



The View from Space on the Beach - St. Heliers at Sunset
(Photo by Jacqui Smith—who borrowed Keith's camera.)

Issue XXIV - Feb 2012

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Musings from Under the Mountain

It may surprise some of you to learn that our son Paul started secondary school last week. He's going to Onehunga High, and he was quite nervous about it, mainly because he had heard that the bullies were worse in high school. However, he got into a good class, he's happy, he's making new friends, the bullies are somewhere else, and the only thing that's worrying him now is the prospect of more homework getting between him and his computer. Which has resided in the corner of the upstairs lounge since the renovations, and this wasn't a problem until recently. Now, thanks to something called "Steam" we're suffering a running commentary, because he can chat to his friends while they play games. Very irritating. Isn't technology wonderful?

Or not. Keith and I went along to the Barbara's Books closing-down sale, and we had a bit of a chat about the book business. The big book-store chains are in trouble, and hard-working independent retailers like Barbara's can't survive. Why? It's not that people have stopped reading. It's that they're reading differently. Barbara talked about how people are turning to e-books, which can be down-loaded cheaply and easily (and often for free, if you're happy to read books that weren't published yesterday—plenty of good SF there). I said I prefer real paper books. That I buy books on-line from the great South American river... though I must admit that I'm less inclined to do so, now that they're charging for shipping. And we were purchasing cookery books and such. For my SF reading, I get books for review from Hatchett, or borrow them from the Library. But others are buying their SF on-line. Because it's easy.

Because it's cheap. A typical paperback is \$US8 on-line—\$NZ12 plus shipping. A lot less than the \$24-\$28 on the retail shelves here. Part of that is not having to pay that 15% GST—and you have to wonder if the politicians intended to ruin the local retail industry, or simply lacked the foresight to see what would happen. Either way, we'll mourn Barbara's Books, and all the other small retailers forced out of business by technology.

Jacqui

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The View from the Comfy Chair

Flowers, flowers and more flowers. The sunflowers have given their all (their seeds collected for next year) so I guess I'm going to have to replace them, but they looked nice while they lasted. But the other planters are full with colour.

The ground is coming along okay too. With both Slooh scopes out of action (Canary because of ice and snow, Chile because of a technical issue) I had no excuse not to get into the garden and do stuff. I've already started lifting the patio stones (which I haven't seen for over ten years) to remove the remnants of the weeds underneath then re-lay them properly with plastic underneath to stop the weeds getting through. Mind you, the more I dig the more archaeology I seem to be uncovering. Found an old concrete path under where the raised garden is going, which is going to have to come out. And why is there a long concrete block in the ground parallel to that path? Still, the dream of having a proper garden is starting to become a reality.

Speaking of dreams, you know you have watched too much Top Gear when you dream that the latest challenge is to convert cars into rockets and go to the moon and back. As they say, "How hard can it be?" Some of the details are hazy, but I do remember extensive damage to the International Space Station (or was it Mir?) when the docking challenge went wrong. Only one of the rockets managed to make it out of Earth orbit, (Clarkson's converted Toyota), go around the moon and return only to burn up on re-entry. Mind you, the unexpected Dalek attack may have had something to do with the problems the other presenters had. They ended up blowing the Dalek out the airlock and ramming it, probably with Hammond's Reliant Robin. It was floating away with the top blown off the last time it was seen. No sign of the Tardis though. And the last that was seen of May's rocket was it went off in totally the wrong direction and was slowly heading towards Mars ... or was it Jupiter?

This month has seen the demise of Barbara's Books but the opening of the Retrospace store in Takapuna. Let's hope this venture succeeds as they compete against online purchasing over the internet. Mind you, it's easier to get books from overseas rather than toys, owing to some weird overseas shipping laws I don't understand. Online shopping and e-books have seen the demise of retail book selling. Good luck Retrospace.

I'm hoping to organise guest speakers for upcoming club meetings so, if anyone has any ideas please let me know. I'm hoping to get hold of the Victorian Steampunk people, the cos-players, the Romans, Outpost 51 (for Star Wars) and roleplaying groups to talk to us and tell us what they are about and what they are up to. See you at the next event and meeting.

Keith
President

A Science Fiction Guide to Swearing

by Jacqui Smith

I've seen Mythbusters episode 142, I know that using those naughty words really does seem to help humans tolerant pain. Given that fact, it's reasonable that people in the future will need some swearing to get through the trials and tribulations of life in outer space. But language changes, and slanguage changes faster. What was rude a hundred years ago is innocuous now, and words which are offensive now probably won't be at some point in the future. So, what's a writer to do?

