

# SOME FANTASTIC

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## Featured Review: *The Last Mimzy*, Widescreen Infinifilm Edition

*DVD Review by Caroline-Isabelle Caron*

Let it be the last Mimzy. Please, let it be the last! I didn't see this movie in theatres, but I had read several scathing reviews.

They were deserved.

It's been a long time since I've seen such a bad movie. I am a fan of children's movies. I make a point of seeing all the major children's and family movies that come out. This one is awful. It is a horrid exercise in formulaic movie making. It goes something like this:

Let's make a movie about ecology:

- Therefore, we must blame all the evils of the world on pollutants changing humans' genetic make-up;
- Therefore, we must show how our world is already on the downward spiral, with metal detectors in schools which mistake braces for bombs;
- Of course, all will be worse and more evil in the future;
- Therefore, there are still genetically pure people in our time (Let's make them cute little white kids just to be you know they're pure);
- Of course, some scientists in the future will try to retrieve pure genetic material from these children to "cure" the world;
- Of course, living tissue cannot time travel (contrary to what we learned in *Terminator*);
- Therefore, these scientists will send adorable, purring, little stuffed bunny rabbits called Mimzies to retrieve this genetic material. The fact that they do not talk or move on their own does not strike the scientists as a hindrance. Nor does the fact that they don't send instructions with the toys;
- Of course, none of the previous Mimzies have come back (DUH!);
- Therefore, the one seen in the film is the *last* Mimzy. The reason why this one would be the last is never explained (though I suspect it has something to do with Microsoft; it has *Intel* inside, for crying out loud!);

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**The Last Mimzy, Widescreen Infinifilm Edition**



**DVD Release Date:** July, 2007  
**Starring:** Chris O'Neil, Rhiannon Leigh Wryn, Joely Richardson, Timothy Hutton, Rainn Wilson, Kathryn Hahn, Michael Clarke Duncan  
**Director:** Robert Shaye  
**Screenwriters:** Bruce Joel Rubin & Toby Emmerich, based on a screen story by James V. Hart & Carol Skilken, and adapted from "Mimsy Were the Borogoves" by Henry Kuttner & C.L. Moore (as Lewis Padgett)  
**Rated:** PG  
**Number of Discs:** 1  
**Studio:** New Line Home Video  
**Special Features:** Feature-length audio commentary from director Bob Shaye; music video of Roger Waters's "Hello (I Love You)"; deleted scenes with an introduction and audio commentary from director Bob Shaye; featurettes: "Adapting the Story," "Bob Shaye: Director Profile," "Casting the Kids," "Production Design and Concept Art," with optional commentary by director Bob Shaye and production designer Barry Chusid, "Real is Good: The Visual Effects" & "Editing and Music"; theatrical trailer; "Beyond-the-Movie" featurettes: "The Mandala: An Imaginary Palace," "The Looking Glass: Emma and Alice," "Sound Waves: Listening to the Universe," "DNA: The Human Blueprint," "Nanotechnology: The Human Revolution" & "Wormholes: Fantasy or Science"; interactive games.

- Despite the fact that living tissue is destroyed by time travel, genetic material can travel back to the future unharmed and "cure" the world.

This is a particularly striking example of what sf used to be, back in the day—back when Gene Roddenberry was still alive—about the belief that unenlightened science will doom us all but enlightened science will create utopia. The genetic purity angle is disturbing, however, especially considering that the film is geared towards children: "In Emma's tears were the instructions for a new awakening," states the narrator in the final scene. "Emma is the mother of all of us."

Let's make a kids movie:

- So let's make sure that only individuals with a 50 IQ and lower will enjoy it;
- Therefore, let's throw science and biology out the window (see above);
- Also, let's make sure the little girl (Rhiannon Leigh Wryn plays Emma) is the cutest thing ever (She is);
- While we're at it, let's make her older

brother an absolute clone of Henry Thomas's Elliott in *E.T.*, since it's a winning strategy (No kidding! Chris O'Neil's Noah is exactly the same character, same personality, same red-hooded sweatshirt, same face, just add glasses. The same character!);

- Of course, the parents must be completely inept and self-indulgent;
- Of course, the science teacher must be enlightened;
- Therefore, it is the science teacher who understands the children first;
- Of course, having premonitions helps, as does having a Tibetan Buddhist fiancée;
- As such, let's bluntly state that science is wrong and Tibetan Buddhism is the more advanced way to understand the universe;
- Therefore, the final sequence must show the idyllic world of our saved (read: "genetically pure") future, where school children are taught to make mandalas with flower petals and meditate in the

beautiful sunny weather. They levitate home at the end of the day. (No, I'm not kidding).

Normally, I would be the last person to critique a movie for attempting to increase the public's awareness of global climate change and its insidious effects, but the movie has to make sense. I would also be the last person to critique Buddhism. I truly think that the Middle Way is one of the best ways to conduct one's life. I also think that there is no contradiction between it and science. It is clear that the writers and director think that if we don't make nice with the Earth, we will be destroyed. No argument there. However, *The Last Mimzy* fails miserably at providing any (even vaguely) coherent ecological message, a coherent spiritual message, or even a "family values" message. It is one big jumble of cinematic formulas that announces its premises (and ultimately its entire plot) within the first five minutes.

Let's adapt a classic science fiction short story (well-respected, but little-read outside of genre readers) into a kids' film:

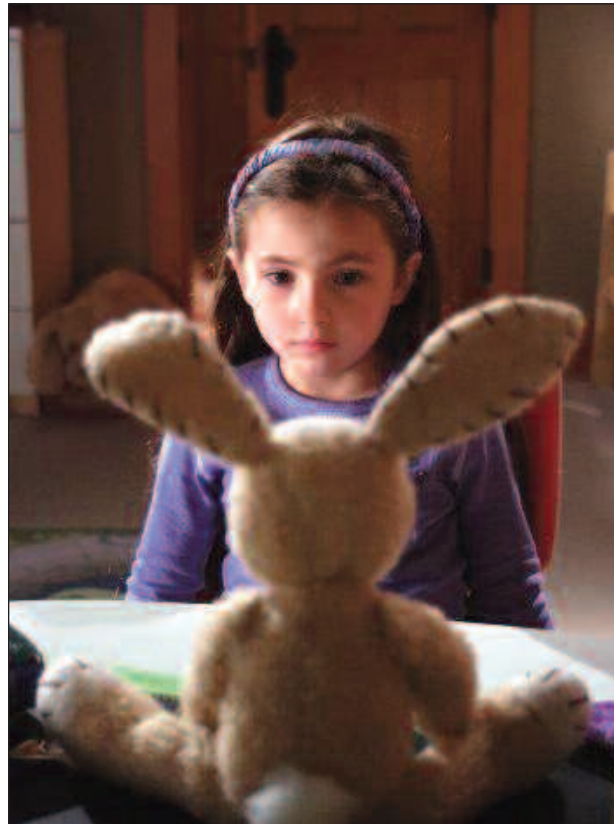
- It should be easy, since there's no original story to think up;
- So let's choose "Mimsy Were the Borogoves," by Lewis Padgett (a.k.a. Henry Kuttner and C.L. Moore) from 1943. Outside of SF fans, who knows that one? (And let's change the spelling of Mimsy, because Zs are cooler);
- To make the story relevant to today, let's recast it in the present and let's bring the very distant future of the story to a few hundred years from now;
- Therefore, we must change the names of all the characters and invent a science teacher and his Tibetan Buddhist fiancée;
- Of course, it can't be an anatomically correct doll that the little girl plays with in the original story (how shocking!), so let's make it a bunny rabbit;
- Therefore, we must cut out all the plot points about the future scientist and simply narrate about him, changing his intentions and goals in the process;
- Therefore, we must cut out all the bits

about Alice Liddell and Lewis Carroll, except for a short scene that does not help move the plot forward at all (it was the central plot point of the short story). Nevertheless, let's dedicate an entire featurette to this;

- Therefore, we must create plot points to replace every thing we took out, so let's make up some sort of eco-spiritual politically-correct subplot instead;
- Since we must shoot the movie in Vancouver, let's reset the story in Washington (close enough), but let's not look up the state's actual geography and major roadways before referring to them in the dialogue. No one will notice.

(Funny, though, that people noticed. User comments on [imdb.com](http://imdb.com) are quite telling.)

It's bad enough they took the wonder and curiosity out of the original story, but there is an entire featurette dedicated to "Adapting the Story." I am not normally one to complain about the adaptation of a literary work for film. Most of the time, even if I don't like it, I can understand it. The changes make



sense cinematically, culturally, even ethnologically in the case of foreign novels. Here, most of the changes make very little sense. No one would disagree that a 1943 short story would require manipulation, if only to bring the science (and politics) up to date. After all, things have changed quite a bit on Earth since the Second World War. However, there is a difference between recasting a story and denaturing it. That they go so far as to justify this is stunning, to say the least. Not mentioning it might have been a better strategy in the end.

This movie was in active development for 12 years. Producer Michael Phillips explains in the "Adapting the Story" featurette that he went through several sf anthologies in the early 1990s and grabbed onto "Mimsy Were the Borogoves" as having potential. He explains that it needed "fleshing out." That may be why the script went through 19 drafts and nine writers. It should have been a sign to give it up, but Phillips and director Bob Shaye kept trying to make it into a movie about "the present helping the future." The final screenwriter, Bruce Joel Rubin, is responsible for the major changes to the characters and plot. He wanted to give a purpose to the toys from the future, and the entire Buddhist motif is his idea. He wanted the movie to be about a "positive human experience" after all, wondering

what would happen if humans' genetic "traits of innocence" had been turned off. His vision is also why the children do not leave their parents behind to go to the future, like in the original story, but simply send the stuffed bunny back.... A nice American happy ending.

All this said, the stuffed bunny rabbit is unbearably adorable and I want one. Sadly the rabbit did not come with the DVD.

The DVD features included are quite standard, though offered under the guise of innovation. The DVD boasts itself as an *infinifilm*<sup>TM</sup>: "an exiting and innovative exploration of the ideas and aspects of a movie." Through pop-up option menus during the movie, viewers are brought to the featurettes; at the end of each they are returned to the movie. It provides a very chopped up narrative. To prevent this, the back of the jewel case states, "Watch the movie first... then experience the *infinifilm*<sup>TM</sup>!" A good precaution. The *infinifilm*<sup>TM</sup> also hosts director Bob Shaye's audio commentary, as well as a "Fast Track" in which subtitles provide running factoids about the history, story, and science related to each scene. All in all, *infinifilm*<sup>TM</sup> has potential, but it needs fleshing out.

