novel that feels like plot manoeuvring. Or perhaps I am just impatient to read more of Astra's story.

The Curious Affair of the Somnambulist and the Psychic Thief by Lisa Tuttle

(Jo Fletcher Books, 2016)

Reviewed by Nick Hubble

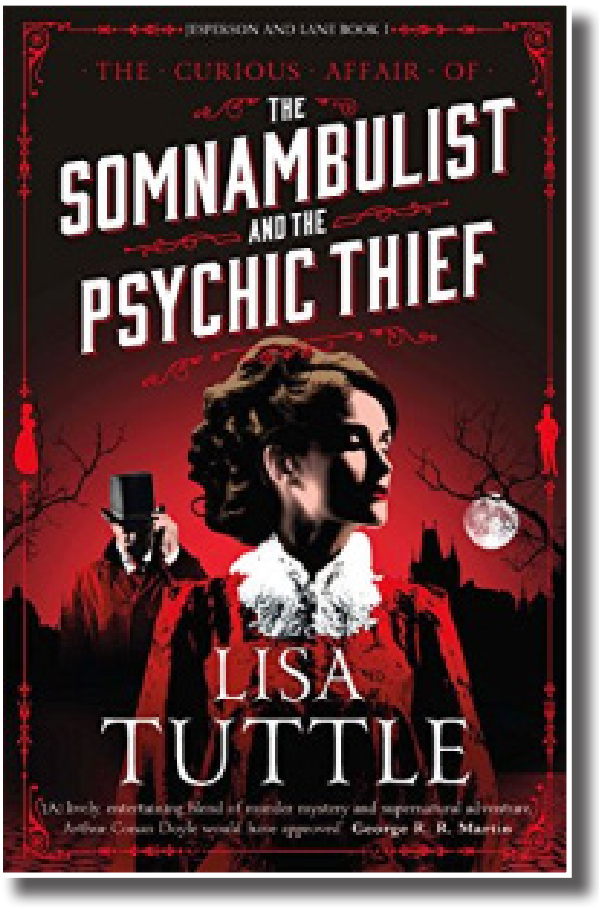
Miss Lane is a late-nineteenth-century spinster with no illusions about her appearance and conscious of the fact that she will never see twenty-seven again. Yet when she finds herself penniless in London following unpremeditated flight on the sleeper train from her job with the Society for Psychical Research in Scotland, she doesn't flinch but sets off firmly on foot from King's Cross for the ladies' employment bureau in Oxford Street. No doubt she would have coped admirably with whatever post was available to her, but we never find out because along the way she is engaged as the live-in assistant to the enigmatic private detective, Mr Jasper Jesperson.

On the one hand, Jesperson is a Holmes-like prodigy who possesses uncanny powers of deduction and superhuman physical abilities, as demonstrated by his scaling a sheer brick wall to rescue a cat from a narrow perch at the top of a four-storey building. On the other hand, he lives with his mother and expects plentiful quantities of bacon and eggs to be available for his breakfast when he surfaces. He is not, however, completely unreflective concerning this situation, as he confides to Miss Lane: 'I have been thinking how a woman may look after a man – a husband or her son – *so well* that he might become a sort of monster … like a gigantic baby who takes and takes'. Miss Lane, of course, is quick with the reassurance that this is not true of him. Yet later, when Mrs Jesperson is reduced to 'getting money from Uncle' to pay the grocery bill, Miss Lane is not sure whether her employer really understands that his mother has been forced to pawn her earrings or if he simply wants her to think that he is unaware of what she has done.

Matters are further complicated by the fact that although we are invited to regard Miss Lane as a reliable arbiter of the moral worth of the characters around her – she gives Jesperson short shrift when he proposes disguising himself as a penniless lad to beg meat from a kindly butcher – and she is quick to describe her own special talent as rationality, she does seem readily drawn to less than straightforward characters. Aside from Jesperson, there is also her former employer or companion – their relationship is never made entirely clear – the decidedly unreliable Miss Fox, who soon turns up to complicate the proceedings. And what are we to make of Miss Lane's curious reluctance to divulge her first name?

It is these questions that provide the genuine pleasure in reading Tuttle's nicely-worked mystery romance. The actual plot involving a sleep-walker who may or may not be involved in the abduction of London's leading psychics – some of whom are based on historical figures as Tuttle has explained in a blog post on the Jo Fletcher Books website – serves as a device on which to hang the real investigation of topics such as gender, subjectivity and agency, which remain of as much interest to readers today as they were to those of the Victorian period in which the novel is set.

While Miss Lane is as properly earnest as any heroine of the time, she is not above arching her eyebrow playfully at implied sexual impropriety or unprepared, when potentially subject to unwanted bodily attentions from a man, for the possibility arising to 'seize his prized emblem of masculinity – and *squeeze* without mercy'. The villains certainly meet their match in her but does Jesperson? Well, if a concern with psychical phenomena and the supernatural is considered as a form of sublimation, then the novel's ending might be thought to indicate a strong potential for intimacy, albeit of an unconventional nature. Hopefully, we will find out more about these engaging characters in due course.



Kojiki by Keith Yatsuhashi
(Angry Robot, 2016)
Reviewed by Sandra Unerman

Keiko, an eighteen year old brought up in the USA, travels to Japan after her father's disappearance. He has left her a death poem and a message she does not understand. In Tokyo, she is drawn into a terrifying encounter with the supernatural and finds herself in the middle of a war between immortals which threatens to destroy the world. She discovers that the secrets of her family background and develops powers which enable her to play an important part in the war.

