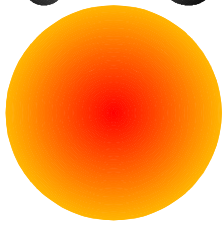




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Issue Sette - June 2010

Musings from Under the Mountain

You have to wonder when you go to the movies to see the new “Shrek” movie and inside the cinemaplex is a stall selling t-shirts and other memorabilia for “Eclipse” (the third instalment of the Twilight saga). And the teens are buying this stuff... I hear that Twilight fans now have their own epithet—they’re called Twi-hards. Now that sounds like something of an insult, I know, but even the Guardian web site is using it, and it seems to be accepted by the fans themselves. I just don’t get it. Sparkly vampires who wander around in direct sunlight and can’t decide whether they want to kill the humans or mate with them... These aren’t vampires as Bram Stoker wrote them. We need a new word... “Twipers” anyone?

Anyhow that’s not the only thing that’s bugging me this month. There’s the fact that it’s damnably cold—as in which circle of Dante’s inferno is this? But more seriously, Gencon Oz has been cancelled—which rather messes up our holiday in Oz, doesn’t it? Here’s the notice on their website:

“ It is with regret that we must announce the cancellation of Gen Con™ Australia, the Brisbane games and entertainment convention, for 2010.

On the eve of announcing our guest list and event schedule, we have decided that due to the current economic climate and its recent effects around the globe, that it is not financially viable to hold Gen Con Australia in 2010.”

What that means is that there wasn’t going to be enough profit in it—possibly even a loss. Is it simply that they hadn’t got enough registrations? Is it possible that one of the big gaming companies pulled out? Your guess is as good as mine. Either way, it’s annoying and now I have to re-set our holiday almost from scratch. Doh!

The other weird thing I heard the other day (and this really is unconfirmed rumour—was that with all the errata that 4th edition D&D has generated, they’re planning a new edition in just a few months from now—go figure! Not that the Smiths play 4th edition much. We’ve gone for Pathfinder which is a modified 3rd edition. So far, it’s working for us, and it’s what we’re teaching Paul to play, along with some of his friends.

Jacqui

From the Cramped Office

This was supposed to be written about three days ago, when I had plenty of time. Instead, it’s now approximately half past meeting, and I have a cat on my lap. Not exactly the stuff of SF, but there you go. This month’s topic is/was “Attending your first WorldCon”, chosen primarily because the Aussies are hosting the WorldCon in Melbourne over the first weekend of September. If you haven’t booked a spot now, it may be too late. I believe the Presidential entourage is flying across the Ditch – it certainly beats swimming, and will probably be easier on all our nerves than steaming.

On a personal note, I’ve discovered the dangers of shopping at Amazon. I stumbled on to the bargain basement prices at Amazon.co.uk and said “Chuck me, Farley, this is CHEAP”. Like, the entire David Attenborough *Life* series box set for £72.50 (that’s about \$NZ170). I’m under instruction to keep my credit card in my wallet until AFTER the con, thank you. But the temptation... I am reminded of Mark Twain’s advice regarding temptation, but I think somebody would flay me. Nevertheless, they have some great examples of hard to find series, new releases, and generally British programmes. I thoroughly recommend spending time (if not money), cruising the site and making a wish list (no money need change hands). Sure beats what’s on the telly at the moment. Now back to my wish list.

Steve Litten

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Stephen Woodworth
“With Red Hands”

Published by Piatkus – an imprint of Little, Brown
Supplied by Hachette
Reviewed by Kevin G Maclean

As I commented in my review of "Through Violet Eyes", Stephen Woodworth is a talented writer, but his first book showed inexperience. Not so, the second book—it flows seamlessly and transparently to its end, leaving one with the feeling "Wow, that was good. But what can he do after this?" Once again, I'm not going to try to place it in a specific genre, because it has elements of many, but to say it was a Detective Paranormal would be accurate but incomplete. The novel is set in a current-day USA where those with violet eyes can channel the dead, and those without can't. It starts six years after the end of its predecessor, and Natalie Lindstrom, our protagonist, now has a daughter, and has left the Corps. The Corps has not taken this gracefully.