The extras are also entirely accessible through the main *infinifilm*<sup>TM</sup> menu, just like in any regular





DVD. They are divided into two sets. “Beyond the Movie™” assembles the features focusing on the science behind the movie, though science here is defined very broadly, as they also include a short on the significance of mandalas and the previously mentioned “Through the Looking Glass: Emma and Alice.” The most interesting fact about those science shorts is that real-world experts on sound, genetics, nanotechnology, and astrophysics explain quite plainly their topics of specialty. Ironically, if one pays attention, these experts very clearly contradict the “scientific” statements of the movie. There is hope.

The second set of extras gathered in the “All Access Pass” focus on the work behind the scenes. Shaye is profiled in one featurette, while the child actors are in another. On top of the previously mentioned “Adapting the Story,” there are shorts on production design, visual effects, and sound. Included is also a (very plain) music video of Roger Waters’ theme song “Hello (I Love You),” a song of no consequence. The more striking extra is the set of 11 deleted scenes. Bob Shaye informs us that most were cut due to audience reaction during test viewings. No words can say how right the test audiences

were. Why they were included at all is a wonder, unless the DVD producers figured that they were standard and had to be added.

As this is a children’s movie, it is no surprise that the DVD contains games and computer extras as well. I cannot comment on the DVD-ROM content as it is, alas, allergic to Macs. The games, however, are quite fun and designed for different age groups. The “Memory Match” is a simple memory game six year olds will be able to master. “Mandala Mix-Up” is an observation game older children will master with patience and play with their parents. Finally, “Spider Bridge” is the hardest of the three games, inspired by young Noah’s ability to direct spiders using sound. Players have to direct the spiders to follow a specific path, using the remote control arrows. I found them the most enjoyable extras.

Now I need to find someone to whom I could give my copy without it being an insult.

*Caroline-Isabelle Caron is an Assistant Professor at the Department of History at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. Her research focuses on North American popular culture, primarily among French-speakers.*

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## **The Crooked Letter, by Sean Williams**

*Book Review by Danny Adams*

The Afterlife isn’t what it used to be.

Seth and Hadrian, twin brothers, have had something less than an ideal relationship. They decide to take a trip to Europe together to get out of the downhill track they’ve slipped into over the years. Along the way they meet a young lady named Ellis, and all three decide that they would have more fun traveling together. Not surprisingly, both boys are attracted to her, and she becomes a source of friction in herself. Then a mysterious stalker kills Seth—that’s no spoiler, as it happens early on and becomes a lynchpin of events to follow—and Hadrian runs for his life in a vastly changing world.

Except Seth isn’t exactly dead—he’s just no longer in our world, which is better known as the First Realm. Ours is a world of matter; when his physical body in the First Realm dies, Seth becomes a resident of the Second Realm, where will sets the physical laws. His death is the needed catalyst for a vast, malignant entity named Yod to invade the First

Realm—eating the souls of the humans who are dying in the ensuing Cataclysm—and to merge both realms with Yod as ruler. In our world, the geography we have known shatters, magical beings that have remained hidden or dormant for ages resurface, and—if Yod has its way—Earth will become a wrecked wasteland utterly devoid of life.

What follows is a fast-paced and often bewildering odyssey for both brothers in two almost-familiar worlds: Seth, in the Second Realm, learns that this Cataclysm is not the first and that much of human religion is based on fragmented and otherwise imperfect recollections of this. Hadrian careens, with the help of a few beings in the know about the Second Realm—through a drastically altered Earth where he is still a target.

The vast array of creatures and places in the Second Realm, particularly when they relate to Earth mythology, can occasionally border on the confusing, but fortunately they never stay that way for

long. (Not to mention there are appendices to help keep the characters, their positions, and the multiple hierarchies straight.) Everything is intertwined: the twins, first of all, are “mirror twins,” a state containing properties highly desired by any being wishing to cause a Cataclysm. The First and Second Realms are likewise intertwined, not just because human souls flee from the former to the latter upon bodily death, not just because Yod wants to unite them, but also because a thread of life exists in each individual that eventually may lead to the Third Realm—a mysterious pan-branching existence that we don’t really get a glimpse of until late in the book, when it becomes critical to the action.

Throughout the book Seth and Hadrian encounter characters who help or hinder them—though helping doesn’t necessarily mean the character is a good guy any more than hindering means the character is bad. If anything, most are devoted to one greater goal or another and the twins simply happen to be instruments. Even the characters who are good, whatever “good” means in this up-turned existence amid the Cataclysm, often remind Seth and Hadrian that whatever they may personally feel towards the boys, they will still do what is necessary in whatever form necessity may take. Williams ably portrays shades of gray that run both so deeply and ambiguously that even characters who are friends, such as the once-human (but now creature-appearing) Xol and the human appearing (though she isn’t human) Agatha make the reader feel sympathetically comfortable and uneasy simultaneously. And just when you think something might possibly at least look human, the rules—in this Second Realm where geometry can be wielded as a weapon—abruptly change and force the hu-

mans into yet another paradigm shift.

Using “will” as a weapon and a defense is not a new thing in fantasy fiction. David Eddings employed “The Will and the Word” in the *Belgariad*, for instance, and young Garion was forced to summon his will (quietly) in order to do magic. Margaret Mahy’s contemporary fantasy *Changeover* series employed what some have called “supercharged imagination,” imposing what you imagine onto the world around you. In the Second Realm, though, will is the foundation of existence, just as breathing and blood are in the First, and the lack or loss of it—from predation or something as simple as despair—will likely prove fatal. This is a trope that could flog the reader badly (and has) and simmer away into something boiling down to “Seth at last suddenly realized he could throw fireballs!” Fortunately Williams has a more subtle hand than that, and his take on will is multifaceted enough so that one discovery / victory does not necessarily mean that things will be peachy afterwards. Think of the game *Renaissance Man*, the way a scholar would need to become a polymath, mastering many different and disparate subjects, rather than an RPG where you continually add more and greater spells to your repertoire.

There are a few ingenious (and appreciated) twists thrown in as well. For instance, when Seth is listening to a pounding outside what purports to be a safe haven, he is informed that the sanctuary is not being attacked—it is literally the shape, the geometry, of the Second Realm being changed. Once again the reader is reminded that physical laws are wildly altered here, yet consistent; one may not be able to imagine an entire world compressing, and yet Williams’ lead-ups make the idea feel perfectly consistent.

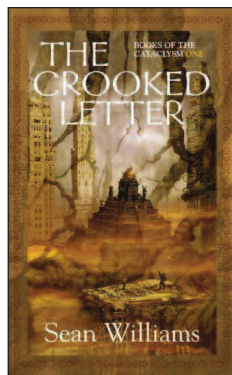
The climax of the story—leading to a decision with realm-spanning repercussions—is another area where in less deft hands the lead-up could have been incredibly boring, a lot of fretting and little else. But Williams’ language here is as sharp as any action sequence in the book (though there is little physical action), so the fretting is increasingly tinged with desperation as the brothers realize how much is at stake and how hopelessly locked into destiny they seem. When the decision comes, it is both hard and a relief that one thing has opened to them, no matter how difficult, and Seth and Hadrian are left all at once barren and optimistic that the fight can be won.

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***The Crooked Letter,*  
Books of the Cataclysm: One**

**Author:** Sean Williams  
**ISBN-10:** 159102644X  
**ISBN-13:** 978-1591026440  
**Publisher:** Pyr  
**Release date:** April, 2008

\$15.00, 509 pages, trade  
paperback



All in all, this a fine, hard-edged tale tinged with compassion and real feeling, and it will be worth journeying into the next books of the series.

*Danny Adams is the author of the short novel The City Beyond Play, co-authored with Philip Jose Farmer and available for purchase from PS Publishing. In addition, his shorter works have appeared or are forthcoming*

*in magazines such as Abyss & Apex, Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine, The Mount Zion Speculative Fiction Review, Mythic Delirium, Not One Of Us, Star\*Line, Strange Horizons and Weird Tales. He and his wife Laurie live deep in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia with four cats who never fail to provide thrilling wonders, dangerous adventures, and chilling perils!*

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## **SFWA European Hall of Fame: Sixteen Contemporary Science Fiction Classics from the Continent, edited by James Morrow and Kathryn Morrow**

*Book Review by Jessica Darago*

Here's an interesting exercise: take a moment to tally up all of the science fiction you've ever read that was originally written in a language other than English.

Go ahead. I'll wait.

Got it?

Now subtract the manga.

Not much of a list, is it? If you're anything like me, you came up with something like, "I've read some Stanislaw Lem, and... and... ooo, Jules Verne! Yeah! And... um... does Umberto Eco count?"

The fact is that English-language readers are blessed with a wealth of talented science fiction writers and a plethora of outlets for their work. If we haven't looked abroad for new voices, it's because we didn't hear them above all the wonderful noise at home. But that doesn't mean we weren't missing out.

The Morrrows saw this situation as a void and set out to fill it. They chose 16 stories from the past 20 years and matched each author up with a translator who would help preserve not just the meaning but also the style, tone, and spirit of the original. The effort shows. The prose is elegant and evocative, and each author's voice stands out from the rest. If nothing else, this anthology showcases the translators' talents. Of course, there is something else: the stories.

It's an eclectic collection, running the gamut from pure hard sf to stories that don't so much flirt with fantasy as ask it if it wants to go get coffee some time. Much like their contemporary American cousins, the bulk of the stories are very per-

sonal—one lone being confronts the glories and horrors of the universe. Both "A Birch Tree, A White Fox" by Elena Arsenieva (translated by Michael M. Naydan and Slava I. Yastremski) and "Wonders of the Universe" by Andeas Eschbach (translated by Doryl Jensen) feature spaceship-wrecked travelers, one with hope of rescue and one without; both become meditations on love and loss, as well as on opportunities squandered. In fact, over half the stories involve romance in one way or another—generally doomed romance, but we wouldn't want our manly genre tainted with that "happily ever after" crap anyway.