Well, traditionally SF writers do one of two things—they either don't have their characters swear (Asimov skirted the issue by using "unprintable" as a cuss word) or they invent new swear words for them. This has the additional advantage that their characters can swear black and blue without offending the censor (or readers of a gentle disposition—like me).

There are three approaches to the invention of slang.

1. Alter an existing swear-word to reflect change over time. Thus we get the many variations upon the "F" word found in SF TV dramas.
2. Adopt an existing word and give it a new and naughtier meaning. Curiously, the word "smeg" in Red Dwarf does not derive from smegma or the Italian appliance company—series creator Grant Naylor claims he never knew either meaning when he first used the word, just that it sounded like it ought to be a future swear word.
3. Make it up. Generally this is the best technique, though it's worthwhile checking the dictionary and wikipedia first (see above). It has given us some wonderfully wrong words—like "Shazbot!" from "Mork & Mindy" (which Robin Williams probably invented himself).

Of course, the big advantage for fans is that we get a whole vocabulary of interesting new cuss words to play with and swear with, without offending anyone. It's certainly more colourful than the practice of using the same words (usually the "F" word) for adjective, noun and verb that the more linguistically impoverished denizens of our society insist upon. That said, some of these words have made their way into the urban dictionary, and even into common parlance. Is that a bad thing? I don't think so.

Slanguage in SF Quiz

1. The "Tintin" character Captain Haddock curses colourfully and almost continuously. Which of these phrases does he use most often?
 - A. Blistering Barnacles!
 - B. Blundering Bobbleheads!
 - C. Buccaneering Bedbugs!
 - D. Butchering Bumblebees!
2. Which of these euphemisms for the "F" word is commonly used in "Babylon 5"?
 - A. Frag
 - B. Frak
 - C. Frek
 - D. Frimp

3. In which SF TV series might you hear the expletives "frelling brazma", "shliznat", "trankass" and many other creative terms?

- A. Andromeda
- B. Blake's 7
- C. Farscape
- D. Lexx

4. "Finagle" may or may not be another word for the Deity, but he certainly has many parts, all good for swearing by. In whose works will you find him?

- A. Isaac Asimov
- B. Larry Niven
- C. Robert Heinlein
- D. A.E. Van Vogt

5. The phrase "great Caesar's ghost" is most commonly associated with which comic book character?

- A. Emil Hamilton
- B. Jimmy Olson
- C. Pete Ross
- D. Perry White

6. According to www.urbandictionary.com, a "dunsel" is a part on a ship that has no use – and a useful insult.

Which SF series gave us this word?

- A. Babylon 5
- B. Battlestar Galactica
- C. Lost in Space
- D. Star Trek

7. The name of which country is a profanity forbidden throughout the Milky Way in the "Hitch-hikers Guide to the Galaxy"?

- A. Bangladesh
- B. Belgium
- C. Bulgaria
- D. Burundi

8. In which fantasy world is "Goohulog" used as a Trollish swearword?

- A. Discworld
- B. Forgotten Realms
- C. Middle Earth
- D. Xanth

9. "There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch" abbreviated as TANSTAAFAL was popularised in which Heinlein novel?

- A. Red Planet
- B. Starship Troopers
- C. Stranger in a Strange Land
- D. The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress

10. The name of which household appliance is used to describe a cylon in "Battlestar Galactica" and a robot in "The Middleman"?

- A. Blender
- B. Kettle
- C. Teasmaid
- D. Toaster



by
Keith
Smith

The Sky at Night – March 2012

I don't know how many people are actually reading these articles but, if you are, and you have questions about astronomy, please send them in and I'll try to answer them. Or if you have ideas for entire articles, I'd like to hear about them. After all, I'm trying to convey my enthusiasm for the night sky and hopefully spark off some curiosity. Trouble is, with all this stray light around the place, even when there's hardly any clouds in the sky, it's hard to fully appreciate what the night sky really looks like. One needs to travel a fair distance from city lights in order to see what a proper dark sky looks like. Local councils should be controlling where lights are shining in order so that power isn't being wasted.

Anyway, we may be losing one bright planet in the evening sky, but we gain two more. Jupiter is low in the west, but Mars and Saturn (in that order) will be rising in the east, mid to late evening. Saturn's rings are also well tilted so the planet makes a striking sight in telescopes. Venus is also low in the west and, around the 14th, will be shining very close to Jupiter. Meanwhile Mercury is acting as a morning star. By the end of the month, Venus will be there as well.