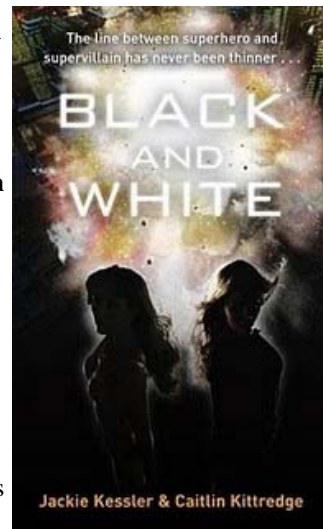
So, what has he come up with? A member of the Corps who can give false testimony while possessed, that's what. Now I'm not going to tell you how, nor the drawbacks of the method he uses, nor how Natalie concludes that her mother is not, and has never been, insane as everyone thought. That's what the book is for. And my recommendation? Buy it. Read it, but not while you're alone in the house—I found the second half quite disturbing, and that's rare. I promise you, the payoff is worth it. I still have the next two in the series waiting to be reviewed. I'm looking forward to them even more.



Jackie Kessler and Caitlin Kittredge
“Black and White”

Piatkus, 452pp
Supplied by Hachette
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

The superhero sub-genre, while being dominant in comics and doing pretty well in movies and on TV, is not well represented in the actual novel – the kind with many words and relatively few pictures. A brief poke in Wikipedia shows less than forty entries in the category (although it doesn't list all the "Wild Cards" novels). There are a couple of SF classics in there, like AE Van Vogt's "Slan", but most are the novelisations of comics. "Black and White" is, as far as I can tell, an original novel, with no relation to any established comic series.



The premise is somewhat original in that the mutations that bring extrahumans into the world are the deliberate result of a mysterious program called the Icarus Project – ostensibly a method of stimulating fertility in childless women. Some years in the future, most extrahumans work out of the Academy of Extrahuman Excellence, run by Corp-Co. Their work, in the main, is dealing with rogue extrahumans. Which brings us to our heroines; Jet, whose power is shadow, working for the Academy and Iridium, whose power is light, who is regarded as a rogue. As you may guess, the authors are playing with the idea that things aren't exactly black and white, and that superhumans in a more realistic world would find issues much more complex than they are in the comics.

Jenna Black
“The Devil’s Playground”

Published by Piatkus
Supplied by Hachette
Reviewed by Jan Butterworth

More and more of the lower dregs of society have been showing up with demons of their own – in alarming numbers. Morgan Kingsley is certain that this is yet another plot of Dougal, the demon king's brother, as part of his on-going bid to seize the throne of the Demon Realm. The king's council on the Mortal Plains must figure out what the plot is, and how to stop it, while an alarming number of people are dying. Morgan is an exorcist, who happens to be possessed by Lugh, the demon king. She is caught between Brian, her mortal boyfriend, and Lugh, who she lusts after, and has to deal with them as well as figure out how to stop Dougal. The 5th in the series, this book delivers more fast-paced action with more plotting to figure out plus very hot sexual tension. Another great read for fans of urban fantasy, though I'd recommend reading the first 4 in the series, to understand the characters and why they want to kill each other, especially those that are the good guys and supposed to be working together! I was saddened to read on Jenna Black's website that this was the end of the series but she added (at least for now)!

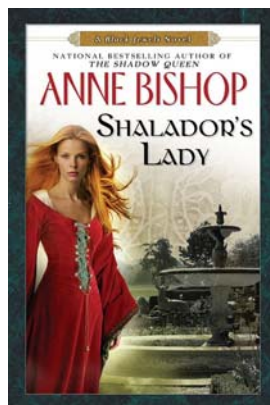


The structure of the novel is doubly interleaved as we swap from Jet to Iridium as protagonist, and from the present to the past as we see the girls as teenagers at the Academy, learning to be proper, well-behaved extrahumans, alternating with them as adults with more adult problems. I have never been fond of this style of exposition, but I am generally willing to put up with it, if it seems necessary to the plot. In this case, it was probably inevitable, being the simplest way to write the story and the background at the same time.