A few stories exhibit the kind of extrapolated sociology familiar to American audiences since Gene Roddenberry turned *Star Trek* into a civil rights platform forty-odd years ago. Johanna Sinisalo's "Baby Doll" (translated by David Hackston) takes today's sexualizing of young girls and our apparently bottomless consumerism to create a parable that—but for one or two of the gadgets involved—doesn't seem like a story about the *future* at all. But whereas American SF is only beginning to embrace wholly political—versus socio-political—commentary again (a reflection, perhaps, of how the champions of rationalism despair of the current situation), the European strain seems to have been cozy with it all along. Valerio Evangelisti's "Sepultra" (translated by Sergio D. Altieri) describes the gruesome fate of political prisoners in a country where politics amounts to little more than organized crime. Lucian Merișca's "Some Earthlings' Adventures on Outrerriah" (translated by Cezar Ionescu) recalls the black, ab-

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**SFWA European Hall of  
Fame: Sixteen Contemporary  
Science Fiction Classics from  
the Continent**

**Editors:** James Morrow and  
Kathryn Morrow  
**ISBN-10:** 0765315378  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0765315373  
**Publisher:** Tor  
**Release date:** April, 2008



\$16.95, 336 pages, trade  
paperback

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surdist humor of the Latin American magical realists. The human imperialists of Merişca's tale exhibit the same blind arrogance, and suffer the same comeuppance, as many of their earth-bound predecessors. (As to the aliens' fetish for bicycles and toilets, well... I did say "absurdist," didn't I?)

In an anthology this varied, it's hard not to get very personal when deciding which story is the standout. For my money, the gem of the collection is Bernhard Ribbeck's "A Blue and Cloudless Sky" (translated by Niels Dalgaard). Judging by its position at the anthology's end, it may well have been the Morrows' as well. I adore a well-constructed time-travel story, one where the outcome is surprising yet, upon reflection, inevitable. Ribbeck's hero is trapped on a doomed planet, within a colony he will found a few days into his own future and 350 years into the colony's past. A story that begins as an ontological

paradox (or, in recent parlance, a big ball of wibbly-wobbly timey-wimey stuff) blossoms into something stranger and altogether more hopeful. Another standout is the penultimate story, "Between the Lines" by José Antonio Cotrina (translated by James Stevens-Arce). A young scholar finds the walls of his reality dissolving, simply because one day he "knocked on the wrong door." The scholar's conclusion, that "[t]urmoil... [is] the optimal condition of the soul," sums up the mood of the entire anthology and, arguably, the core philosophy of Western literature.

In case the stories presented here whet your reading appetite, the Morrows have thoughtfully included a good bibliography of European SF in general and, in the editors' notes that precede each story, have recommended more works by each author. The editors' notes are a bit cloying in their enthusiasm for their subjects—at one point, I thought I had misread and was convinced that the editor must be James Lipton. The stories are strong enough that they need no introduction; I'd advise skipping the notes unless you're looking for the authors' other work.

Overall, the Morrows have put together an impressive collection and brought together authors and readers that have been too long apart. One hopes this is only the beginning.

*Jessica Darago needs to come up with a new bio now that she's one of the editors for Some Fantastic. Either that, or she can use the some boring mini-bio that Matthew usually uses. Her choice.*

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## **Visual Journeys: A Tribute to Space Artists, edited by Eric T. Reynolds**

**Book Review by Christopher J. Garcia**

*"The picture on the page and the picture in  
your mind from the writing seldom coincide."  
—Jef Raskin*

The idea of writing a story around an image is an old one... a good one, but an old one. *Visual Journeys* attempts it once more, using the works of various artists who specialize in space-related pieces. It is at times magnificent, both in terms of writing and imagery. But as an added bonus, there's one piece that's created the "traditional" way, with the artist neatly wrapping a package around a story ("Kronos

Jazz Quartet" by Delphyne was created to go with "Where We Go," by Richard Chewdyk.

The artist list reads like a genre who's who of the last few decades: Bob Eggleton, Ron Miller, Frank Wu, Wolf Read, Delphyne, and Chesley Bonestell, among others. That list includes Hugo and Chesley winners, as well as folks who can flat-out paint! The included works are equally impressive, especially Miller's "Jupiter Cloudscapes." It's a marvelous piece, and the story attached, "Jupiter Whispers" by Christopher McKitterick, just seems to have melted in to the page. McKitterick is a writer I know little about, but his story is one of the best in the entire col-



lection, and I think the story offers excellent insight into what's going on beyond our ability to see.

The writer list is also an interesting one. Frank Wu pulls double duty as both an artist and a writer. His story, "Worlds in Collusion: A Planetary Romance," is a fine little piece of romantic SF. It's hard to believe that Frank can excel at both art and writing, but I thought this, his third sold short story, was one of the more inventive in the anthology.

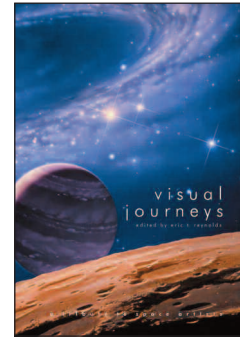
There's also Mike Resnick, a personal favorite writer of mine, who is working off a Frank Wu art piece called "Ad Astra." This is the kind of story that just about blows my mind. Who would have thought that basketball could play a role in an SF story? The idea that any planet could define itself through a single moment of basketball triumph says a lot about human glory and what it means. The story, "Monuments of Flesh and Stone" is one of Resnick's most entertaining stories and one that got me thinking.

If you want to get into the head-trip realm of reaction to art, read Jay Lake's "After Bonestell," based

**Visual Journeys: A Tribute to Space Artists**

**Editor:** Eric T. Reynolds  
**ISBN-10:** 0978514831  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0978514839  
**Publisher:** Hadley Rille Books  
**Release date:** June, 2007

\$24.95, 388 pages, trade paperback

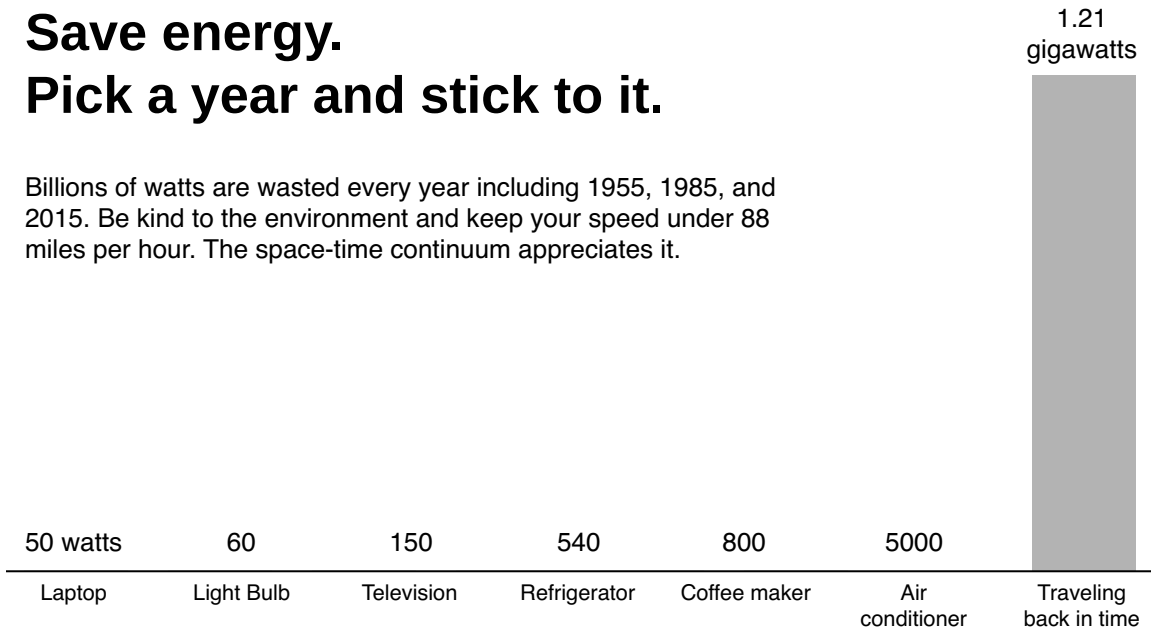


on Bob Eggleton's painting of the same name. It's one of those not-quite-dreamy but not-fully-real stories that Jay Lake is so good at producing. Here a man talks to the Earth, and the resulting conversation is almost religious in nature. To see Eggleton's piece and create from it a story so far from what the average reader would ever see is part of the reason why anthologies like this work so well. They zig when you expect them to keep going straight.

## Save the Space-Time Continuum: Do Not Exceed 88 Miles Per Hour

**Save energy.  
Pick a year and stick to it.**

Billions of watts are wasted every year including 1955, 1985, and 2015. Be kind to the environment and keep your speed under 88 miles per hour. The space-time continuum appreciates it.



Source: ABS Alaskan; Back to the Future

FlowingData

©2008, Nathan Yau; This graph originally appeared on his website, Flowing Data (flowingdata.com), on Mar. 22, 2008

One of the more interesting artists in the book is Wolf Read. His “Hell Orbit,” a stunning piece of art, is made into a story by G. David Nordley. It’s the kind of story that I cannot resist: a deep, meaningful romance. It feels like *Rebel Without A Cause* with traditional SF elements. There’s a little bit of S.E. Hinton in Nordley, and it makes me smile.

I don’t think I’ve ever read Jude-Marie Green’s writing before. In this anthology, she took one of my favorite Frank Wu pieces, “Derelict,” and crafted a story of the same name around it. This one feels the most tied to the original art piece, and it works so beautifully. The portrayal of the main character and of the ship that kidnaps her is very impressive. There’s a lot here, both on the surface and in subtext that rewards a reader for taking the time to thoroughly chew it.

I’m not as sold on the story “Inheritance by Willis Couvillier,” though the painting from Michael Carroll that it was written around is very strong. The one problem I have with it is that it is, at heart, a thriller, and I wasn’t quite thrilled. Still, the writing was strong, if slightly less than taut. I do have to say,

of all the stories in the collection, this is the one that would make the best short film.

Unlike some of my favorite anthologies, *Visual Journeys* doesn’t seem to have much flow from piece to piece. In this case, it doesn’t hurt that much. There’s a certain museum-like quality to the image-story couplings that elevates both. The pairs seem to exist as an image with the explanatory text almost serving as a sort of labeling. While stories typically exist in anthologies on their own, here they are irrevocably tied to the images, and they form a unit that can be looked at with a stronger relevance.

*Visual Journeys* is a great piece of work. The reproduction of the images is top notch, and the layout is strong. The feel is not of a traditional anthology but of a fine art book with really long annotations. You can’t ask for better than that.