The Southern Cross is roughly at the 9 o'clock position with the bright star Canopus high overhead. This puts Carina and that area of the Milky Way nearly overhead. Since the Cross is lying on a side, the left most star is now at the bottom. Very close to that, just below it is a fainter star. This isn't actually a star, but is actually the Jewel Box cluster (NGC4755), a magnificent sight in binoculars or a small telescope. Under a dark sky the Milky Way will stand out and a dark hole can be seen to the lower right of the cross (lower left when it is standing up as per the flag). This is not a hole but it is a dark patch of nebulosity called the Coal Sack. Going up towards Canopus and halfway between the Southern Cross and the False Cross are two brighter patches in the Milky Way. The one to the left is the Eta Carina nebula (NGC3372) and the one to the right is the Theta Carina Cluster (IC2602), sometimes known as the Southern Pleiades.

Orion has moved to the western sky but is still relatively high. Canis Major, along with Sirius is also

overhead but a bit further north than Canopus. An open cluster (M41) can be seen with the naked eye in the body of the dog, located a quarter of the way towards the back legs from Sirius. Another open cluster that can be seen is the Beehive Cluster (M44) in Cancer which can be found by following the line through Castor and Pollux, the two bright stars in Gemini. Gemini is due north with Leo (accompanied by Mars) rising in the east. Virgo (with Saturn) isn't too far behind.

Events:

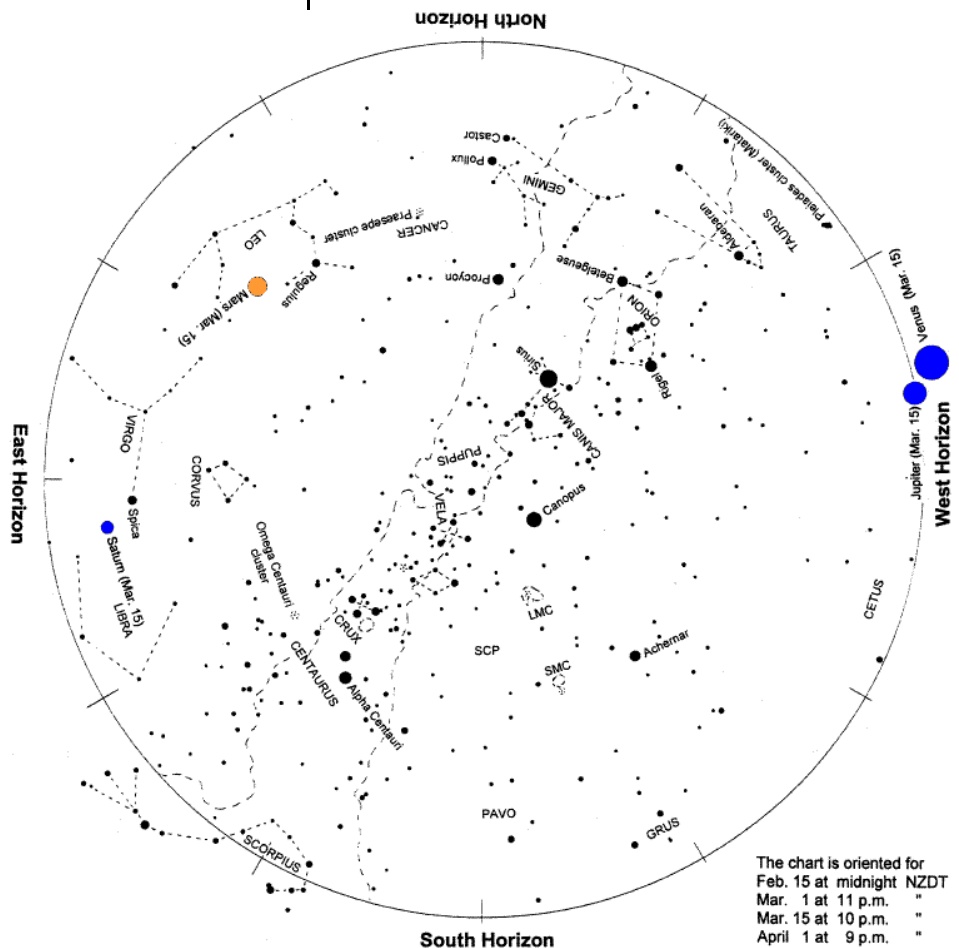
- First Quarter Moon: 1st March
- Full Moon: 8th March
- Last Quarter Moon: 15th March
- New Moon: 23rd March
- First Quarter: 31st March

Mars reaches opposition on the 4th and will be at its closest to Earth on the 6th.



Jewel Box Jewellery?

(Actually it's a Christmas tree ornament, and I am so going to have to figure out how to make one—Ed.)