The plot is basically about Jet trying to find and take down Iridium, her former friend, as Iridium attempts to find out what is really going on – and the underlying theme is about the effects of having extrahuman powers on the all too human mind. This is most obvious in the case of shadow powers, those that we are told are doomed to go crazy.

And why shadow powers in particular are affected that way is never made clear. That is part of the problem. For me, this novel was ultimately less than satisfying, because the Icarus Project was never fully explained, and there were too many questions left unanswered. One can only hope that more answers are forthcoming in the next novel.

Shalador's Lady
Anne Bishop
ISBN 978-0-7322-9094-8
Published by HarperVoyager
Supplied by HarperCollins
Reviewed by Jan Butterworth

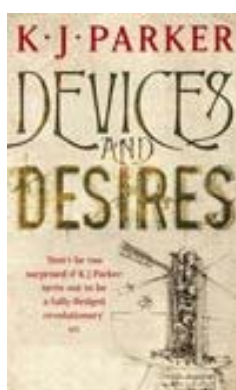


After many devastating years of war, a new Queen, Lady Cassidy, has been chosen to rule Dena Nehele, and repair the damage caused by cruel, corrupt Queens. Cassie is a plain Jane, used to prettier girls winning – her first court was bedazzled by a pretty face and abandoned her to serve Lady Kermilla. Now Cassie is the Queen of Dena Nehele and proving to be a good, fair ruler for its people, Bloods, landen and Shaladorans, who are starting to have hope again. She is paid a visit by Kermilla, now a Queen ruling a couple of small villages and looking to expand her holdings – and tithes she is paid. Theran Grayhaven, the First Escort of Cassie's court, thinks Dena Nehele needs a different Queen and is convinced Kermilla is the one. Cassie is intimidated and doesn't trust the rest of her court not to be won over by the prettier Queen, so she runs to another village and must decide whether to concede the territory or stay and fight.

This is a very well written story and I enjoyed it immensely, though I despaired at how dumb Theran was and keep waiting for him to see through Kermilla. I loved the Scelties and the humour they injected in the book! The ending was also satisfying for me.

This is the 8th book in the Black Jewels series and a direct continuation of The Shadow Queen. I hadn't read anything in this series before and was nervous about jumping in at this point but I was worrying for nothing. Everything is explained in just enough detail for the reader to understand the history and motivations, but not enough detail to bog the story down. I'm now looking to read the previous books, as this is a series I want to see more of.

K. J. Parker
"The Engineer Trilogy"
Book 1: "Devices and Desires"
Book 2: "Evil for Evil"
Book 3: "The Escapement"
Supplied by Hatchett
Reviewed by Stephen Litten



"The quickest way to a man's heart is proverbially through his stomach, but if you want to get into his brain, I recommend his eye socket". Thus begins each of the books in K. J. Parker's The Engineer Trilogy, these being: Devices and Desires, Evil for Evil, and The Escapement. I provide a review of the entire trilogy as the story continues more or less without pause; the books providing glorified chapter breaks. It might be possible to read the books as separate entities, but they aren't really stand-alones.

K. J. Parker's fantasy world is devoid of non-humans, a pleasant change. Instead there are two smallish mountain principalities, Eremia and Vadania, recently at war but now at peace. They are your "typical" medieval fantasy

realms who trade for advanced goods with Mezentia, A coastal city-state run by engineers. One of these engineers, Ziani Vaatzes, has committed the gravest crime, building a device that contravenes specification. For the Mezentines, "specification" is all important watchword, and there is an amusing little philosophical discussion in one of the books regarding the possibility of contravening specification by not allowing for margins of error or tolerance.

Vaatzes manages to find refuge in Eremia, and soon his talents as an engineer are being exploited. Vaatzes is also trying to find a way of being reunited with his family in Mezentia, which has now declared war on Eremia for harbouring the "Abominator" Vaatzes. Not that Mezentia should have any difficulty in destroying Eremia, as Mezentia is the only source of reliable, mass-produced war machines. The only thing that Mezentia does not produce is soldiers, but instead hires mercenaries from the Old Country.