*Christopher J. Garcia edits The Drink Tank, the twice Hugo-nominated fanzine, on eFanzines.com and is a writer, filmmaker and historian from San Jose, CA. He has had his work appear a bunch of places a bunch of times and he is damn proud of it.*

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## **Radio Freefall, by Matthew Jarpe**

*Book Review by Chris Elliot*

I was of two minds after reading Matthew Jarpe’s well-meaning debut SF novel, *Radio Freefall*. On the one hand, my more politically inclined reading instincts were telling me to buck up and just applaud the thing for what it’s worth—a work of contemporary SF making an effort to engage with current global political issues (in the case of the novel in question, “globalization” and its various real or potential discontents). On the other hand, my more pleasure-driven reading instincts—the ones interested in the joy of reading a good story well told, in subtlety, nuance, complexity, uniqueness, and meaningful, smart characters with something interesting to say—just couldn’t get past the fact that after finishing *Radio Freefall*, I felt less like I’d read a good novel than like I’d just sat through a long, albeit at times interesting, PowerPoint presentation detailing at a 10,000-foot level the broad story arcs that were going to go into politically-inclined novel intent on engaging with current global politics.

Generally speaking, my more pleasure-driven

reading instincts win these battles hands-down, and such is the case with *Radio Freefall*. I enjoy a political debate, but if I’m going to get it in the form of SF, or any other fictional drama, there needs to be more—art and politics mix excellently well, but there are reasons to make a political statement in artistic form, as opposed to pamphlet form, and those reasons have everything to do with the way pleasure in the reception of the art object meld together with the political message to produce a particularly powerful response in the person viewing, reading, or listening to the art. *Radio Freefall* takes place in the very near future—sometime in the 2030s. The old world of nation-states is teetering on the cusp of “Unification,” a momentous event in which all the individual nations, mostly by mutual agreement (apparently), will be dissolved into a single, cohesive unit administered by one centralized government.

Much, if not all, of the driving force behind this move to Unification comes from WebCense. Led by Walter Cheeseman, this quasi-corporate, quasi-gov-

ernmental, apparently nearly all-powerful but certainly all-bureaucratic organization is tasked with monitoring, policing, and imposing its world vision and will on the ubiquitous Web. And in this novel, since the Web appears to be the truly dominant mode—maybe realistically the *only* effective mode—of non-face-to-face communication and information exchange in the world, that means it is essentially in control of administering how people perceive the world that lies beyond their particular day-to-day experiences. You could say they define how the world is consumed by the people who live in it. And since we all know that bureaucracy-driven institutions generally connote “bad” and “oppressive” in these types of SF stories (well, really, any type of story), it’s not hard to connect the dots and conclude early on that “unification” in *Radio Freefall*’s world means a “really bad thing.” Cheeseman/WebCense want Unification for the usual reasons—power, a convenient mechanism to shape the world in the way he sees fit, and so on.

This is a classic dystopian set-up: arguably the most famous of SF dystopian works, *1984*, was built just around this type of pervasive, bureaucratic control of information. *Radio Freefall*’s central narrative ploy, however (and it’s a useful one), is to envision a world in which control of the media is virtually absolute, but to tell the story right before the other shoe drops (i.e., right before the actual establishment of the seamlessly authoritarian unified state). As such, it offers the possibility of a still-viable struggle toward a vision of a better world, rather than a certain and fixed reality of dystopia. Call it the utopian impulse for change.

The resistance to Unification, and by extension to WebCense, turns out to be made up largely of musicians in the rock and roll/indie music scene and disaffected nerd-types. Yes, kind of like 1960s flower power meets open-source computing. On the music side, there’s Aqualung, a 50+ leader of the up and coming Snake Vendors, with his emotion-inducing Machine—a technology designed to register and alter the emotions of the audience listening to his music. On the hard-core nerd side, there’s Quinn Taber, former employee of WebCense whose current all-consuming life-goal is to somehow bring down Cheeseman, the man who stole his at the time greatest invention and sent him packing to boot. And then there is the Digital Carnivore, a pervasive and self-

aware Web virus; squarely in the resistance movement by default, though probably not intent, to the degree that its very nature—viral and uncontrollable, intent on constantly reshaping the Web according its own unknowable and definitely not human logic, rather than WebCense’s—is almost by definition contrary to the apparent drive to administrative control and imposed homogeneity that is part and parcel to Unification. Added to the mix are a slew of band members and singers, AIs, and convenient acquaintances who flow in and out of the story, usually when required to provide some needed technological or contextual/historical exposition for why things are the way they are (socially, politically, personally) at any given moment in the story.

*Radio Freefall* clearly situates the resistance as positive and Cheeseman/WebCense and the Unification as negative. Which is all well and good. After all, who wouldn’t oppose the unification of all nations under one single governmental institution, if that meant a flattening of all diversity, an enforced homogeneity, and the evacuation of cultural history in favor of a tasteless, unsatisfying “consistency”? And to top it all off, subjugation under the thumb of a bureaucratic body headed up by a guy named Cheeseman? And by extension, who wouldn’t support the opposite of all those things? It goes without saying... at least as portrayed in those simple terms.

But I found myself bridleing at points throughout the story, just because of this seeming simplicity at the level of argument. It all seemed a bit too staged, too easy. WebCense, Cheeseman, the “Unification”—they all feel too much like the proverbial strawman, and while I couldn’t imagine living in a Unified world of the sort described by Jarpe, I also can’t help asking, “What about a differently unified world? One that isn’t bureaucratized and ruled by the Cheesemans’ of the world? Isn’t there possibly a uni-

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### *Radio Freefall*

**Author:** Matthew Jarpe  
**ISBN-10:** 0765317842  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0765317841  
**Publisher:** Tor  
**Release date:** August, 2007

\$24.95, 320 pages, hardcover



fied world like that out there somewhere, within the imagination of someone?"

*Radio Freefall* doesn't raise these questions at all, mostly because it doesn't include characters who are positioned to ask them. Jarpe presents a very simple world, really, with all-too-simple choices and easy answers, and for a novel with apparently real political aspirations and a definite horse in the race, that's a no-no (at least in my books), at least if you're interested in thinking through an issue as opposed to telling people how to think about a particular issue.

Which returns me to my initial "reader's struggle" with Jarpe's novel. What this story could have used, what its message would have most benefited from, is some real complexity at the level of message, an infusion of productive uncertainty that would have transformed its unfortunately set-piece-like debates into something that requires real engagement from the reader. What I mean by that is some engagement with the issues that isn't immediately and

obviously pre-concluded even as it just begins. And meaningful characters, not cardboard cut-outs with "right position" and "wrong position" floating over their heads. Walter Cheeseman, WebCense... these simple caricatures don't cut it when it comes to something so very close to our current situation, one in which anti-globalization demonstrations are the norm wherever the International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organization meet. It's in a novel that seeks to argue and, one assumes, persuade readers to take a particular position in the debate that you truly need a measure of honest and concerted debate amongst meaningful characters situated in complex narrative situations. I think *Radio Freefall* falls short of that mark.

*Chris Elliot has written film and television reviews for Popmatters.com. He currently lives in Northern Virginia with his ever increasing collection of anime soundtracks.*

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## Deep Inside: Extreme Erotic Fantasies, by Polly Frost

*Book Review by Rose Fox*

Frost brings up some intriguing ideas in this collection of 10 erotic stories, including a priestess who can transfer a man's sexual prowess into a sex toy, the moral dilemma of profiting off the eroticized exploits of serial killers, and "Viagra babies" whose wild sexual appetites are rigidly controlled with medication while swingers seek to get off on drinking their blood. Instead of developing these notions, she relies on sketchy images of schoolgirls in short skirts, dominatrices in black leather, and squirmy alien tentacles to keep her readers hot and bothered. It's a poor trade-off. Many of the stories began as

performance pieces, and perhaps that's why they're so heavy-handed. What works when read aloud to eager listeners in a crowded café doesn't necessarily work on the page.

"Viagra Babies," "The Threshold," and "The Orifice" all feature barely-legal teen protagonists, which gives the whole collection a literally sophomoric feel. It's extremely difficult to do anything new or interesting with the story of a hesitant, virginal Catholic schoolgirl being urged by her theoretically more debauched friends to go find a nice boy to have sex with so she can be cool like them; Cameron's tale in "The Threshold" is predictable from start to finish, from menstrual embarrassment to fantasies about an erotic rape that removes the burden of the choice to remain chaste. There's no surprise when Sarah, a mysterious exchange student who seduces Cameron in the girls' bathroom, turns out not to be on the up and up, nor when Cameron's slutty friend admits she's never actually had sex. Even those of us who haven't lived these clichés know them backwards and forwards.

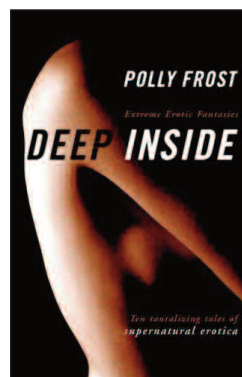
It's not much better when Frost writes about adults; their emotional development is so minimal

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### Deep Inside: Extreme Erotic Fantasies

**Author:** Polly Frost  
**ISBN-10:** 0765315874  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0765315878  
**Publisher:** Tor  
**Release date:** May, 2007

\$12.95, 272 pages, trade paperback





that they might as well be in high school. "The Dominatrix Has a Career Crisis" should really be entitled "The Dominatrix Throws a Temper Tantrum," the central characters of the title story and "Playing Karen Devere" are obsessed with fame, and "The Pleasure Invaders" features drug addicts who will do anything for a fix. All of these stories are at heart about being out of control, driven by cravings both sexual and not. However, this doesn't seem to be a theme so much as a fixation, the one string on which Frost plays her bawdy songs. Control and sex are powerfully connected in this culture, and it's a shame to see that connection remain unexamined here, when even a sidelong acknowledgment of those psychological underpinnings would put these stories considerably above most of their kind.

Similarly, some of the fantastic elements are genuinely interesting and could rescue the run-of-the-mill fantasies, but little is done to integrate them with the plots or characters of the stories they appear in. A vague backstory about magical time travelers gives Sarah something resembling motivation for seeking out Cameron's "sacred" virginal blood, but in the end she's just a creepy chick who likes trolling for girls so that the men of her "family" can pop their cherries. Does it matter that the drugs of "The Pleasure Invaders" are aliens that give people tremendous sexual pleasure? Not really. Frost brings up several intriguing moral concepts—the stigmatization of addiction, police corruption, the deaths of aliens after humans abuse them—but all are lost in the chronicle of addicted cop Rachel and her desperate quest for the next fix. That her addiction to sexual pleasure is ultimately portrayed as a good thing, or at least a titillating thing, diminishes the story still more.

Easily the best piece in the collection is "Test

Drive," wherein lovers surrounded by stimulating gadgets and porn-on-demand rediscover what it's like to actually touch each other and enjoy their physical imperfections. The debate between human tenderness and mechanical efficiency has been addressed in countless erotic science fiction stories over the years, of course, but Frost makes this particular conversation charming and sweet, and its eroticism relies more on characterization than on aggressive button-pushing. It's more intellectual and interesting than any of the other stories, which makes it more arousing as well. The literary and the erotic are not in conflict; quite the contrary. A sexy story's worst enemy is the cliché, not the 10-cent word or the layered plot.