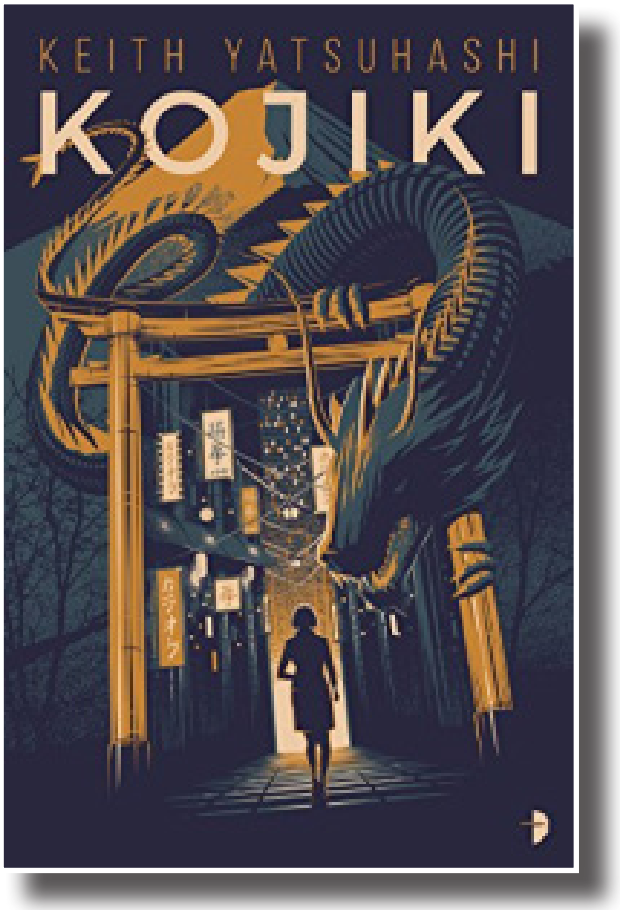
The original Kojiki is an eighth century book of mythology from Japan. But in this novel, the traditional version is merely a cover story for a different set of gods and guardian spirits. The traditional Storm God Susanoo, for example, is said to be a substitute for Aeryk, Kami or Lord of the Air. The novel moves from Tokyo to San Francisco, Romania and Nepal, before it returns to Japan and, inevitably, Mount Fuji. Yatsuhashi is a fan of Tolkien and Godzilla films. He has mixed elements of Japanese tradition, such as the tea ceremony and the role of the Emperor, with inventions of his own to create a story on a grand scale.

The novel is full of action but its forward momentum is punctuated by a series of flashbacks. In these, we go into the memories of the kamis as they relive the events which have led to their present troubles. These interruptions might irritate some readers, but they struck me as an effective way of filling in the background while increasing the tension about the dangers faced by Keiko and her allies.

Keiko is a straightforward sort of heroine, slightly naïve and lacking in confidence until she is pushed into resisting attack, mentally and physically. She is easy to like but does not really have the chance to develop a memorable personality. Her strongest relationships are with her missing father and with Yui, the daughter of the Lord of the White Spirit who becomes her friend. Both girls struggle to deal with the weight of expectation that results from their ancestry.

The older immortals have more complicated emotional lives. We gain insight into these, both in the flashbacks and in the present day narrative, but events move too fast for them to be explored in any depth.

The story is full of battles, with large doses of death and destruction. The combatants include Lords of Air, Earth and Fire, as well as the Queen of the Oceans. The fights show plenty of ingenuity in working out the different ways these elements can overcome one another. But in the end, it is the struggle in the hearts and minds of the immortals which decides the outcome.



Yatsuhashi's style is lively and immediate, as we are taken into the feelings of a range of characters. There is also plenty of sensual detail. The kamis have guardians, lesser spirits who take animal form, and these allow for some particularly vivid images. When the fire dragon, Fiyorok appears, 'Glittering scales of red and gold sparkled through the smoke, vast armoured plates that burned with an internal fire. A pair of huge spikes sprouted from the top of an enormous reptilian head, the long, snake-like body behind sporting a series of small, razor-sharp spears…' and Keiko is too enchanted to be afraid. A few quieter moments are well evoked, like Keiko's introduction into a bath in a hot spring of volcanic water at the edge of a cliff. But most of the novel takes us through the detail of one battle after another, in gripping detail. Even so, I found the fighting less compelling as the story went on.

Kojiki is a fast-paced adventure story. I would have preferred fewer fights and more character development but other readers may well be carried along with the excitement.

The Bastard Wonderland by Lee Harrison (Wrecking Ball Press, 2016)

Reviewed by Arike Oke

You can take the lads out of Hull, but you can't take Hull out of the lads. That's okay, I'm a daughter of Hull myself. That means I appreciate the dourness, sarcasm and bittersweet melancholy of my home, all of which come through beautifully in this love letter of a fantasy debut from Lee Harrison. I mean: mushy peas get an origin story.

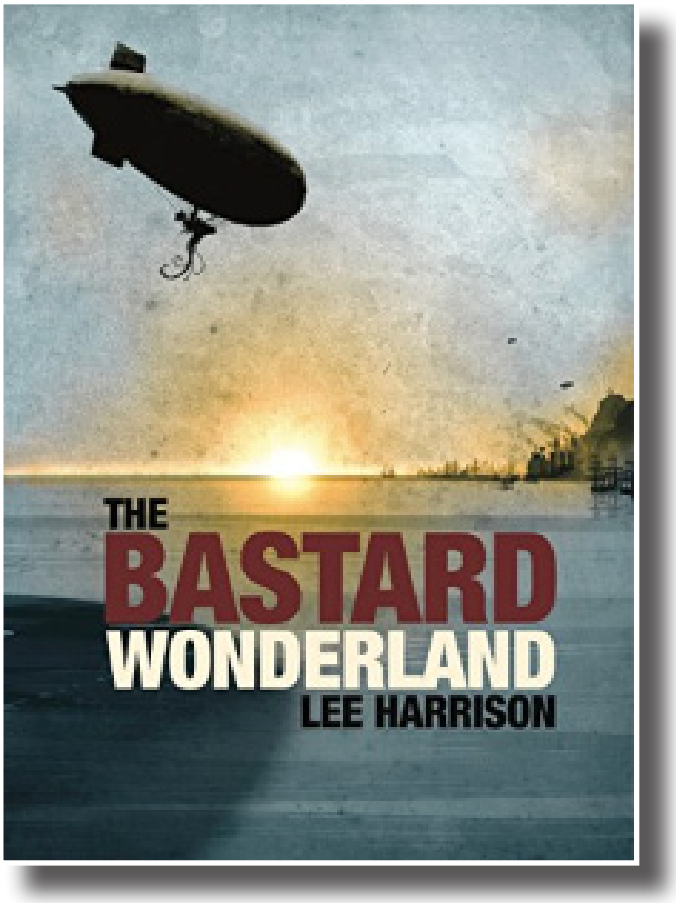
There's a backlash right now against maps in fantasy books. Utter tosh say I. A novel with this geographic ambition, outlining a startlingly well realised alternative world, could only benefit from a map. I kept flicking to the frontmatter and the endpapers to find only blank pages, beautiful blank pages though. Wrecking Ball Press, a small press operating out of Hull (see, some kind of theme emerging!), has made a gorgeous edition of this book, cover, paper and font all working together to make a quality volume. Is the image chosen for the cover a small spoiler of a one of the story's treats? Perhaps, but it looks well on't.