The socio-political situation in Eremia and Vadania is such that Vaatzes is able to exploit certain features to his advantage. Such things as the unmarried Duke Valens of Vadania writing letters to the wife of the Duke of Eremia, or that hunting is a popular sport among the mountain nobility. Eremia almost survives the war with Mezentia, but for treachery. The Ducal family are rescued by Duke Valens, who then must contract a marriage with heir-apparent princess of a minor tribe of nomads, whose numbers are more than the two principalities combined. In fact, everyone is wary of the Cure Hardy (the nomads in general), and are pleased that a desert separates the nomads from the civilised world. The Mezentines are particularly distressed when the Cure Hardy cross the desert and obliterate their mercenaries. The war, which had run thus far in favour of the Mezentines, swings back toward the Vadani and their allies in no uncertain terms. The characters, plot, and behaviours in this trilogy are all believable. Duke Orsea of Eremia is consumed by doubts and feelings of inadequacy. Duke Valens is trying to prove to his dead father that he is a good duke. Miel Dukas, an important Eremian noble, is the constant slave of duty and his responsibility. Psellus of Mezentia is trapped in his engineering mindset. But all these characters exhibit growth, and the resolution of Ziani Vaatzes' problem is handled well. Parker has mined European and Steppe cultures well to produce the two warring duchies, reminiscent of Italian city-states and the Cure Hardy tribes, who mimic the Tatars and Mongols. The fantastic is the Mezentine engineer-merchant culture, but accepting that is easier than elves and goblins. A particularly nice touch is to have the Mezentines brown-skinned, while everyone else is white (mostly). A very satisfying read and I wanted to follow the characters after the story had ended. Certainly, I will be looking for more of K. J. Parker's books on my next shopping trip.



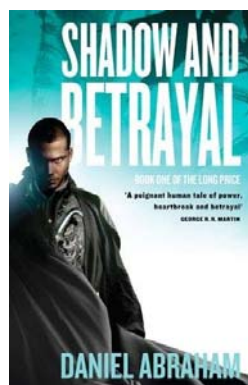
Sherilyn Kenyon
“Bad Moon Rising”
Published by Piatkus
Supplied by Hatchette
Reviewed by Jan Butterworth

To escape their Apollite mother’s fate, an ancient king spliced the genes of his four sons to those of wolves, bears, tigers, leopards, dragons, and other strong animals. He created a new species, two with animal hearts and animal base forms, and two with human hearts and human base forms. From their mother’s Apollite race they inherited magick and psychic abilities. From their father’s tampering they would live by day as their base form and at night switch to their alternate form. The gods were furious and cursed the animal Katagaria and human Arcadians never to be at peace with each other. This is the 14th Dark Hunter novel and Fang and Aimee’s story, starting before his brother Vane’s story, which was the 5th book of the series. Sounds confusing but fans of the series will enjoy the new perspective of events that are told from Fang’s viewpoint. An excellent read for Dark Hunter fans but you should read the series before embarking on it.

Everyone believes Fang, a Katagaria wolf, retreats inside his mind after his sister dies and he and his brother are left to die by their pack, strung up for Daimons to finish them off. He’s actually trapped inside a demon dimension as the Daimon have stolen too much of his soul for him to return. It’s up to Aimee to find each Daimon who have a bit of his soul and kill them to release it. Aimee Peltier is part of the family of Katagaria bears that own Sanctuary, a bar where Arcadians and Katagaria can mix freely without violence. Aimee is hiding the fact that she is Arcadian from her family. As wolves and bears don’t mix, she also has to hide her attraction to Fang.....