Hundreds of websites archive fiction and fan fiction that exists solely to provide wankable imagery, but readers paying \$12.95 for a 10-story trade paperback collection put out under a science fiction and fantasy imprint aren't looking for those stories. They're looking for high-quality SF that also happens to be hot. For the most part, that's not what Frost is writing, and so this particular book, published this particular way, falls very short. The best of these stories would be right at home in middling-quality anthologies of erotica, but none would stand a chance of appearing in any anthology of science fiction or fantasy. By ignoring nearly every opportunity to engage in moral or intellectual debate, Frost puts the lie to her title. Nothing here goes below the surface, leaving readers ultimately unfulfilled.

*Rose Fox is the result of a genetic experiment to create the perfect writer. Having escaped from the laboratory, she now roams the streets of New York, looking for inspiration in gutters and rainbows.*

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## **Pan's Labyrinth, New Line 2-Disc Platinum Series**

*DVD Review by Caroline-Isabelle Caron*

In his prologue to *Pan's Labyrinth*, Mexican director Guillermo del Toro states that *El labirinto del Fauno* nearly killed him and that he lost 40 pounds writing and shooting it. Considering how deep and dark this film is, it is no surprise.

*El labirinto del Fauno* is by far the best movie I've seen in the last five years... bar none. It is a real, modern-day fairy tale and not one of those sanitized,

rosy-coloured, happy distillations spoon-fed us by Disney. No, a real old-fashioned fairy tale where people get killed, flayed, or burned; where children are abandoned in the woods by their parents, cooked and eaten by witches; where the little mermaid actually dies in the end. This movie is no different. Most of the characters do die before the story is through, and it is clear from the beginning that it will

happen. We know because this is a fairy tale, and the point of a fairy tale isn't the story. It is the moral of the story, one which must be understandable by all and from which all can learn.

Hansel and Gretel's moral? Beware of strangers offering candy. Little Red Riding Hood's moral? Strange men will want to eat (i.e., rape) little girls. Snow White's moral? Stepmothers may be evil, but you will move out of the house some day. The Little Mermaid's moral? Changing yourself to find a man will only lead to disaster. Stay yourself. Need I go on?

*El laberinto del Fauno's* moral? We'll address it a bit later, but suffice it to say that it is a heady truth, and thus it makes sense that del Toro found himself struggling with it. The story is as dark as a Grimm tale in the original German. Young Ofelia and her very pregnant mother Carmen travel to the Spanish countryside in the fall of 1944 to meet the latter's new husband, Capitán Vidal, who commands a local military outpost in a rundown mill. The weather is rainy and cold, and the mood is dire. The anti-fascist rebels inhabit the region, resisting the new Franco regime that the Capitán and the local middle-class are perfectly happy to serve. In the case of the Capitán, the powers given him by his position allow him to maim, torture, and kill whomever he deems his enemy and to dominate all whom he deems his inferiors, including his wife and step-daughter.

Ofelia is a beautiful young girl who lives for books and in books. The 10-year-old Barcelonan actress Ivana Baquero plays her with understated strength. She is not angelic, however; she has all the

markings of a difficult, wilful child. She adores her mother and adulated her dearly missed father. She is quite angry with Carmen for having remarried and refuses to call the Capitán "father." She finds ways to avoid doing what she is told and is very subtle and understated about it. Therefore she avoids punishment, yet she resists. This resistance is also manifest in the world of her imagination, where the Faun lives in his labyrinth.

(At this point, I need to express my only complaint about the North American marketing of the movie, both in French and in English. In the latter, it was marketed as *Pan's Labyrinth*; *Le Labyrinthe de Pan* in French. However, when the Faun presents himself to Ofelia, he specifies that he is so old that none of the names he used to have apply anymore. He is just the Faun; in other words, he is not Pan, Greek demi-god of old mythology. Though Pan was a faun, he was not *this* faun. So why market the movie with a title that is both misleading *and* clearly contradicted in the dialogue? Because the distributors think that you and I, the viewers, are so ignorant we won't know the difference. Guess what? We did!)

The ruins that scatter the woods that border the grounds of the old mill link Ofelia's imaginary world to ours. The Capitán's housekeeper Mercedes tells her not to play there, that this labyrinth is older than anyone remembers. There, she meets the Faun—depicted through Doug Jones's extraordinary acting and enhanced by Pablo Adán's precise dubbing performance. One loves and fears him instantly. Faun tells Ofelia she is the long-lost daughter of the King of the Underworld and that to return to her rightful

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### ***Pan's Labyrinth*, New Line Two-Disc Platinum Series**



**DVD Release Date:** May, 2007  
**Starring:** Ivana Baquero, Sergi López, Maribel Verdú, Doug Jones, & Ariadna Gil  
**Director:** Guillermo del Toro  
**Screenwriter:** Guillermo del Toro  
**Rated:** R  
**Number of Discs:** 2  
**Studio:** New Line Home Video  
**Special Features:** Video prologue by Guillermo del Toro; audio commentary by director Guillermo del Toro; TV spots; theatrical teaser (US); featurettes "The Power of Myth" & "The Faun and the Fairies"; DVD Comics: "Giant Toad," "The Fairies," & "Pan and The Pale Man"; Lullaby Featurettes: "The Melody Echoes the Fairy Tale" & "Mercedes' Lullaby Progression"; director's notebook detailing the art and making of the movie; multi-angle storyboard/thumbnaill; & photo galleries.

place in this kingdom without sadness and fear, she must succeed in three tasks, proving that she has not become mortal. She must complete these before the next full moon, a few days away. They are perilous and frightful, but if she succeeds and obeys, Ofelia will be able to forever escape her brutal mortal world.

Ofelia must first get the golden key from the stomach of giant toad living in the roots system of the ancient fig tree behind the mill, slowly killing it. She succeeds of course, while at the same time avoiding an appearance at the dinner the Capitán throws to show off his new family to the local bourgeoisie. This key she will use to get the silver knife out of the Hombre Palido's dining room. I will not reveal the third task here, though the viewer will guess from the beginning what it ultimately will be. This foreknowledge is not an issue, as I have said, since it is a function of the true fairy tale to be decipherable and impart its lessons.

Ofelia both succeeds and fails at the last task, and she both lives and dies as a result. The happiness of the Underworld Kingdom is restored, the fig tree lives again, but only housekeeper Mercedes and some of the rebels survive another day. Yet the lesson is learned: escaping through one's imagination is good and useful only so long as it does not overtake reality. If it ever does, people die. (Recall del Toro's admission in the prologue regarding his weight loss while working on the film.)

As a result, most US media have called this movie "a fantasy for adults." Setting aside the fact of how this quote indicates mainstream's misunderstanding of genre fiction, it is quite right. Certainly, this movie is not for children to see (yet this story would work as a tale *told* to children). Like so many fairy tales are, the movie is a tragedy in the strictest sense of the term. This above all else is what makes *El laberinto del Fauno* so marvellous.

The extraordinary acting; the dark, eerie, threatening photography; the haunting, meaningful music; and the precise dialogue all make this movie a work of genius and poetry. Yet, the true star of the movie (and the DVD extras) is Guillermo del Toro himself. As in his 2001 film *El Espinazo del Diablo*, del Toro revisits the Spanish Civil war and once again shows how haunted he and his family are by this truly brutal and violent period Spanish history. Though del Toro is Mexican by birth, the horrors

committed by all sides of the conflict are a blight on his imagination. In del Toro's work, evil in the guise of phantoms and human killers lurks in the mid-twentieth-century Spanish countryside; children lose their lives or their innocence; and adults lose their souls, if they even had them in the first place—Capitán Vidal certainly is evil incarnate.

With an average knowledge of Greek and Roman mythology, and a smattering of European history, the movie visuals take on added meaning. There is no need to understand Spanish mid-twentieth-century history beyond the narration, as this is not a historical movie. This said, understanding class and political dynamics of that period might help the viewer better understand the motivations of the human characters, especially Carmen. The disk two extras will help here, especially "The Power of Myth" and "The Color and the Shape" featurettes. Additionally, the massive "Director's Notebook" provides actual scans of del Toro's sketches and notes, with attractive menu pages, access to del Toro's "video pods," as well as missing scenes and deleted characters. These mini-featurettes are beautiful and informative but not exclusive to the DVD set. They can be viewed largely from the movie's official website ([panslabyrith.com](http://panslabyrith.com)).

Though New Line distributes the film in North America and has produced the DVDs, this is not an American movie by any stretch of the imagination. Del Toro is Mexican, and all the producers and most of the co-producing companies are Mexican or "independent." Most of the actors are Spaniards and familiar only to fans of European movies—save Doug Jones, who will be familiar for del Toro fans. Most importantly, the movie is shot and set in Spain, played in the Barcelonan dialect, and presents a story that arguably falls into the realm of South American magical realism. All this may explain why it did not gain the success in the US that it had in Europe and Latin America. In this aspect, the DVD extras are quite useful as they are clearly designed to allow the casual and non-familiar viewer to delve into the Spanish-speaking world. Guillermo del Toro's audio commentary is (for once) both moving and informative. It is well worth re-watching the movie with it.

The other extras are more standard. Disc one contains the trailer and posters, while disc two contains the storyboards and offers the ability to com-

pare them with thumbnails. Galleries contain ample illustrations of creature design, sets, props, and production notes—many of them in del Toro's own hand. They too are well worth looking through. So are the DVD-ROM features, which (though only PC friendly) allow for watching the film with synchronized storyboards, additional production photos and

artwork, the original shooting scripts in Spanish and English, and a very cool movie keyword search engine. Something tells me there are also a few Easter eggs on the DVDs, but I could not find them.

Run to get this one. Buy it and keep it. Learn its lessons.

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## TMNT

*DVD Review by Alex Esten*

Working with the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles franchise is difficult, because the filmmaker needs to strike the right balance between slapstick, goofball humor and the older, more mature tones found in the original comic series. Lean too heavily on one end and run the risk of alienating a sizeable chunk of your audience. When a writer or director goes for goofball humor for the sake of children's entertainment, tragedy strikes. We all wish we could forget about *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 3*. On the other hand, if the creative team takes the franchise too seriously, to the point where they're forgetting the absurdity of the TMNT concept itself, the project treads into dangerous territory; it becomes pretentious and preachy and drops the tongue-in-cheek irony that made the original animated series so brilliant. In other words, we get that terrible TMNT cartoon on Fox from a few years ago. Accelerating the franchise's nose-dive was garbage like *TMNT: Fast Forward*.