The protagonist, and main point of view character, is Warboys. No relation to the tragic lost boys of Mad Max Fury Road, this Warboys is as laddish and uncouth as they come. He reluctantly teams up with his dad on a begrudging journey across their world. They are caught up in the expansionist ambitions of a Napoleon–like figure, but soon come up against the old belief systems of the territories they are forced to invade. It seems that there might be some truth in the old myths, but who can Warboys and his dad trust? Is anyone looking out for the underdogs in this war that on the surface is about a conflict of cultures, but underneath is as much about broken dreams and sickening ego as any real-world conflict throughout our own history.

Harrison shows us the other side of the conflict through the eyes of Nouzi Aaranya, a young man groomed from childhood in more ways than one to be a soldier and martyr for a cause he barely grasps. Whereas Warboys is solidly placed within the world of pubs, back streets, sailors, drinking and swearing, Nouzi is altogether more delicate. He's led a life of direct indoctrination, rather than the societal conditioning of Warboys' context. Nouzi's own identity gradually surfaces as the plot unfolds. This forms an enlightening counterpoint to Warboys' growing sense of responsibility to others. By the end of the book both men find themselves changed.

Harrison handles the dual point-of-view third person narration deftly. Each character is well drawn and distinctive. The plot, once past an avoidably slow and dialogue heavy first act, trips along happily building towards a satisfying, touching and cinematic denouement that still somehow manages to retain the 'call a spade a spade' Northern tone. Female characters are few and far between in this boys' own tale, but as this story can be read as intrinsically about male relationships this paucity of female representation is hardly unexpected.

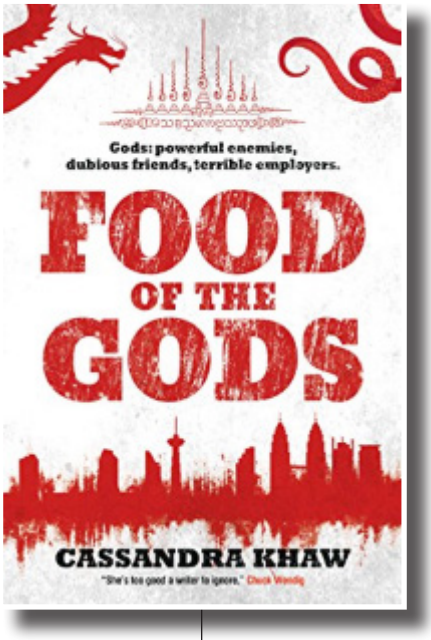
The world that Harrison has created for this story is startling in its clarity and depth. The technology, the big reveal, the language, religion, even the descriptions of landscape, sea and street are deft and convincing. It is a nice touch that Harrison prefaces sections of the book with quotations from archival texts from within the universe he's created. Harrison has set up a world that could contain many more stories. We are not left with a cliff hanger so much as an open window looking out across a vista of real humans living real lives in which Harrison will find rich pickings for many more stories. I'll be in line to read them, pattie buttie and chips in hand and wearing my 'It's Never Dull in Hull' t-shirt. One request though, forget what the internet forums say: next time let's have a map, eh lad?



Food of the Gods by Cassandra Khaw (Abaddon, 2017)

Reviewed by Shaun Green

You may think your job is hell, but your employers are unlikely to be its denizens.



Former triad Rupert Wong makes reparations for his past by working nights as, of all things, an administrator in the Ten Chinese Hells. By day he prepares meals for a family of well-connected Kuala Lumpurian ghouls. And yes, most days human flesh is on the menu. This complex arrangement is further complicated by Rupert's undead love interest and her demonic child, as well as the endless Machiavellian machinations that characterise the realms of gods. But things can always get worse, as is proven when an ancient dragon charges Rupert with investigating the murder of its daughter. Declining isn't an option and failure will result in death, so Rupert proceeds as he always does: he pursues survival, proactively.

Food of the Gods collects two of Khaw's novellas, *Rupert Wong, Cannibal Chef* and *Rupert Wong and the Ends of the Earth*. The two fit together well enough, with little time lapsed between their stories. Tonally, I couldn't help but notice some dissonance between the two, but that may be due in part to my preferring *Cannibal Chef*.

Khaw has prolifically published fiction since 2015, although her writing on games stretches back well before then. This background may contribute to her accessible, exuberant style and Rupert's affable, confidential first-person voice. There's also a games-ish connection with the visceral horror of these stories: *Food of the Gods* boasts more gore than *Viscera Cleanup Squad*. Sometimes disturbing, sometimes schlocky and often grotesquely violent, I occasionally wondered how anyone was left ignorant of their predators in any human settlement at all.