Daniel Abraham
“Shadow and Betrayal”
Book One of the Long Price
Orbit, pp593
Supplied by Hatchette
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

That does look like a high page count, and there’s a reason for it. This is actually Books One and Two of the Long Price, published in the US as the separate volumes “Shadow in Summer” and “Betrayal in Winter” back in 2006/7, but in the UK as a single volume. I was quite surprised to learn that “Shadow in Summer” was actually Abraham’s first full-length novel – considering the high level of writing skill on show in this work. Not that unexpected however, when you consider Abraham’s lengthy list of published shorter fiction includes Hugo and Nebula nominations. So, you know the man can write. That’s a good start. And this book is a pretty good start too. It’s high quality fantasy with an oriental flavour, and a distinctly original

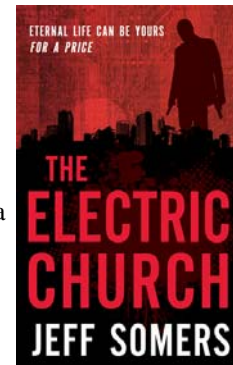


concept of magic. Normally I prefer a larger dose of magic in my fantasy, but the sheer power possible with the “andat” makes up for its rarity. That rarity also means that Abraham can fully work through the political and economic consequences of the magic in his world. “Shadow in Summer” is set in the summer city of Saraykeht in the warm south of the world. We’re introduced to our two main characters, Otah and Maati, as boys, the younger, unwanted sons of noblemen, sent to the poets’ school. It is through poetry that the andat can be manifested and controlled, and this is what the boys are meant to learn. Otah rebels and leaves, and Maati is sent to Saraykeht to study with the poet Heshai, who controls the andat called “Seedless”. Of course, nothing is that simple, especially since the Khaiem is in an undeclared war with the Galts, who are out to conquer the world. The Khaiem have the andat, whose magic is highly selective, but extraordinarily powerful. Which means that the andat will have to go... This novel is complex, political and goes deep into the effects of perceived sin on the human psyche.

By contrast, “Betrayal in Winter” takes the reader to the winter city of Machi, far to the north. Otah and Maati are here now for their own reasons, and become embroiled in plotting, scheming and outright murder as the old Khai Machi lies dying. More complex politics, but a bit less soul-searching and a lot more action make this an even better novel than the first. Which makes it pretty darn good.

Jeff Somers
“The Electric Church”
Orbit, 383pp
Supplied by Hatchette
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

It reads like an action movie, set in a dark future, where nations are a thing of the past and the rich and poor are separated by a deep chasm... We’ll make that an R18 movie, for bad language (our anti-hero, Avery Cates, is inordinately prone to the use of the “f” word) and violence – we have a very high body count here, though not all of them are exactly human. So, this is not a book for children or sensitive persons. Avery Cates is a Killer, an assassin for hire, in a starkly violent world with overtones of “Bladerunner”. Here there are robots, guns, hover vehicles, guns, cybertech, guns, psionics... oh, and more guns. He’s a surprisingly sympathetic character for all that – he’s not into killing children, and avoids killing people who aren’t shooting at him (or he’s being paid to kill). He’s in trouble because he killed an undercover cop (by mistake) and now the King Worm, head of the DIA (the cops’ cops) has hired him to kill Dennis Squalor, founder and chief prophet of the Electric Church. Now, I’ve read about full-body cyborgs, human brains in mechanical bodies before, but the idea of this as a religious exercise is new to me. The rationale is that the only way to work out your salvation is over time – lots of time – and that means you need to be immortal. And so, you are invited to become a cyborg, a brain in a android body, one of the Electric Monks. The question is, are all those converts willing? And are they as happy as they seem? If you like cyberpunk and dark future action movies, you’re guaranteed to love this book.



Uncorked Broderick Wells

A while ago I lamented the quality of comic book writing. I have yet to change my opinion. However, on the web, there are a number of truly wonderful comics. Where to start, because I've found quite a few that I follow regularly, as well as a few that have run to completion. I'm going to be adding a few web addresses, so for those of you with the paper version, just click [here](#) to see what they are (you'll need to do that by clicking your fingers to a mambo beat).

First off, we have Phil and Kaja Foglio's Airship Entertainment (www.airshipentertainment.com) which is the home of such classics as: *What's New with Phil and Dixie* (who's old enough to remember this from *Dragon* magazine?), *Myth Adventures* (yep, those books written by Robert Lynn Asprin), *Buck Godot* (a space opera, and *Girl Genius* (definitely steampunk, and probably the best webcomic). All are different, but they have that delightful sense of whimsy that Phil Foglio showed way back at *Large Lizard*

magazine. *Girl Genius* has its own website, distinct from the other three and features lots of lovely steampunk memorabilia, Collectibles and so forth. Naturally, some of these are available as hard copy comics.