The TMNT franchise has had it rough over the past decade. After the second movie, which most fans would agree was the peak of the franchise, it was all downhill. We had the turtles time-traveling back to Feudal Japan (big mistake), a clumsy new cartoon that was simply an annoying and substandard "re-imagining," and then a disgusting spin-off/revision ala Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: Turbo/Neo/Zeo/Dino Force/Thunderlips etc. So there was a lot riding on this new TMNT movie. Expectations and hopes (from most, at least) were high. There was immense pressure on the team to redeem the TMNT franchise after nearly 18 years of mediocrity. Miraculously, they delivered.

*TMNT* is, without a doubt, the best thing to happen to the turtles in almost two decades. The few places where it falters are fairly embarrassing, but

when the film hits its stride, few could argue it doesn't rival the original films or comics. In fact, the movie has only one major flaw: the monster subplot. It distracts from the true focus of the film (the turtles) and feels forced and artificial, like the filmmakers needed an immediate physical threat to provide tension. Sadly, they did not seem to realize that Max Winters and his generals would have been more than sufficient to fill that role. They're immortal. They're more powerful than the monsters and turtles. One general can outright dominate the entire Foot Clan. Their ancient and malicious brotherhood provides the perfect contrast to the turtles' family strain. Additionally, their backstory is much stronger than the monsters'. There is no Krang-esque Dimension X silliness.

Incidentally, I'm still somewhat surprised that the filmmakers decided to go with a multidimensional angle for part of this movie, because much of the appeal of the franchise comes from that real-world grittiness of New York City. Granted, the concept itself is absurd...we have mutated turtles, giant rats, crime lords, pigs, wolves, highly intelligent brain-pods, and so on. But what fascinates me about the franchise is how all of those absurd elements interact with the real world. How the turtles cope with being outsiders. How regular police forces attempt to manage crime wave after crime wave. How society itself was being manipulated and subverted to the Shredder's own maniacal whims. "Shredder" wasn't only a catchy moniker; he literally was shredding social organization apart. So I was disappointed when *TMNT* relied on that multi-dimensional angle when it never worked before and only ended up damaging the series. Drifting away from the real-world gritty interactions was always a mistake and it still is.



Remarkably, however, as clumsy and ill-conceived the monsters were, the rest of *TMNT* is fantastic. The action sequences are some of the most entertaining I've seen in years. I'm actually surprised that I enjoyed them so much, considering my initial reluctance to embrace CG for a Turtles movie. When I had first seen the character designs, I thought they looked like goofy bobbleheads. I was not confident they would be able to move, run, jump, fight, or even talk convincingly. (Years of lousy CG in non-Pixar movies had much to do with my skepticism.)

After sitting down to watch *TMNT*, I've never been so happy to be completely, utterly wrong. The CG is absolutely wonderful, and it re-energizes the franchise in a way I would never have imagined possible. In CG, the film can do things no amount of live-action trickery could ever hope to accomplish. Combat is smooth and fluid, and the lithe, natural movement of both turtles and enemies is a far cry from the bulky suits of previous films. Characters are able to leap off of buildings with the camera following them all the way down. There's never a missing angle in any fight scene. Filming a chase sequence is never limited by how or where the camera can or can't go.

Furthermore, the CG allows for character depth and development unheard of in the big latex suits, at least with regards to the turtles themselves (the original movie's Casey Jones is sorely missed). Facial expressions are no longer limited to a small handful of basic puppetry mechanics. When Leo and Raph fight on the rooftops, we can actually see the pain in their eyes. That scene in particular is stunningly gorgeous, as well. There truly is no poorly executed CG in *TMNT*.

Yet the film's excellence doesn't end there. While it looks amazing, it feels even better, because it was made for the older fans...the ones who grew up when the franchise meant something. Everything in the film is steeped in Ninja Turtles lore and history: the rivalry between Leonardo and Raphael, Mikey's enthusiasm and humor, the Foot Clan struggling to rebuild under Kirai's leadership after Shredder's defeat, Splinter's victory shrine (with Shredder's helmet and an empty canister of Ooze, no less), April and Casey, the music, the jokes, and so on.

Given how incredible the film is, it's unfortunate that the special features don't go beyond a few alternate/deleted scenes. The alternate opening absolutely should have been used. Likewise Mikey's extended birthday party sequence. There is also a short cast interview, which ends up being unimpressive, as most of the voice actors aren't terribly compelling—with the exception of Laurence Fishburne, but only because he's Laurence Fishburne. Thankfully, Kevin Munroe's director commentary to the actual movie is gold, and he reveals some fascinating details about the production process, particularly the methods behind the lighting design.

Between Monroe's commentary and the film itself, it's obvious that *TMNT* is a love letter to the fans from a fan. *TMNT* is certainly in my top 10 for both animated films and comic book movies, so in case you missed it, pick up a copy immediately. And if you have already seen it, pop it in again.

*Alex wants to believe in Terminators, Godzilla, and integrity in American politics, but unfortunately all three are entirely imaginary.*



## TMNT

**DVD Release Date:** August, 2007  
**Starring:** Chris Evans, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Mako, Mitchell Whitfield, James Arnold Taylor, Mikey Keley & Nolan North  
**Director:** Kevin Munroe  
**Screenwriter:** Kevin Munroe, based on characters by Peter Laird & Kevin Eastman  
**Rated:** PG  
**Number of Discs:** 1  
**Studio:** Warner Brothers  
**Special Features:** Commentary featuring writer/director Kevin Munroe; alternate opening & ending; deleted scenes; side-by-side comparison of storyboards and CGI; & cast interviews.

## Day by Day Armageddon, by J. L. Bourne

Book Review by Matthew Appleton

I'm a huge fan of apocalyptic fiction. Show me a story that deals with the end of the world and/or devastates humankind, and chances are good that I will read it. However, despite this proclivity of mine, I didn't really start enjoying zombie fiction until fairly recently, when I watched the 2004 remake of *Dawn of the Dead*. I'm not completely certain why the zombie-filled version of the apocalypse didn't appeal to me before then, but my best guess is that I've always been more of a SF lit snob and that my prejudices prevented me from really taking the time to check out this more fantastical end-of-the-world scenario. Things have changed a lot since then, and I now find myself reviewing my third zombie novel for *Some Fantastic*.

The conceit of J. L. Bourne's *Day by Day Armageddon* is that we witness this particular zombie apocalypse through a journal kept by a survivor of it. The journal actually starts out as a New Year's resolution—it's the type of goal that many of us (myself included) set at one point or another in our lives when a new year starts. But, imagine that within just a few weeks of embarking on this promise you made to yourself the zombie uprising begins. How would this affect your resolution? Would you persevere or give up in the interest of putting self-preservation first? If you do maintain it, would it read more as a play-by-play of how you've managed to survive or would it lean more towards reflections of what it's like to live in this apocalyptic world?

The answers to these questions would depend greatly on the type of person the survivor is. In the case of *Day by Day Armageddon*, it's an unnamed active-duty naval aviator (we never find out his name). Within a few days of the start of the new year, news reports out of China start talking about a strange new flu epidemic that local authorities cannot seem to contain (shades of Max Brooks's *World War Z*—apparently, China is the new bogeyman for lots of different things these days). Within a couple of short weeks, the flu has broken through to the United States. Our narrator, who, thanks to the information being spread through the military, senses that the news reports aren't capturing how dangerous the situation is, starts stockpiling in case of a pandemic that causes massive social unrest. The character has mili-

tary training and obvious conservative credentials—on the drive home from his parents' on New Year's, he listens to Fox News on the radio, and when he's thwarted in his attempts to stockpile ammunition, he initially blames "some kind of liberal law that [he] didn't know about causing the red tape" (p. 7) before conceding that it could just be worried gun shop owners trying to keep all their customers happy. Despite this, he disobeys orders to bunker down at a local airbase. Anyone who has seen the aforementioned *Dawn of the Dead* remake knows at that moment he saved his own life, though those who haven't seen that film will find out later when we receive confirmation that the base was likely overrun.

Before the end of January, the government announces through the Emergency Broadcast Network that it will commence nuclear attacks on a select list of major U.S. cities; it is a last-ditch effort to kill as many of the undead as possible, since that is where the highest concentrations of them exist. Unfortunately for our hero, he lives close enough to a selected site—San Antonio, TX—that he must flee to survive. This sets the tone for the rest of our novel; it's the first of many times he is forced to flee the location he has secured for his own safety. In fact, there's an almost episodic feel to the way this recurs repeatedly throughout the book; the narrator never gets to choose the moment to find a new location to call "home." Each new migration is the result of external forces, ones beyond his control.

Part of the reason he is able to survive despite the frequent need to flee is that the narrator is the type of resourceful hero you expect to find in genre fiction: smart, inventive, and wanting to do his best to save his community, however that might be defined at that particular given moment. In addition to figuring out that the original reports from China were not telling the real story, the narrator (as well as his friend John—the first other survivor he befriends) possesses an almost MacGyver-like ability to improvise new tools as needed. Furthermore, when the opportunity arises to save other survivors, he almost always does so.

This intelligence and resourcefulness make downright frustrating some of the moments in the narrative where a glaring, almost mind-numbingly

stupid thing is written. For example, near the end of the novel, he and the group of survivors he has gathered have bunkered down in a missile silo and are using military satellites to ascertain which major cities were in fact destroyed. (We learn during the course of events that many pilots and silo operators disobeyed orders to launch). After becoming used to the controls, our narrator notes that the satellites “didn’t seem to work above a certain longitude” (p. 157). Excuse me... longitude? This guy is a naval aviator, and he makes an error regarding longitude and latitude? I don’t know who really made the mistake: the narrator, the author, or the copy editor.

The type of narrative we’re given makes such errors even more inexcusable. *Day by Day Armageddon* is basically a straightforward action-adventure novel. We’re given plenty of detail about the preparation he and his growing gang of survivors undertake to deal with the zombies and plenty of detail when it comes to the various encounters with the undead. However, there’s very little contemplation or reflection on their plight as individuals, as a group, and as what’s left of humankind. Yes, our narrator expresses concerns over the plight of his parents in Arkansas, and he admits to feeling as though he is responsible for the gang of survivors, but introspection seems to little interest him. He does write things as such as “the dead are the lucky ones” (p. 47) and “I keep thinking... what is left to live for?” (p. 71). However, he rarely offers much reflection beyond these interjections, which is a shame because the narrator is capable of dark humor. For example, there’s one instance when he decides to kill a zombie that is otherwise not any sort of immediate threat:

“The creature looked horrible... It was wearing a long white apron with something written in blood... it read:

‘If you can read this kill me.’