What balances the horror is Rupert Wong himself: a wisecracking lead with just enough wits, wisdom and skill to scrape through any situation. He's a smartarse, a little gratingly so, but this characterisation works because Wong's flippancy drags the godlike and terrifying down to his openly petty human level.

For me *Cannibal Chef* is the strongest of these novellas because it successfully takes the form of a mythological police procedural. Wong finds himself pulled in multiple directions by players whose motives and relationships he doesn't understand, the ground constantly shifting beneath his feet.

Ends of the Earth takes Rupert away from his employers and dumps him in London. Ostensibly done to protect him from blowback following his investigation, there is of course more to it. In London he meets up with the Greek pantheon, as well as some newer gods on the scene, and more carnage rapidly unfolds.

It's plausible that I prefer the first novel because Kuala Lumpur and the Chinese pantheon is fresher to my British eyes than Zeus's posse and the Big Smoke. However, I do think the novella suffers from reusing much of its predecessor's framework, because the repetition doesn't measure up to its own bar.

There are some nice but underdeveloped ideas in *Ends of the Earth*, but more significantly there are some mis-steps. One such is the theme of dehumanization, which breaches the surface late in the novella. Rupert appears briefly outraged with a state of affairs he's been made complicit with and, one assumes, has largely learned to ignore through his years of supernatural service. But then this moment passes and he reverts to form.

The problem I have with this is that dehumanization is inherent in the very concept of active gods to whom humanity are cattle. *Cannibal Chef* gets away without dwelling on this because Wong's entire life serves as his cage, and some restraint is exercised in the extent to which the mythological, well, butchers people. *Ends of the Earth* escalates the butchery tremendously, and in removing Rupert from his employers and family it also partially liberates him. So when he briefly acknowledges an emotional response of outrage and disgust it retrospectively shines a light on everything which has come before. This in turn means that when the entire line of thought is shelved as abruptly as it was raised, the story's foundations are undermined.

Regardless of these problems I hugely enjoyed *Food of the Gods* and look forward to reading more of Khaw's stories, Wong or no Wong. Briskly paced, inventive, funny and replete with grotesqueries, the mis-steps will stay with me because I liked the book so much.

The Hidden Oracle, Book One of *The Trials of Apollo* series by Rick Riordan

(Disney Hyperion, 2016)

Reviewed by Christopher Owen

Winner of the 2016 Goodreads Choice Awards: Middle Grade and Children's, *The Hidden Oracle* is the eleventh novel in the *Camp Half-Blood Chronicles*, and the first book in *The Trials of Apollo* pentalogy by New York Times #1 Best-Selling Author, Rick Riordan. The *Camp Half-Blood Chronicles* is primarily made up of three five-book series. The first two, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* and *The Heroes of Olympus* respectively, follow the adventures of twenty-first century demi-gods, teenage children of mortals and either Greek or Roman gods/goddesses. In this third series, Riordan does something different, focusing instead on the adventures of the god Apollo.

At the end of *The Heroes of Olympus*, Apollo is blamed for many of the problems the heroes have had to resolve. This third series picks up a few months following the events of the second series with Apollo's punishment beginning with him falling from the sky and crashing in an alleyway dumpster. At first Apollo's punishment appears to be one simply designed to humble him: he is transformed from a beautiful, powerful god to an awkward, acne-covered teenaged human. He is then further humbled when a couple thugs beat him up, when he is forced into the servitude of a young girl named Meg, and when he realizes that he is exceptionally less talented at music and archery than when he was a god. His inner-struggles throughout the narrative consist of a conflict between his over-zealous ego and his melodramatic horror at his newfound limitations. But Apollo also faces exterior struggles, and it is in these conflicts that he learns that his punishment is not just to be humbled but also to right the wrongs that lead to the conflicts of the first two series in the *Chronicles*.

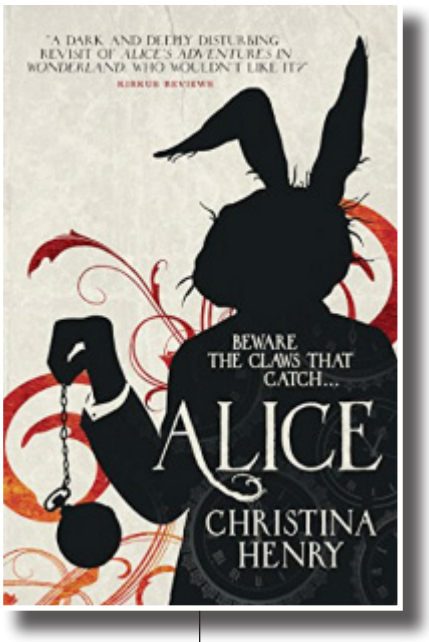
Children at Camp Half-Blood, the secret camp for demi-gods, are going missing. One by one they head into the forest as if hypnotized and are never seen again. While previous heroes in the *Chronicles* have travelled far in an American road trip-style adventure, in *The Hidden Oracle* Apollo does not need to travel farther than the forest neighbouring the campgrounds. This changes the structure of the narrative than the previous books in several ways. First, Apollo is able to head back and forth between the forest as site of adventure and the campgrounds as site of respite, healing and communicating with aids. Second, while each previous book in the *Chronicles* is focused on at least three main adventurers, this book focuses primarily on two heroes, Apollo and Meg. Furthermore, while previous books touch on the other campers only briefly, this book spends a great deal more time getting to know the people who live at camp year-round. This includes three of Apollo's children, adding another interesting dynamic to this book, a greater focus on the relationships between demigods and their godly parents, something that is only touched on briefly in the first two series.