The chart is oriented for
Feb. 15 at midnight NZDT
Mar. 1 at 11 p.m. "
Mar. 15 at 10 p.m. "
April 1 at 9 p.m. "

Obituaries

January 1

Bob Anderson, (aged 89), British Olympic fencer (1952) who went to Hollywood and became a film fight director and choreographer, teaching stars from Errol Flynn to Mark Hamill to wield a sword. This was the man who taught the Jedi to use their light sabres and make it look good—he even wore the Vader suit in the fight scenes. He was sword master for numerous movies including “Highlander”, “The Princess Bride”, “The Three Musketeers”, “The Mask of Zorro”, “Pirates of the Caribbean” and “The Lord of the Rings” film trilogy—and most recently “The Hobbit”.



January 5

Richard Alf, (aged 59), American businessman, a former comic shop owner who became co-founder and chairman of San Diego Comic-Con International in 1970. Now attracting over 125,000 attendees this is way the biggest genre convention anywhere, much bigger than World-Con. Go figure.

January 6

John Celardo, (aged 93), American comic strip artist who drew Tarzan and Buz Sawyer, both widely syndicated in hundreds of newspapers across multiple countries.



January 12

Reginald Hill, (aged 75), British crime writer best known for the “Dalziel and Pascoe” novels (made into the TV series).

January 14

Arfa Karim, (aged 16), Pakistani student and computer prodigy, world's youngest Microsoft Certified Professional from 2004 to 2008. She was invited to visit with Bill Gates and when she suffered a major epileptic seizure he instructed the doctors to do everything they could to save her—but it wasn't enough. Sad really—who knows what she could have achieved.

January 16

The Senator, (aged ~3,500) Pond cypress in Florida, which was the world's fifth oldest known tree. It was destroyed by a fire which started high in the hollow tree, probably the result of lightning.



January 22

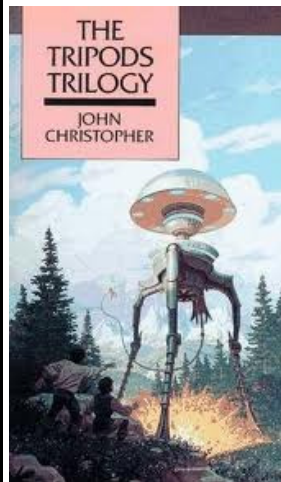
Dick Tufeld, (aged 85), American voice actor and announcer, who narrated a number of the Irwin Allen TV dramas, and was the voice of Robot B-9 on Lost in Space. Best known for the phrase: “Danger, Will Robinson!!”

January 25

Jean Wells, (aged 56), American game designer, edited a number of notorious D&D modules including “White Plume Mountain” and “Keep on the Borderlands”.

January 26

Ian Abercrombie, (aged 77), British actor who emigrated to the US and played numerous supporting roles in many films and TV shows including “Army of Darkness”, “Star Wars: the Clone Wars” (as Palpatine), “Seinfeld”, “Wizards of Waverly Place”, and even “Babylon 5”. His last major role was as the voice of Ambrose in “Rango”.



February 2

Samuel Youd, (aged 89), aka **John Christopher** British science fiction author, mainly of young adult novels. He was best known for “The Tripods” trilogy - which was partially made into a TV series by the BBC (I've never forgiven them for not finishing the job; they never made the “Pool of Fire”). He also wrote adult SF including the novel “The Death of Grass” which was well ahead of its time—the idea of a mutated wheat virus destroyed the world's crops is scarily possible.

February 2

Florence Green, (aged 110), British supercentenarian, last known veteran of World War I—she was not a combatant, but a teenaged waitress in the Women's Royal Air Force.

February 6

Janice E. Voss, (aged 55), American astronaut who flew as a mission specialist on five space shuttle missions, jointly holding the record for American women.



February 12

John Severin, (aged 90), American comic book artist noted for his distinctive work with EC Comics, primarily on the war comics Two-Fisted Tales and Frontline Combat; for Marvel Comics, especially its war and Western comics; and for his 45-year stint with the satiric magazine Cracked. He was one of the founding cartoonists of Mad in 1952.

Compiled by Jacqui Smith



Directed by Chris Miller
 Produced by Latifa Ouau & Joe M. Aguilar
 Written by Tom Wheeler, David H. Steinberg
 Brian Lynch
 Narrated by Antonio Banderas
 Starring Antonio Banderas, Salma Hayek
 Zach Galifianakis, Billy Bob Thornton
 Amy Sedaris, Zeus Mendoza
 Constance Marie, Guillermo del Toro

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

If you expect to see anything resembling Perrault's 1697 fairy tale of *Le Chat Botté* (as in the original Mother Goose stories) in the Dreamworks version, then you're in for a rude shock. "Puss in Boots" is thoroughly Hispanic American, set both culturally and geographically far from late medieval Europe, somewhere in the dry and dusty deep west of the USA. But Hollywood has been re-inventing characters from myth, legend and fairy tale since long before Disney gave "Snow White" a make-over in 1937 (he did a "Puss in Boots" short in 1922). The Shrek spin-off was originally intended as a straight-to-DVD cheapie, but I'm glad it got the big budget upgrade., because it's a fun ride.