“I smiled at this and thought to myself that I would have liked to have known this man when he was alive, as I appreciated his sense of humor. I slung my weapon to my shoulder and selected single shot. I then took aim, and shot stock-boy in the head. John gave me a ‘why did you do that?’ look, and I just glanced at him and said,

‘Professional courtesy my friend, professional courtesy.’” (p. 98)

This bit of dark humor is just one of many small touches that help make *Day by Day Armageddon* an enjoyable read. There’s one point early in the novel when the narrator and John use a car radio blaring *The Marriage of Figaro* to distract a zombie horde long enough to give them time to flee to safety. Not knowing anything about classical opera, I looked up *The Marriage of Figaro* on Wikipedia, and sure enough I found that it “is used as the regimental *slow march* of the Coldstream Guards of the British Army.”<sup>1</sup> (emphasis added) Bourne also provides a moment of pathos rarely found in this type of fiction when he has the narrator and John find the body of an older man who has killed himself. On his person, they find a suicide note that is both a love letter and a letter asking for the forgiveness of his undead spouse, whom he could not bring himself to kill (she’s locked in the basement of the same building) and whom he could not live his life without. Bourne also makes it a point to show that *Day by Day Armageddon* is in part of product of the new zombie age—some of them move faster (though they certainly aren’t moving as fast as their brethren in the *Dawn of the Dead* remake) and seem to show some signs of retaining intelligence. The reason is not clear, but it may have something to do with the radioactive fallout resulting from the nuclear strike. Hey, this is no more far-fetched than the scientific reason given for the origin of the zombies in David Wellington’s *Monster Nation*.

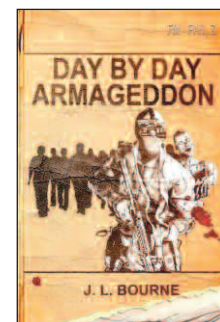
The final result is a fun-to-read, action-packed chase novel. It’s not necessarily cerebral horror, but if you’re looking for a pleasant way to kill an afternoon, *Day by Day Armageddon* will definitely entertain. There are a few weaknesses to the book, but that’s common in a lot of first novel efforts. As I’m

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### ***Day by Day Armageddon***

**Author:** J. L. Bourne  
**ISBN-10:** 0978970772  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0978970772  
**Publisher:** Permuted Press  
**Release date:** November, 2007

\$14.95, 212 pages, trade paperback



sure will be no surprise to most, this is the beginning of a series, complete with a teaser for the sequel at the end of book. Unfortunately, there's not much in the way of denouement to this particular part of the story—more than anything, the book ends at a rather convenient stopping point. It's a bit disappointing to have the story end abruptly, especially given the rather pessimistic view of humanity that accompanies the climax. So, it will be interesting to see as the story progresses whether the characters show more contemplation over their plight or this remains a

straightforward action-adventure book.

#### End Note

1. "The Marriage of Figaro," Wikipedia, 17 April 2008 (last revision). 27 April 2008 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage\\_of\\_figaro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage_of_figaro)>.

*Matthew Appleton is the co-editor of Some Fantastic. He has not yet begun preparations for the coming zombie apocalypse.*

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## **ParaSpheres: Extending Beyond the Spheres of Literary and Genre Fiction, edited by Rusty Morrison & Ken Keegan, & Portable Childhoods, by Ellen Klages**

*Book Reviews by Sara K. Ellis*

I've never understood the inane barriers imposed between genre and literary fiction: those self-proclaimed literati who take aim at genre's "trashy" adherence to convention, while leaping into a rose-scented garbage chute whose walls threaten to squeeze them into the even narrower standards of the *New Yorker* story. What I find most deplorable, however, is the tendency of some genre fans to buckle to their purported betters. When out and proud SF fans readily cough up disclaimers to their reading habits, usually with well-rehearsed paeans to the sentences of Paul Auster, I wonder, really, if they can remember high school. We never deferred to the tastes—certainly not the intellectual ones—of the exclusive back then, so why now, are we so ready to diss the very books that helped us survive those years—and those people—just to ingratiate ourselves to readers of food memoirs? If I may ven-

ture a disclaimer of my own: I adore Granta, but were Ursula K. Le Guin's genre monster to lope into my room with a branding iron, I'd happily bare my forehead.

In recent years, the fêted and the marginalized have been working, if not quite together, to pry the door open between these wrongly circumscribed territories. Literary authors, sick of categories themselves, have been wading unsteadily into genre's unconsecrated soil, while a few vanguard publishers have been clearing a space for fiction's red-headed stepchildren, stories belonging neither to Agni nor *Asimov's*. *ParaSpheres*, Omnidawn's collection of Fabulist and New Wave Fabulist fiction, is one such platform. With its 50 stories, the book's size alone could be the doorjamb that keeps these worlds open to one another. "I decry," writes Rikki Ducornet in the introduction, "the lethally misguided notion that like *suitable* ideas, the creative impulse must know and keep its place; that art and literature, like trousers and radishes, are no more than commodities."

The collection keeps this promise. There's nothing suitable or predictable at all about *ParaSpheres*, which is what I enjoyed most about it. The book leaves nothing out, and while some have called for more pruning in future anthologies, to do so would weaken its mission of inclusiveness—an aspect admirably more prevalent in genre than in literary publishing. With fewer constraints on length—and on the resumes of its contributors—*ParaSpheres* can put

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### **ParaSpheres: Extending Beyond the Spheres of Literary and Genre Fiction**

**Editors:** Rusty Morrison & Ken Keegan

**ISBN-10:** 1890650188

**ISBN-13:** 978-1890650186

**Publisher:** Omnidawn Publishing

**Release date:** June, 2006

\$19.95, 640 pages, trade paperback





heavyweights like Kim Stanley Robinson and Le Guin next to newcomers like Michael Constance, whose brilliant “Finding the Words” is his first published story, “if you don’t count the one that appeared in his high school newspaper.”

As with Constance’s story, words themselves are an ongoing motif in a book that contains Laura Mullen’s “English/History,” Rudy Rucker’s “The Jack Kerouac Disembodied Style of Poetics,” and a personal favorite, K. Bannerman’s “Armedgedn, or The End of the Word,” a story that reads like the world’s shortest rock opera, and in which the human race makes a truly unspeakable sacrifice in order to regain its voice. Another entry, which I was happy to see appear again, was Kim Stanley Robinson’s “Lucky Strike,” a damnation of the insidious, and ever-present, claims that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were inevitable. Robinson’s fictional revision is particularly relevant in light of the fact that the real events of August 1945 are being rewritten, not only by right-wing Americans, but ironically by Japan’s own educators, who, having decided that their students are too sensitive, have begun cutting it from their curricula.

Not all of the stories in this collection will be to your taste; however, that all depends on who you are. And, if there’s one story that, for me, carried out *ParaSpheres’* mission to push beyond classifications and make its readers rethink their prejudices, it was Angela Carter’s “The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe.” As a child I once enjoyed Poe’s stories, and the Vincent Price films, but as an adult I’d found him a bit of an hysteric, more maudlin than my grandmother. Yet Carter’s phantasmagorical biography, which traces the writer’s roots to the theater, brought a new depth to work I’d too quickly put aside: “So you say he overacts?” Carter writes. “Very well; he overacts. His mother was, as they say, born in a trunk, grease-paint in her bloodstream, and made her first appearance on any stage in her nightshirt in a hiss-the-villain melodrama entitled *Mysteries of the Castle*.” Wow. *ParaSpheres* doesn’t aim to convert but to shift our perspectives, if even just a little. It accomplishes this admirably.

Now, returning literature with a capital “L” as that great snubber of SF, and bloviator supreme, Sven Birkets likes to call it, while cramming for California’s gauntlet of teacher examinations last year, I picked up a wonderful primer on literary theory by

Professor Mary Klages. Klages’ *Guide for the Perplexed* managed to give a clear and engrossing overview of a subject so often accused of a willful opacity—no thanks to Sven. I’m starting the second half of this review with Mary, because until reading the afterword for *Green Glass Sea*, I was unaware that she and Ellen were sisters. Yet it all made sense. If anything, Ellen’s collection of short stories, *Portable Childhoods*, reads like a demonstration of Mary’s clarity and unbiased approach to literature.

As in *ParaSpheres*, many of the stories in *Childhoods* exist beyond the realm of classification, while skillfully evading the disingenuous tricks sometimes employed by literary writers who are out of ideas. The book can be likened to that motley collection of treasures you kept tucked away in a shoebox during childhood. Beginning with an excerpt from *Green Glass Sea*, Klages’ novel about two girls growing up in the shadow of the Trinity Project, *Childhoods* mixes impish humor with a world of pain. Like that kid who always tipped bottles of Elmer’s over in your desk, Klages’ “Intelligent Design,” a comment on the idiocy of the term itself, easily dispatches with the flimsy glue of creation science, while “Guys’ Day Out,” about an elderly father facing his own son’s descent into senility, drops you right back into the land of inequity: God’s boyhood fantasies create the world’s coolest bug collection in just seven days, but on earth, the acceleration and dilation of time turn arbitrary and brutally unjust.

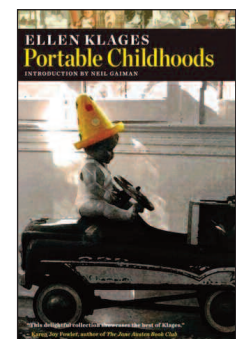
For queer readers, however, this book is a real delight; in particular, “Triangle,” which while giving much-needed attention to the treatment of homosexuals under Nazi rule is also a prickly peek at love and academe. Although the story has been criticized for a predictable twist ending, it’s funny how quickly such subject matter regains relevance in a shifting political climate. During the final years of the Clin-

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### *Portable Childhoods*

**Author:** Ellen Klages  
**ISBN-10:** 1892391457  
**ISBN-13:** 978-1892391452  
**Publisher:** Tachyon Publications  
**Release date:** April, 2007

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ton administration, I once laughed off the histrionics of Showtime's *Queer as Folk*, when along came Bush to make those clichés seem just like new. "Time Gypsy," Klages' lesbian time-travel thriller, is one of those joys you find yourself mentally casting while stuck in traffic—Todd Haynes to direct, of course.