One of Apollo's sons, Will Solace, is dating a boy named Nico Di Angelo, a central character from the previous two series of the *Chronicles*. There are very few LGBTQ+ characters in contemporary middle-grade children's fantasy fiction; three of them are in this book. Apollo is bisexual (or perhaps pansexual), which, after much research, I believe makes him the only same-sex attracted first-person narrator in a children's fantasy novel published in this century (and, perhaps, in history). With three LGBTQ+ central characters, a wide range of ethnicities represented among the demigod campers, and explicit feminist ideals shared by Apollo's grandmother, Rhea, this book does very well to present progressive ideologies and a diverse representation of characters.

While reading the other ten novels in the *Chronicles* allows for a greater appreciation of *The Hidden Oracle*, this is not entirely necessary in order to follow the story. This book works well to begin a new, exciting series in Riordan's universe. The adventure continues in its sequel, *The Dark Prophesy*, released in May 2017.

Alice (Chronicles of Alice 1) by Christina Henry (Titan Books, 2016)

Reviewed by Kate Onyett



In a mental health asylum, replete with Victorian-grade grimness, a young woman with a scarred face, adrift on a sea of medicated forgetfulness, with only a disembodied voice to talk with through her cell wall, imperfectly recalls the vicious attack that lead to her imprisonment. A fire at the asylum frees Alice and unites her with her neighbour in a desperate escape and subsequent quest to destroy an even greater evil released from the asylum in the fire. To do so they will have to face the magic and violence of The City's criminal world, as Alice learns that she may not just be a helpless girl…

There is a fashion, among the gothic fraternity, to take Carroll's psychedelic adventure and re-read into it disturbing and adult imagery. The implied drug use, violence and sexuality have been explored in written and graphic form over and over. Henry's book is part of this set; but instead of Alice morphed into a crazed/ butt-kicking/ spooky protagonist (as is the case in most re-readings), this Alice is an abused, frightened woman in a deeply misogynistic world, very much at the mercy of those (men) around her. Her companion is male, and her growing attraction for him is her main sense of validation among the confusion. In this unjust world women are either victims or 'protected' only by association with a man (husband, partner, pimp).

The thrust of the story seems to be Alice's individual female emancipation – emancipation through realising one's own strength and value and taking control of your life. But given the nature of the narrative as a mythic quest story, it happens at a racketing rate, far too fast to be credible for a newly released decade-long victim of institutional abuse. In fact, tracking through the crowded lanes of the inner Old City (the rough world of work and crime as opposed to the New City – the world of the rich and important – a nod to dystopian class divide, there) it reads very much like a computer game: tasks to achieve, enemies to overcome, our two heroes literally running the streets and rooftops. Alice is the heroine, ergo she has to shape up and get moving. Furthermore, Alice can develop only because she has 'magical' ability. The rest of the non-magical women in the story are killed, tortured, oppressed and hunted.

As a generic quest hero, Alice ticks all the boxes; as a fast-paced action-adventure, the book is a glorious romp; as an addition to the Alice-re-readings, this is suitably grisly and astonishing. However, looking to see if this re-reading can raise Alice from just being a doll tossed about by Fate, to bring out her strengths as a *person* of equal value, regardless of gender, it does not work for me. As a first book in a series, it sets up in an efficient manner the wider world to come. But it still leaves me feeling uncomfortable – and not because of the gothic-horror details.

Warlock Holmes: A Study in Brimstone by G. S. Denning (Titan, 2016)

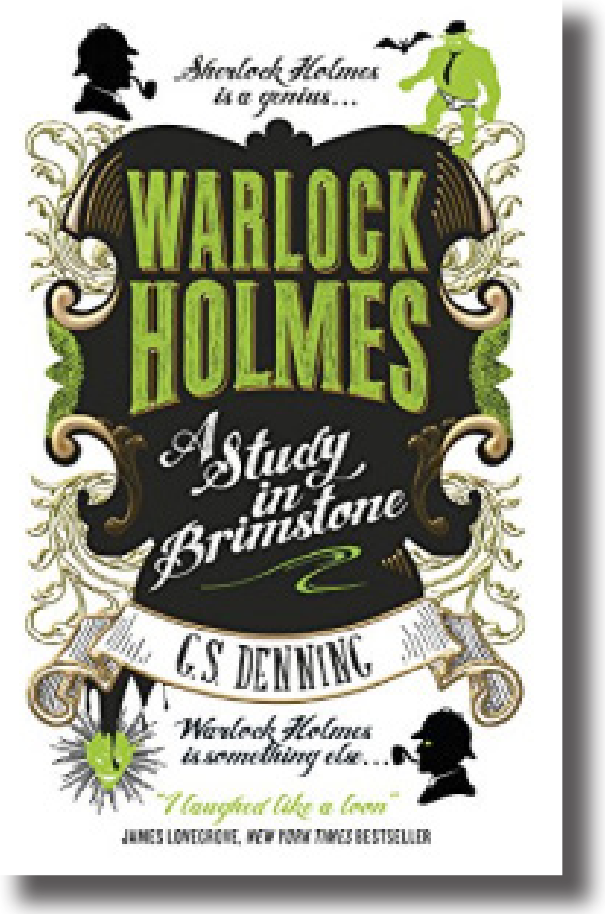
Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Is there room for yet another Sherlock Holmes parody? This particular interpretation has Victorian London's gaslight reimagined as illuminating the supernatural rather than the simply melodramatic. Holmes is an incompetent magus who has a fondness for the accordion. His sometimes foil Inspector Lestrade is a vampire, and the Baker Street Irregulars are were-rats. Straight-man John Watson, like Conan Doyle's original narrator, alternates between being terrified of the demons intruding into the London streets and attempting to teach Holmes how to use the deduction and reason a Great Detective should actually possess as his tools.