It explores the childhood of the orphaned Puss, and his relationship with Humpty Dumpty (from a nursery rhyme, originally a riddle) who begins as his childhood friend, then leads him into crime, and becomes his nemesis. Puss gets a lady love named Kitty Galore (see Goldfinger's Pussy Galore) chases after Jack and Jill (nursery rhyme) to get the magic beans, grows Jack's Beanstalk (English folk tale), to a castle in the clouds to steal the Goose that lays the Golden Eggs (Aesop's Fables). It's quite a romp as you might expect, steals from all sorts of sources and it all ends happily ever after—as indeed it should (and the studio is no doubt happy with the profits). There will no doubt be a sequel.

Directed by Steven Spielberg
 Produced by Peter Jackson & Steven Spielberg
 Screenplay by Steven Moffat, Edgar Wright, Joe Cornish
 Based on The Adventures of Tintin by Hergé
 Starring Jamie Bell, Andy Serkis, Daniel Craig
 Music by John Williams
 Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

It has to be said that's quite a list of talent—I even recognise the name of the script writer, because he does Doctor Who. There's even more names to recognise if you hang around for the end credits, Norman Cates among them. Weta Workshop have surpassed themselves with this one—the motion capture animation is amazing, skirting the edge of that "uncanny valley" (according to some critics falling right over the edge), and simultaneously neatly capturing the style of Hergé's artwork. The plot is essentially based around "The Secret of the Unicorn" (1943) and "Red Rackham's Treasure" (1944) with elements of "The Crab with the Golden Claws" (1941). It's a matter of opinion whether or not the movie does justice to its source material, but nonetheless it's still a hugely entertaining roller coaster of a movie, proceeding at almost to rapid a pace. You have to love the climactic battle of the dock cranes! I will only complain that the 2-D print we saw had a streak down the middle on one reel which was particularly distracting in the desert scenes. Not good enough, Event Cinemas Manukau!

The strangest thing is that "Tintin" won the Golden Globe for Best Animated Feature, yet it isn't in the nomination list for the Academy Awards (which includes "Kung Fu Panda 2"). What are the Academy thinking? That said, there is a nomination for John William's splendid music. Well done, that composer man!





Directed by Martin Scorsese
 Screenplay by John Logan
 Based on "The Invention of Hugo Cabret" by Brian Selznick
 Starring Asa Butterfield, Ben Kingsley, Chloë Grace Moretz, Sacha Baron Cohen, Ray Winstone, Emily Mortimer, Christopher Lee and Jude Law

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

I must begin by thanking Maree for the two pairs of 3-D glasses she handed us at the January club meeting, because as it turned out, we needed them. By the last week of the school holidays "Hugo" was only available in 3-D so Paul and I had no choice. Not such a bad thing really, because Scorsese's masterpiece is apparently one of a handful of 3-D movies to truly exploit the medium, justifying paying those extra pennies (see <http://realvision.ae/blog/2012/01/hugo-deep-staging-and-keyframing-comes-to-3d-movies/> for the technical explanations why this is so).

"Hugo" is a movie-lovers movie, a must-see movie, but the theatre was mostly empty. People aren't going to see it. Which didn't stop it earning a Golden Globe for Martin Scorsese as Best Director, and a nomination for Best Picture at the Academy Awards. The critics loved it—but it has yet to make its budget back at the box office. Part of the problem is that it isn't what it says on the tin. The previews suggested that it was a steampunk fantasy children's movie—but it isn't a fantasy, it isn't especially steampunk, and it isn't really for children in spite of having child protagonists. And maybe the parents are scared off by the fact that it is a Scorsese movie and he has this reputation....

What "Hugo" is in reality, is a beautifully filmed paean of praise to the movie, set in Paris in 1931, mostly in and around the Montparnasse railway station. Hugo is an orphaned child with a gift for mechanisms—inherited from his father who was himself a clockmaker. He is adopted by his inebriate uncle, who is responsible for maintaining the clocks at the railway station. The uncle disappears, leaving Hugo to keep all the clocks running on time, while evading the station master. In his spare moments, Hugo learns the art of clockwork from a toy-maker and attempts to repair his sole inheritance from his father, a remarkable automaton. When he succeeds in getting it to work with the aid of Isabelle, god-daughter of the toy-maker, the automaton draws a image which will surprise you, and yet be utterly familiar (at least it was to me). At that leads to yet more discoveries... and happy endings for everyone, including the grumpy station master.