"Childhood," Klages writes, is a time "of play... and freedom from responsibility" but also of "someone else's rules and supervision." She doesn't condemn the adults in her story—although one of them meets a horrible end—but she's great at showing how such restrictions are extensions of adults' own personal fears. "Flying Over Water's" liberating image of a girl defiantly ordering a Coke and fries, after telling her weight-vigilant mother that she's gone to "swim laps," could fish an unpleasant summer out of anyone's memory. There is also "Taste of Summer," a Bradbury-esque take on an ice cream shop, and "The Feed Bag," a poem about the diner Klages went to as a child. Klages grabs at that hallowed place, food and its surrounding rituals have in our memories, focusing not only on sights and flavors, but also on our memories of space: the "passionate liaison of our bodies, which do not forget," as Gaston Bachelard writes, with the "various functions of inhabiting a particular place.

"We sat in a booth./Or sometimes,/once or twice,/in the empty back room with chrome-rimmed tables/linoleum floor/

buzzing lights/and a secret passage to the underworld"

What truly stands out in Klages' characters, and which still sadly seems rare, is the unshared ease, rather than agony, with which they view these differences. So many stories featuring misfit kids often have obligatory detours showing them struggle to conform. Not so here, and thankfully not, for as anyone who's ever felt different knows, such secrets were more a cause for celebration than self-hate.

At their essence, the adults in Klages' stories reveal the same well-intentioned proselytizing we've come to expect from those who want to shoo us away from books they deem to be undeserving. Both feel genuinely threatened by sugary drinks and rocket stories, but their vigilance and assiduous adherence to the customary can keep others, not to mention themselves, from living full lives. To quote Klages, "Everything—and everyone—might be dangerous. Don't swallow your gum, cross Main Street, talk to strangers. Bad things could happen."

In *ParaSpheres* and *Portable Childhoods*, good things are a guarantee.

*Two years ago, Sara K. Ellis repatriated after 13 years of Tokyo trains. She now lives behind the Orange curtain where she co-publishes the reverse culture-shock 'zine, The Bleeder.*

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## **Rex Libris: I, Librarian, Volume 1, by James Turner**

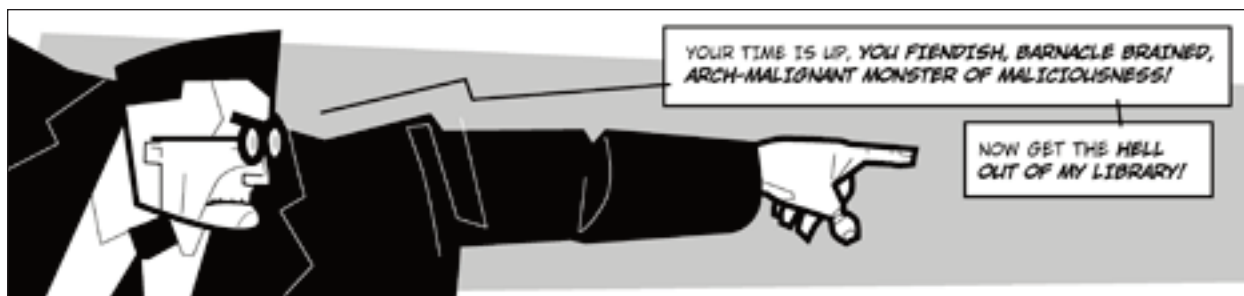
*Graphic Novel Review by Hawk*

Being a librarian isn't as easy as it seems. It's not all shushing rowdy patrons and making sure books are reshelfed properly, as Rex Libris, head librarian at Middleton Public Library, well knows. Some days it's about chasing despotic warlords across the galaxy to get books returned, or about destroying demon samurai who are destroying library property.

*Rex Libris: I, Librarian*, written & drawn by James Turner (*Nil: A Land Beyond Belief*) revolves around Rex Libris, who used to work in the Library of Alexandria. Through various machinations, Rex watches his beloved library burn and vows to never forget. Two-thousand years later, he works at the

Middleton Public Library run by the mysterious Library Administrator. Rex & the Library Administrator have assembled a library to rival Alexandria, where demons, aliens, and everyday people come to check out books ranging from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* to *Demon Samurai and How to Defeat Them*.

Rex is a member of the Ordo Bibliotheca. Haven't heard of them? That's because it's a secret librarian organization, dedicated to training librarians to protect knowledge, retrieve books, and add to the library collection. Want to keep your library book out an extra few weeks without renewing it? The librarians of Middleton Public Library will track you down, and—if you're lucky—you'll only pay a fine.



Joining Rex at the library are Simonides (an immortal turned into a bird), Circe (yes *that* Circe), and Hypatia (newly graduated from Ordo Bibliotheca training). Together they ~~fight crime~~ check out books, visit outer space, find patrons lost in the stacks, defend the library from Vandals, and keep Simonides in line.

I picked up *Rex Libris* on a whim, very much wanting to like it. My day job is very similar to library work, and I always want to support anyone doing comics about libraries. Unfortunately, it was difficult for me to get into this graphic novel.

James Turner creates all his art using Adobe Illustrator. It's a very distinctive—and consistent—style. Illustrator can be a difficult program to use, and he uses it with skill. However, it lacks the warmth one finds when something is created by hand. I am not a fan of blocky art styles; I consider them too clunky, and it diminishes my enjoyment of the writing if I can't enjoy the art.

In addition, the storylines are too cluttered. We are introduced to the Library Administrator, see Rex have various interactions with library patrons, meet the publisher of Rex's book about his life, and are introduced to Rex's backstory—all in the first issue. Issues 2-5 are a bit less cluttered; however, Turner has quite a few storylines running through the issues, most of which are not resolved or truly explained by the end of this graphic novel.

While there are some very humorous gems in *Rex Libris: I, Librarian*, such as "Take what you wish my minions, but the bird seed *is mine!*" Another great exchange between Rex and Hypatia is "These buttertarts brim with the *very calories of Evil!* **Inexorably** drawing me in to a carbohydrate-fueled hell of high caloric **sin!**" "You don't **have** to eat them you know." "Oh, that's right (**MUNCH MUNCH!**) Take the buttertarts side, why don'tcha?" However, more often than not, the writing is less invigorating and more stilted. There were quite a few times where I

### Editorial: It Was Frodo, with the Ring, at Mordor

From the famous Hugo-winning fanzine *Who Killed Science Fiction?* up through the portions of Gardner Dozois's *Year's Best* annual summations where he addresses the overall health of the field (not to mention the consistently falling circulation figures for the big three magazines), there's been no shortage of discussions over the years about the state/health of the genre. From my perspective, however, it hasn't seemed to be such a big deal as I never seemed to have problems finding plenty of good SF... That is until the *Lord of the Rings* movie adaptations hit the big screen.

(Just to be clear, for the sake of this editorial, SF is referring solely to science fiction—insert your favorite definition of the genre here.)

At first, I understood (and found amusement in) the fact that Tolkein and books related to his work suddenly took up shelves of space at bookstores. It was a cash cow that booksellers would have been stupid to ignore. As a result, the amount of new SF on the shelves took a nosedive—after all, all that space used by Tolkein and those cashing in on him had to come from somewhere. However, something very disconcerting seems to have happened since the four-disc extended *Return of the King* DVD box set sales finally slowed: as Tolkein's presence at bookstores started to wane (though it's still well above where it was before the films), SF's continued to

*(continued on next page)*

#### *Rex Libris: I, Librarian, Vol. 1*

##### Writer & Illustrator:

James Turner

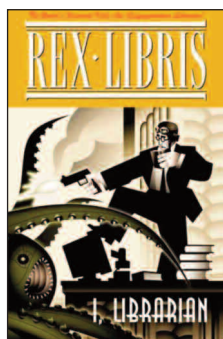
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## Editorial: Frodo, the SF Slayer

(continued from previous page)

wane as well. In it's place, more fantasy and horror marketed as dark fantasy.

Mind you, this is a very unscientific observation, based solely on my impression of what I see in bookstores and not checked against the "Books Received" and "Upcoming Releases" lists published by *Locus*—or even their yearly review of published book numbers. Nonetheless, it seems clear to me that Sam and Frodo didn't just destroy the ring while in Mordor; they somehow struck a blow against SF as well.

I base this observation on the sheer volume of fantasy/dark fantasy series that seem to line Science Fiction/Fantasy section at my local Borders. Don't get me wrong, you can still find good, new SF on those shelves, but it's in smaller quantities and almost buried by a growing list of series that seem to share a common theme: there are supernatural creatures that lives amongst us, known only to a few humans, and it's thanks only to the ceaseless efforts of many of those humans and a few of those creatures that the general human populace doesn't know—which is a good thing given that the relatively peaceful co-existence is ready to collapse at any given moment.

Given that publishers are ultimately following the money trail, what does this trend say about the average genre reader? Or, does this have more to do with what the reading public in general wants? In particular, is interest in SF truly on the wane or is this just a type of fluctuation in reading tastes that occurs occasionally? If interested is decreasing, what type of future does SF have? Or, am I just seeing a pattern where one doesn't really exist?

I have nothing against fantasy and horror—hell, I think that's obvious based on the titles, including the one in this issue, I've reviewed for *Some Fantastic*. However, good SF is what made me a fan of speculative fiction as a whole, and I don't want to believe that SF is becoming a marginalized genre again (I will leave the discussion of whether SF truly left the ghetto for another time). Hopefully, either I'm just seeing things or this is just part of a cyclical pattern. Only time will tell.

In other news, *Some Fantastic* will migrate to a new web domain over the course of the next six months. If you have the website bookmarked in your web browser, please redirect it to "somefantastic.org". Also, a quick word of congratulations to both Christopher J. Garcia & Steven H Silver for their respective Hugo nominations. Both have made contributions to *Some Fantastic* over the past few years, and I hope they continue to do so.

— Matthew Appleton

read something that I understood was meant to be funny but that just came across as tired.

*Rex Libris: I, Librarian* is a diamond in the rough. If you enjoy stylized art and don't mind picking through some chaff to find the humorous gems, I would recommend this graphic novel. Just make sure you return it on time, if you check it out from your local library. You don't want Rex or his crew to have to come after you with their semiautomatic Beretta M92F pistols to get it back.

*Rex Libris* has some bad language, but is suitable for most ages. Slave Labor Graphics publishes this as an ongoing comic series.

*Hawk lives in California with her husband, where she spends almost too much of her time reading comics. When not fulfilling her addiction, she can be found reading books, hiking, researching, or enjoying non-computer gaming. She comes down on the side of the Ordo Bibliotheca and firmly believes that you should return your books on time or be hunted down like a rabid dog.*

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## SOME FANTASTIC

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