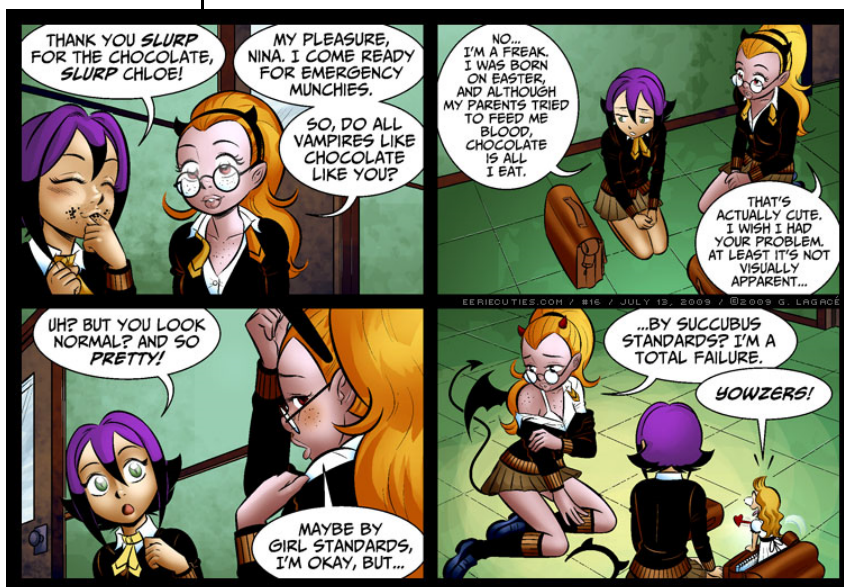
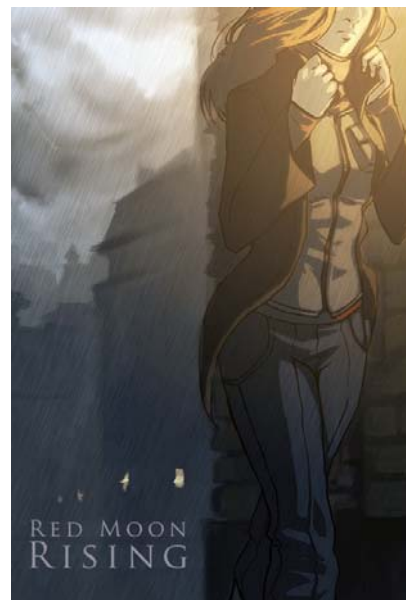


Meanwhile, www.krakowstudios.com of Canada has a nice little collection of comics. *Krakow* is what happens when you summon a D&D succubus, and she decides to stay. Quite funny, especially when one of the flatmates gets a job in Japan. Every now and then the comic features frames or the entire strip drawn by guest artists. *The Demon Sisters* is just a continuation of the same story, with a slight refocusing of main characters. *Krakow2.0* and *Marilith* are the same story, *Marilith* continuing where *Krakow2.0* left off on a separate website. *Charliehorse* is another succubus infiltrated story, the concept being 'would you sell your soul for a prom date?' Actually, *Charliehorse* turned into a nicely flavoured morality tale before the artist, Krazy Krow. Lastly, *Spinnerette* is a wonderful superhero comic, set in

the mid-west. Our heroine, Heather Brown, has the misfortune to be caught in an accident with a genetic transmogrifier (or something), and now has six arms and the ability to shot web from near her arse. Peter Parker she is not...

The Becoming (<http://thebecomingcomic.com>), written by J. Alan Shelton and drawn by Douang Khamsitthisack, claims to be steampunk, but I reckon it's Enlightenment-punk. Nevertheless, it's an interesting story and the arts nice.