I don't do arty movies, but I really enjoyed this film and I do strongly suggest that you go to "Hugo" - or at least get the DVD, which is apparently to be released ahead of schedule, in a hope to recoup the movie's budget (though you'll miss out on the clever 3-D stuff). Paul liked it, though he complained there wasn't enough action. This in spite of a magnificent dream sequence involving the famous 1895 Gare Montparnasse railway derailment—wherein a train over-ran its buffers and crashed through the station façade (yes, this really happened and here's the picture to prove it).



Reviewed by Raewyn

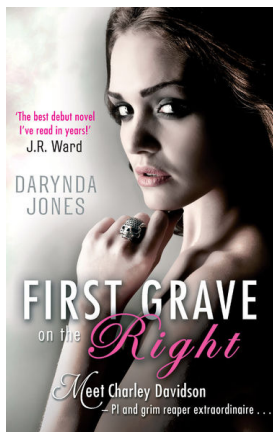
"Hugo" is set in Paris with all the signage in French, but all the characters speak English throughout. It has a great cool automaton which needs repair. What it does is one of the mysteries of the storyline—no spoilers here. There's a great scene with the famous train accident where the train came out onto a street from above. There's steam engines and clockwork, but this is not steampunk. A fun romance, a nice story, suitable for old ladies etc. Very enjoyable.

Quiz Answers:

1. A. Blistering Barnacles!.
2. A. Frag
3. C. Farscape
4. B. Larry Niven
5. D. Perry White
6. D. Star Trek
7. B. Belgium
8. A. Discworld
9. D. The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress
10. D. Toaster

**First Grave on the Right:
Charley Davidson Book 1**

by Darynda Jones
Published by Piatkus
Supplied by Hatchette
Reviewed by Jan Butterworth



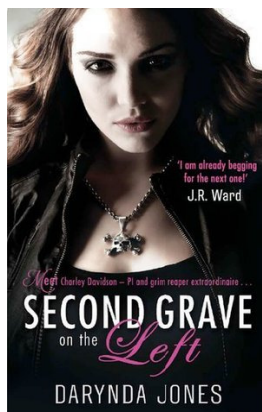
Charley Davidson is shiny, very shiny. She doesn't sparkle though. She is the portal spirits must travel through to reach the entrance to Heaven, (aka The Grim Reaper). Her seeing dead people also helps her homicide detective uncle have a high solved rate on murder cases – it's much easier to figure out who the murderer is if you can just ask the victim who killed them!

Three lawyers have been murdered and they turn to Charley to find who their killer is and help them get justice. She has a dead assistant, Angel, and a live assistant, Cookie, who help solve these cases. Also popping up is Garret, a bounty hunter frenemy, and The Entity, a dream lover who is appearing more frequently. Charley discovers he may not be a ghost after all...

First Grave on the Right is action-packed, fast-paced, hilarious, has some hot sex scenes, and is very hard to put down. Read it when you want some light-hearted, mindless enjoyment. Charley is a great character, a cross between a competent Stephanie Plum and a Betsy the Vampire Queen minus the shoe obsession. This is an impressive debut novel. The writing is smart, fun, and moves quickly. I'm looking forward to finding out what Charley does next.

**Second Grave on the Left:
Charley Davidson Book 2**

by Darynda Jones
Published by Piatkus
Supplied by Hatchette
Reviewed by Jan Butterworth



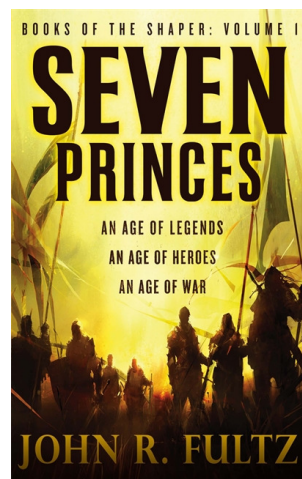
The second in the Charley Davidson series, this book carries on with the fantastic blending of chicklit, mystery, and urban fantasy. With fast paced action, a hot love interest, and witty humour, this series is a must read! The ending of the book is perfect, setting the scene for the third book and leaving me wanting more...