Much of the best humour appears in the beginning of the title story (there are five others included), when Holmes is trying to hide his true nature from Watson who, traditional-Watson-like, spends some time trying to work out just what is happening and what the voices coming from Holmes (including that of the mysterious Moriarty) actually *are*. There's some neatly comic exaggeration, such as the advert Holmes inserts in the newspaper under Watson's name, to attract the attention of the villain, which asks for something to be returned to Watson at 221B Baker Street where

he will be "alone, unarmed and probably drunk". (To add verisimilitude, Holmes has also inserted Watson's bank account number and mother's maiden name, so that the killer can verify that there is *indeed* a John Watson residing at 221B Baker Street.) Many of the jokes, however, have the air of faintly weary parody. The reader who gains will be one who knows the original stories and can appreciate how Denning is playing with them. The middle part of "Brimstone" (corresponding to Part Two of *A Study in Scarlet*) is an effectively-handled and extensive off-colour joke. It doesn't, however, take much cogitation to have worked out the missing letters in "The Adventure of the _eckled _and" long before our duo reach the solution.

Watson attempts to steer Holmes down the road of rational inquiry for the best of motives. It not only makes him look more efficient as a Consulting Detective, it also protects the world: whenever Holmes uses his powers as a magician the demonic forces intrude just a little bit further. By the end, though, we're not sure that Watson's succeeded in either (though another book, *The Battle of Baskerville Hall* is promised next year). *A Study in Brimstone* will certainly amuse, but whether Sherlockians will see it as a worthy addition to an extensive canon will depend on matters extraneous to the book itself, such as how much of this canon the reader has sampled. Try it and see.



In the Labyrinth of Drakes by Marie Brennan (Titan Books, 2016)

Reviewed by Kate Onyett

We join dragon scholar Lady Trent in the fourth volume of her memoirs as she travels this time to hot and distant lands. Charged by her government to discover how to successfully breed the native desert drake dragons, this is no picturesque Attenborough-style trip, as the government want a steady supply of light, strong dragon bones to make airships in an arms race with their neighbours. What Lady T and her colleagues actually find is subterfuge, kidnap and a ground-breaking archaeological discovery about an ancient Draconian race. But, alas, no firm answers on the dragon breeding.

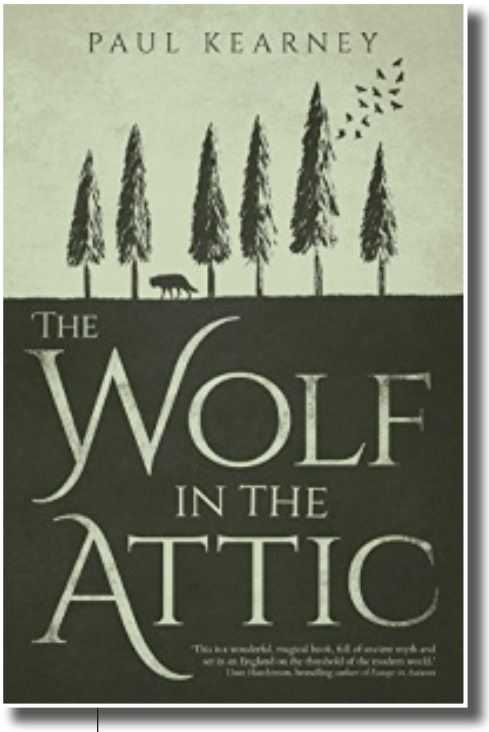
The series presents a fresh and invigoratingly realistic depiction of a world in which there happen to be dragons. If 'steam punk' introduces elements of futuristic (steam-powered) technology into a Victorian setting, then this is unquestionably 'dragon punk'. Although there are different names for countries and religions, it is clearly presented in a Victorian-esque era, with what is effectively a Western European woman working in a field of zoological research. Having dragon exploration as the main trope provides the speculative foundation for what is basically a rousing depiction of social detail and adventurous narrative in a very traditional vein: skirmishes, arson, poisoning, dangerous explorations and hostage-taking.

Sociologically, the historically-accurate orientalism that flickers in the writing of Lady T and in the attitudes exhibited between 'Western' peoples and those of an ostentatiously 'Arabic' background, as well as the prejudices against independent women in a 19th-century-style era are intelligently utilised to give depth and flavour. This is not a post-colonial polemic on the awfulness of either, this is a novel about dragon exploration, but the elements are organically part of the whole; these were the times, these were the mind-sets. Through Lady T's remembrances, we are treated to a hyper-reality of arms races, grudging female emancipation and the tricky subject of West meets East. Brennan displays cultural nous by presenting a world with characters and geopolitics that read not a hundred miles from our own, while also tilting it sideways through the prism of fantastical detail, giving it enough fun and excitement to keep you reading and reading on.

A quick word must be said about the voice of Lady T as first-person narrator. She is bold, pragmatic and

passionate about her subject, coming across as one of those wonderfully solid, tramping-across-country-in-heavy-boots, old-family types; strong-willed and impressive. As the guide to her world, she is thoroughly realised and likeable, and works within it beautifully. For being part zoological exploration, part H Rider Haggard, even part Emily Pankhurst, this is proof of what knowledgeable writing can be; intelligent credibility while remaining a thumping good read.

The Wolf in the Attic by Paul Kearney (Solaris, 2016)
Reviewed by Estelle Roberts



This engaging novel, set in the 1920's, tells the story of Anna Francis, a young Greek refugee forced from her home, who settles with her father in a rented house in Oxford. While her father drowns his sorrows and bereavement in wine and brandy and meets with other Greeks to mull over past glories, young Anna is more inclined to make the best of the situation. She maintains a degree of pride in her Greek heritage and takes a great interest in the tales of the Greek heroes that her father tells her. Her mother was killed by Turkish soldiers as they were preparing to flee their home and Anna, being so young at the time, has only a very hazy memory of her.

Despite having no real friends – her only confidante is her doll – Anna chafes against the restrictions her father places on her freedom and makes frequent attempts to explore her new home and assuage her natural curiosity. It is as a result of this that she makes the acquaintance of two gentlemen from the University. Mr Lewis and Mr Tolkien, who provide a somewhat protective friendship for her, returning her to her home after one of her adventures proves somewhat more disturbing than she is used to. It is her encounter with a mysterious group of people camped in the woods outside Oxford, the death of her father and the threat of being sent to the workhouse that form the catalyst for the changes in her life that she is desperately seeking.