Also well worth reading is *Red Moon Rising* (www.redmoonrising.org) which is written and drawn by Rose Loughran, a 22 y.o. Scot. This is definitely steampunk, with lots of lovely atmospheric colouring, and a delightful commentary by Rose as to what's happening. Apparently she's trying to book tickets to here, so maybe we might get to meet a real live artist. Yay!



SHREK FOREVER AFTER

Directed by Mike Mitchell
 Produced by Gina Shay
 Teresa Cheng
 Andrew Adamson
 Aron Warner
 John H. Williams
 Written by William Steig (Book)
 Josh Klausner
 Darren Lemke
 Starring Mike Myers
 Eddie Murphy
 Cameron Diaz
 Antonio Banderas
 Music by Harry Gregson-Williams
 Cinematography Yong Duk Jhun
 Editing by David Teller
 Studio DreamWorks Animation
 Running time 93 minutes
 Budget \$165 million
 Gross revenue \$526,893,583

It's school holidays again, and once more the Smiths are going to the movies. I learned an important lesson with this one—during the school holidays, even if you book on line, if they don't have allocated seating, make sure you're good and early. We arrived before the movie started—but too late. The cinema was packed to the gills and we couldn't get three seats together. Not conducive to a pleasant family viewing experience.

But, I digress. You wanted to hear about the movie. The professional reviewers can't seem to be able to make up their collective minds about this one, their score averaging out to just above average. There also seems to be some confusion about the title—is it "Shrek Forever After", or is it "Shrek: the Final Chapter"? (Personally, I prefer the former—it's punnier).

So, we have Shrek at the children's first birthday party—and he's already getting a dose of mid-life crisis! Or is it just that he can't stand celebrity? I have to say that it's easy to see why he loses it. The provocation is enough to send any Dad into a fit (Though the thought of Shrek dealing with teenagers is... alarming!)

He loses a lot more than he bargains for when he makes a bargain with the devil—in the shape of Rumpelstiltskin (if you remember your fairy tales, he always was a nasty piece of work, and he hasn't changed even though everyone knows his name). Essentially, Shrek exchanges a "day in his life he would not remember" for "one day of being a REAL ogre again." And so Shrek finds himself in an alternative universe where he was never born. Cue an unkempt Donkey who has no idea who Shrek is, an

overweight Puss-in-boots, Rumpelstiltskin as King of Far Far Away, and Fiona as Boudicca the ogress. And lots of chimichangas.

It's Donkey who figures out the solution—the contract Shrek signed with Rumpelstiltskin has to have an escape clause. It's back to "true love's kiss" and the alternate Fiona isn't having a bar of it. She's far too busy leading the revolution. Of course, it all does work out in the end—happily for Shrek, unhappily for Rumpelstiltskin, who ends up in a time vortex worthy of Doctor Who.

The animation, is of course, excellent. We saw it in 2D (as is our preference) and like a lot of modern 3D movies seen in 2D there was still a sense of the third dimension in there, for me at least. The Shrek style was still very much in evidence, and carried over into a flock of new characters—Rumpelstiltskin with his flamboyant wigs, the witches and a host of ogres. Puss in Boots is fatter and furrier... The animators excel themselves in a magnificent aerial chase through Rumpelstiltskin's opulent palace—sure it's to show off in 3-D, but it works.

The plot is definitely stronger than the plot of Shrek the Third, and quite a bit more complex. It's nothing new, but it's new to Shrek—and let's face it, this is the fourth Shrek movie. It's not going to be the spectacular novelty that the first one was.

The puns come thick and fast, and there are some very good lines. I have to say that overall, it was a good, if not great movie, and an adequate bit of school holiday frivolity. They tell me that the next offering from the fairy tale end of the woods will be Puss in Boots in his own movie. Should be entertaining.



by
Jacqui
Smith

Disney • PIXAR
TOY STORY 3

Directed by: Lee Unkrich
 Produced by: Darla K. Anderson
 John Lasseter (Executive)
 Nicole Paradis Grindle (Associate)
 Screenplay: Michael Arndt
 Story: John Lasseter, Andrew Stanton,
 Lee Unkrich
 Starring: Tom Hanks
 Tim Allen
 Joan Cusack
 Ned Beatty
 Don Rickles
 Michael Keaton
 Wallace Shawn
 John Ratzenberger
 Whoopi Goldberg
 Music by: Randy Newman
 Editing by: Ken Schretzmann
 Studio: Pixar Animation Studios
 Running time: 103 minutes
 Budget: \$200 million
 Gross revenue: \$632,356,662