A week after "First Grave" finished, Charley is dragged out of bed at 2am to meet with Cookie's missing friend, Mimi. When Mimi doesn't show, they start investigating and find a group of people that knew each other in high school twenty years ago are turning up missing or dead. As well as that case, Charley's retired police detective dad is receiving threats from a recently released prisoner, and Cookie has a dead guy in the boot (trunk) of her car. Reyes, the sexy son of Satan, appears covered in blood and badly wounded. Demons who have escaped hell are holding his corporeal body captive and torturing it, hoping to lure Charley out so they can capture her and the portal to heaven. Charley is determined to find and save him, though Reyes warns her it's a trap. Reyes

doesn't want to be saved though, he'd rather die than let them have Charley, so has hidden his body from her. The original characters are back, with a few intriguing additions. One is Amador Sanchez, Reyes' school-friend and cellmate. They used Reyes' fan clubs to build a nest egg and play the stock market to create a good life for Amador and his wife Bianca. They are the only people who know all about 'Dutch'. Officer Owen Vaughn also shows up. He hates Charley and in high school tried to run her down with an SUV. Why?

**Seven Princes:
Books of the Shaper
Volume 1**

by John R. Fultz
Published by Orbit
Supplied by Hatchette
Reviewed by Jan Butterworth



There's a hell of a lot happening in this first volume of a new fantasy series, and apart from a couple of reasonably brief slow spots, it moves along at a very brisk pace. 'Seven Princes' is a dark fantasy saga that's epic in scope, and at times reads like a big-budget action film unfolding. ...But don't let that analogy put you off, it's not nearly as overblown or daft as the average Michael Bay summer blockbuster.

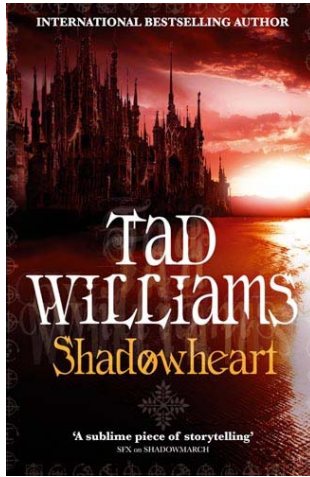
All the classic elements are here: Heroic warriors & black-hearted villains; Legendary creatures; Magic & sorcery; Romance, war & betrayal; Triumph & tragedy. And blood-soaked carnage on a grand scale... Yep, there's a very high body count in this book, and not just among the supporting cast. No one's safe in this story, as the author's not at all afraid to kill off important main characters in order to advance the plot. That was a refreshing change, and I found myself really surprised at a couple of characters' unexpected early exits.

John Fultz is apparently a writer of comics, and that probably explains the cinematic style of the narrative at times. That's not a criticism though - it suits the story he's telling and certainly keeps things moving forward. Seven Princes is Fultz's first novel, and occasionally that shows, mainly in the pacing, and in not getting to know some of the characters or places as much as we should. There's enough happening in Seven Princes to comfortably fill a couple of novels, and it would have been nice to see the story given at least another couple of hundred pages or so, just to let the world and it's characters breathe a little more deeply.

But all that aside, Fultz is a storyteller who knows how to spin a good yarn. Sure, it mightn't be the most original fantasy story around (if such a thing even exists) but it uses the familiar elements well, and it's an entertaining read. Seven Princes won't be to everyone's tastes, but if you don't mind your heroic fantasy sprinkled with horror and seasoned with graphic & gory violence, then this is definitely worth a look.

**Shadowheart:
Shadowmarch Book 4**

by Tad Williams
Published by Orbit
Supplied for by Hachette
Reviewed by Cassie Craig



Shadowheart is the last book of the series Shadowmarch. I haven't read the preceding three novels in this Epic fantasy. It was a little hard going reading the synopsis but despite this I was able to plunge ahead and engross myself in the magical world that Tad Williams has created. Now I am left with the urge to read the rest of the Shadowmarch series.

The tyrant ruler of the south has suddenly left his siege at Hierosol to sail around to the Southmarch kingdom with grandiose plans to unlock the sleeping gods. And being a tyrant means people fear him and hastily bend to do whatever he demands no matter that outcome or how gross the requests are.

Big bad fairies become allies with humans, these are not Tinkerbell type fairies but big dangerous and scary looking who actually love to eat humans and who were at war with them previously. In this war are underground folk called Funderlings who live under the Southmarch castle and little Tom Thumb folk who can command birds as their trusty steeds. Meanwhile the tyrant still has the Southmarch king captive so his children, the Prince and Princess are on a quest through this book to gain his freedom. The Prince has teamed up with the fairy queen and has been transformed into something a bit more than human. The Princess is fighting her way to get to the King. The story ends up at the castle that is more than it seems and is being run in the Kings absence by a traitor. A vast warren of tunnels under the castle is where the tyrant is seeking to. He sends fearful creatures to kill the Funderlings but they have more of a surprise for him than he bargained for.