This is a very well written and well-paced novel, with an engaging main character. Misters Tolkien and Lewis are also a very pleasing addition to the narrative. There is a supernatural element, going back to ancient British lore, which adds a dreamlike, or perhaps nightmarish, quality to the story. Within the real world of Oxford, the ingrained racism faced by Anna and her father, her loneliness and the verbal and even physical abuse she receives, are heartbreakingly shown. For Anna, this is made even worse when combined, as it is, with her father's behaviour. He seemingly ignores her then beats her for minor transgressions.

The blooming romance between Anna and Luca, a young man who is part of the group resident in the woods, is well handled and feels realistic, with all the intensity, embarrassment and novelty of first love almost sweetly portrayed, but without overwhelming sentiment. This is, of course, a fundamental part of Anna's rite of passage, which is at the very heart of the story.

While this could be classed as young adult fiction, it is a novel which truly draws you in and will be enjoyed by readers of all ages.

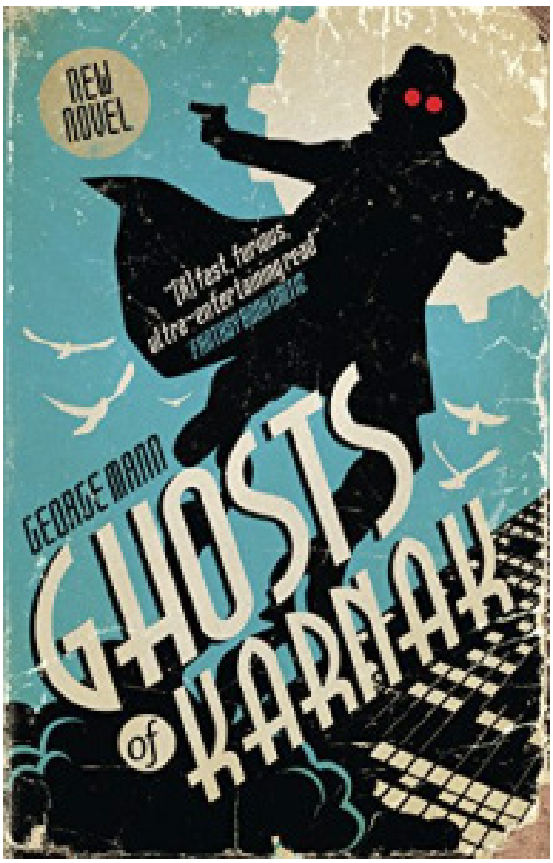
Ghosts of Karnak by George Mann (Titan Books, 2016)
Reviewed by Kerry Dodd

A woman is found dead on the streets in this alternate 1920s New York, ancient Egyptian symbols etched into her skin. It soon becomes clear that this next mystery in George Mann's 'Ghost' series will reach from the heights of its metropolis skyscrapers to the depths of the dark desert tombs. For Gabriel, who masquerades as the enigmatic action-hero vigilante Ghost at night, this development becomes personal, as his old friend and lover Ginny Gray fails to return from her travels to Egypt - curiously absent as the excavated treasures and wonders are unloaded in preparation for a new exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. As the death toll rises across the city, amongst rumours of a spectral figure seen over the

city, the Ghost must bring together his closest allies to discover how all of these separate strands interconnect and point towards a threat hidden within the city itself.

Moving swiftly between a range of engaging characters, *Ghosts of Karnak* wastes no time in dispensing the action – providing an exciting and furious tale from the outset. Split between the police detective Donovan, the heroism of the Ghost and the mysterious uncovering of Ginny herself in Egypt, the narrative remains fresh throughout, offering short sharp bursts that pull the reader in. From the monstrous twisted machine and man Enforcer hybrids to the animated stone statues of Egyptian deities, the graphic and vivid fight scenes are a joy to read. As opposing forces converge on Manhattan, it becomes clear that ancient powers are stirring, cults and gangs will clash and Ginny herself hides a secret that threatens not only herself, but also the city.

A marvellous melting pot of superhero action, detective mystery and supernatural terrors, this steampunk-esque alternate history erupts with explosive imagery – a veritable juggernaut whose fierce story charges onwards, barely pausing for breath and offers a thrilling ride. Similar in style to Mann's *Newbury and Hobbes* series, the imagery is evocative, the suspense poignant and the writing sharp. Although the third instalment in the series, the novel stands well on its own, accessible and engaging, ready to whet the appetite of the reader for more high-octane and pulp-inspired fiction. Ranging from the sandy deserts of



Egypt to the brawling streets of New York, *Ghosts of Karnak* is a thrilling testament to this author's engaging style and gripping imagination, another success that suggests this train is far from stopping and will continue to move forward, delivering even more rich material with the fourth book in the series *Ghosts of Empire*, expected in October 2017.

Like what you see?
Enjoyed what you've read?

Perhaps you'd like to join our BSFA Review team?

Is there a book, TV series, film etc. that you feel passionate enough about to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard)?

Feel free to get in touch with a sample of your writing and suggestions of what you'd like to review.

Email me: smayoke@gmail.com

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Greetings from the BSFA's Membership Officer (Dave Lally) (email: membership@bsfa.co.uk).

Although this BSFA membership section deals with the nuts and bolts of making sure your data is up to date (provided ye tell me by email – in order to send out your copies of **Vector** and/or **Focus** and any other BSFA publications), it also deals with membership subscriptions and/or renewals. Also in between main BSFA mailings, where someone joins, we send out the last/most recent BSFA magazine(s). Thereafter, future BSFA issues are posted direct from our printers.