This book feels like a new world without riding on the back of other so called fantasy works. There isn't so much war that a girl gets put off from reading (I hate page after page of siege so I was pleasantly surprised that I didn't have to skim over to much), there is just the right amount of hinted love that might blossom. So the guys can enjoy this without too much mushy stuff.

I would recommend reading the series from the beginning and not jumping into the last book cold turkey like I have. As with previous reviews for the Shadowmarch series I would agree that this is in capital letters an EPIC FANTASY novel and I would recommend reading this book to others. I actually would love to see it come to life on the big screen.

(Editorial note: According to Wikipedia, the "Shadowmarch" quadrology, like "Otherland", was intended to be a trilogy—until the third book grew so large that that it had to be split into two for publication. Tad Williams is a excessively wordy writer—which may go part way to explaining why I haven't liked any of his stuff since "Tailchaser's Song" at only 400 pages).

Uncorked by Broderick Wells

One of the problems of deciding to embark on further education is that sometimes, you have to go further. The trip to points no longer Communist was quite enjoyable. But I'm contemplating the prospect of spending a week in the charming environs of Waiouru, and suddenly the MA thesis is looking like a bridge too far. Never mind that I will be doing original work based on my research in primary source documents. A week in Waiouru.

But before we get there, the Wells household, less senior cat wrangler, spent the weekend in Rotovegas. Living in South Auckland, it's a lot closer than we thought: like 2 ½ hours away (205km from the front door to the motel in central Rotovegas). In keeping with Wells' ecumenical spirit, the pillaging of the sights and experiences of Rotovegas was shared with a couple from Wellington, Evan & Jo. But why go to the sulphur capital of NZ? Because my nearest and dearest had won a 4WD experience, and she didn't want to do it ("Mud? Horrible stuff. Keep it away from me."). Evan, on the other hand, is a petrol head with impeccable qualifications (University of Otago alumnus) and he immediately said yes. M & S were along for the ride.

The problems started when we were arranging where to meet. By the miniature railway at Kuirau Park, says I. I'm not sure it's still there says S. A steam vent opened up under the track. Sure enough, neither Evan nor Jo was able to spot where the railways was (but ain't). Much muttering and describing the name of our motel and they met us there instead. We later did a bit of industrial archaeology and found the remnants of the miniature railway. Dead obvious if you knew it was there, but not so obvious if you're relying on hearsay.

Evan and I motored out to the 4WD experience, which was a fair way out of town. The guys running it had acquired some ex-logging land and there were a number of former logging tracks that proved useful. It starts of all gentle and non-threatening and ends with an invitation to purchase clean underwear from the operations shop. And it was all done in Suzuki jeeps. None of it was sufficiently frightening that either Evan nor myself wanted to get out and walk home, even when the other guy was behind the wheel (I knew Dump-A-Drunk was good for something). For a free ride, it was worth the price of admission.

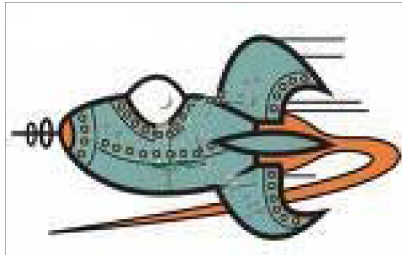


Rotorua 4WD—without Broderick, who shall remain anonymous.

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UnCONventional 2012

**33rd New Zealand
National SF Convention
Auckland
1-4 June 2012**



**UnCONventional will be held at
the Surrey Hotel which is located
at 465 Great North Rd, Grey Lynn.**

We can announce that our Fan GOH is Lorain Clark. Lorain is a familiar face behind the registration desk of many a con, and she who works behind the scenes has not escaped notice either! Our Guests of Honour have yet to be confirmed, but we are negotiating with a kiwi icon or two. We intend to use the convention to showcase the wealth of talent to be found in our own backyard.

**www.unconventional.sf.org.nz
Look for us on Facebook.**

**This year, we have selected two
worthy charities:
WSPA and Breast Cancer NZ.**



World Society for the Protection of Animals



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Nova Zine Back Issues:

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This Month:

- DOS Conflicts with Battlecry so postponed until Saturday 10th Feb at Chez Smith
- SPACE Meet at 7pm at Greenland McDs Friday 2nd February Then Stardome Observatory 8pm
- BOOK Monday 27th March Marie Williams's place

Next Meeting:

Wednesday 21 March, 2012, 7:30pm
Auckland Horticultural Centre,
990 Great North Road,
Western Springs



Upcoming Events:

February 17th-19th Battlecry 2012
ASB Stadium, Kohimarama, Auckland.

June 1-4th 2012 UnCONventional 2012
33rd New Zealand National SF Convention