Requests (on the inside front pages) in every issue of **Vector** and/or **Focus**, are made re telling us about mail address changes (both snail-mail and e-mail) but despite that some members don't advise us: their mailing is marked "Return to Sender" and some (on subsequently contacting them by e-mail) have also changed that! PLEASE keep us up to date re. changes of address. Despite mind-reading being an SF trope, most BSFA Officers (and certainly not the Membership section) have not mastered that area yet!

Requests (and we in BSFA are not obliged so to do) to renew annual subscriptions are also ignored by some members. We sometimes send a 2nd reminder – again to no avail. Then, and only then, –and this is the exasperating aspect– having been removed from the database, some then contact us saying no BSFA mailing has been received. We state that despite reminder(s), no sub has been paid (of course sometimes they have changed e-mail and not told us that either). Then and only then, they opt to renew and we have to go through the whole process of putting them back on again! This only adds to our admin aspect and PLEASE remember all BSFA officers are volunteers (and do their BSFA service as a spare-time, free time activity).

So, to streamline our membership services side, please – RIGHT NOW – look at THE ENVELOPE this mailing has come in.

THIS IS IMPORTANT!

Firstly, you will see your MEMBERSHIP REFERENCE NUMBER given thereon – PLEASE! – note it down elsewhere and use it in all communications to BSFA – along with your name of course (ie: Name/----). This greatly helps since we have some members with the same initials and surname! Codes after the No: "**----/J**" = Joint membership (and if so and only ONE member name appears on the envelope, please advise us of the 2nd member: this is a legal requirement), "**----/L**" = Life membership.

Secondly, look at the codes after your Surname(s). By this means, we are able to convey important info to the entire membership (ie. YOU!). You may have more than one code.

Most of you will have a date code (eg 08/18): this is the renewal date for you to pay your next annual subscription (and that will be updated as renewals are done). Please note it down and renew in time! If your date shows pre 08/17, your annual sub is now overdue (in some cases, long long overdue) and you will be shortly removed from the database – WITHOUT FURTHER NOTICE!

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The following mainly applies (for admin/historical reasons) to those whose BSFA Member No is 7175 or earlier:

CMO = please e-mail this officer (we have no e-mail data for you and you are missing out on useful BSFA data as well as new and forthcoming PDF versions of the BSFA Review and the BSFA Newsletter). It is considerably more efficient for us to communicate via email than by snail-mail.

NSR = contact me please: we have NO RECORD AT ALL of any subscription having been paid. Please advise me soonest re. your subscription status.**

SI = Incorrect annual subscription being paid (ye are paying an old annual subscription – in some cases the old rate was replaced 8+ years ago (!) – and you urgently need to amend your annual Bankers Order to the correct amount – see the **www.bsfa.co.uk** website for current rates).**

** Should ye not contact me re. these aspects by 30 September 2017, we in BSFA reserve the right to remove you from our membership database. (Sorry!)

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And if you are renewing your correct subscription by Paypal (which is the simplest method), please note:

(1) please pay via the bsfa.co.uk website (and NOT directly). The correct rate for sending BSFA mailings to an address outside the UK (ie. overseas) is shown thereon (currently GBP £40pa) as are the (various) UK rates. If any UK rate is paid, we can only send items to a UK address (although it is OK to change address mid-sub: UK->o/seas – that would be in order and likewise if ye move back to UK from o/seas, we can't part-refund but will happily apply the UK rate at your next renewal). And note as well re. the concessionary UK rate, we reserve the right to ask for evidence re. one's eligibility for that.

(2) on the address line, put your Member No. (an example from our fictional member – one Mr G Orwell: when he renews, he puts on that address line via Paypal: Orwell/21984, Room 101, 1 Prole St, Airstrip One, Oceania – we remove the No. from the address)

and finally,

(3) for speedier action –esp. if ye have left it a bit late to renew and are in danger of being removed– when ye get the Paypal acknowledgement (specifying the payment date, amount paid and yr snail-mail address) please send it immediately to me (note: the long gobbledygook Paypal payment reference is usually a string of letters/numbers, on its own an is insufficient). This is much quicker than the usual pay-by-Paypal method (which without your action above, can take a little time to get through to the BSFA's membership dept!)

Right: well thank you for your attention – I trust ye are enjoying the various aspects of your BSFA membership?

These –inter alia– are:

(a) our magazines and publications (above)

(b) the right to vote annually in our BSFA Awards (ye get a very nice booklet with the finallists thereof sent to you just prior to our annual Eastercon/UK National SF Convention) and – after voting – the winners are announced at said National SF Convention.

The next two Eastercons are: 2018 – Follycon/Harrogate, and 2019 – Ytterbium/London

(c) the Orbiter Writing Groups (contact me if ye want more information re. this)

and

(d) our meetings:

(i) in Central London every 4th Wed of the month (excl Dec), and
(ii) occasionally elsewhere: see our **www.bsfa.co.uk** website for data and also our BSFA Facebook page.

And so – if you're due for subscription renewal – we hope you will stay with us. We have some special events being planned for our 60th anniversary in 2018: we would like you as a member to be part of that!

This has been the first of an occasional column from what might be called the "cinderella department" (ie. we don't directly deal with SF) of The British Science Fiction Association Ltd. And please remember you are a member of a UK Co "Limited by Guarantee" –not by shares– under UK Co Law and thereby are subject to the "Constitution" of that Ltd Co (legally called its "Memorandum and Articles of Association") when you joined.

Amongst the rules therein are :
(1) should BSFA Ltd ever have to be wound up, every member at the time (and anyone up to one year previously having been a member) is liable each for up to GBP £1 toward any of its debts (this is a standard rule with all UK Cos Ltd by Guarantee);
and
(2) should you not have paid your annual subscription (whether asked for or not) within three months of its being due, ye auto-cease to be a member! [Not applicable to our few Life Members.]

Dave Lally
Membership Officer

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EDITED BY SUSAN OKE

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