Yes, the toys really are back. This time, when I had the inspiration to book on line the day before, I not only got the session I wanted (the first of the morning, before the car park gets full), I discovered that we had allocated seating. This made for a much more relaxed and pleasant day for the Smith clan—we chose to sit pretty well dead center in the cinema where the picture and sound should be at its best.

Unlike Shrek 4, this movie received almost universal critical acclaim. However, I personally am not sure that it was that much better than its school holiday rival. Simply called “Toy Story 3” and tag-lined “The Breakout Comedy Of The Summer” (don’t think they used that one here) and “The Great Escape”, it has definitely won the battle for the box office.

All the Toy Story movies have made it even more difficult for me to bring myself to ever throw out toys—and this one makes it hard to give them to the local Playcentre. Because that is essentially what happens to Woody, Buzz and the remaining toys. Andy is going to College. He puts the toys in a bag to go up to the attic

(and let’s face it, it would have been a pretty boring movie if they’d got there). Instead, after nearly ending up in the trash, they end up being donated to the local Daycare. It looks like they’re going to have a great time, being played with every day—but there are children toys want to play with them and children toys most emphatically do NOT want.... And our heroes find themselves abandoned in a roomful of the latter, children too young to take care of the toys. Turns out that this Daycare is dominated by a toy bear called Lotso—who isn’t as nice as he at first appears. He rules the toys like a mob boss. There’s only one way out, and that leads to the dump...

Which is where it gets ugly—our unfortunate toys are caught on a conveyor leading to an incinerator. They avoid being chopped to pieces on the way, but as they’re inexorably caught in a tide of trash falling into the flames, small children in the audience have been seen to cry in terror. If you must take the under-5’s to this movie, be aware that they may be upset.

Of course, they do escape, and Lotso gets his comeuppance. Everything works out for the best, and there’s a lovely poignant scene where Andy leaves his beloved Woody with a little girl who loves him. There’s lots of good humour here too, most of it focused on the antics of Ken and Barbie (who get some great lines). It’s somewhat darker than the previous installments, but it’s a worthy sequel—definitely worth going to see on the big screen. Even if you have to borrow a child to escort you... (and avoid the teens going to see the latest Twilight flick...)



by
Jacqui
Smith

Obits

June 22

Robin Bush (aged 67)

British historian—resident historian on “Time Team”.

Pennant Roberts (aged 69)

British TV director—worked on “Survivors”, “Blake’s 7” and six “Doctor Who” stories, including “Warriors of the Deep” and “Pirate Planet”.

June 29

Louis Moyroud (aged 96)

Co-inventor of the phototypesetting process (1953) which allowed text and images to be printed on paper using a photoengraving process.

July 2

Carl Adam Petri (aged 83)

German mathematician and computer scientist—invented the “petri net” when aged 13.

July 14

Seymour London (aged 95)

American doctor, inventor of the automatic sphygmomanometer.

July 15

Peter Fernandez (aged 83)

American radio and voice actor. Best known for voicing characters for anime including “Speed Racer”.

July 19

David Warren (aged 85)

Australian inventor of the flight data recorder.

(compiled by Jacqui Smith)

The Sky at Night – July 2010

Mercury is very low in the evening sky, appearing just after sunset. It will be hard to spot. Venus shines brightly in the north west in the evening sky. Located in Leo. Last week I watched it pass the bright star Regulus which now shines below it. Mars is also in the evening sky in a northerly direction. Located between Leo and Virgo

Jupiter is in the morning sky, rising about midnight. Located in Aquarius. Saturn is high in the evening sky, rather close to Mars but a bit more to the east. Located in Virgo. Saturn’s rings are starting to open up again and can be made out in a small telescope.

The full moon is on the 26th.

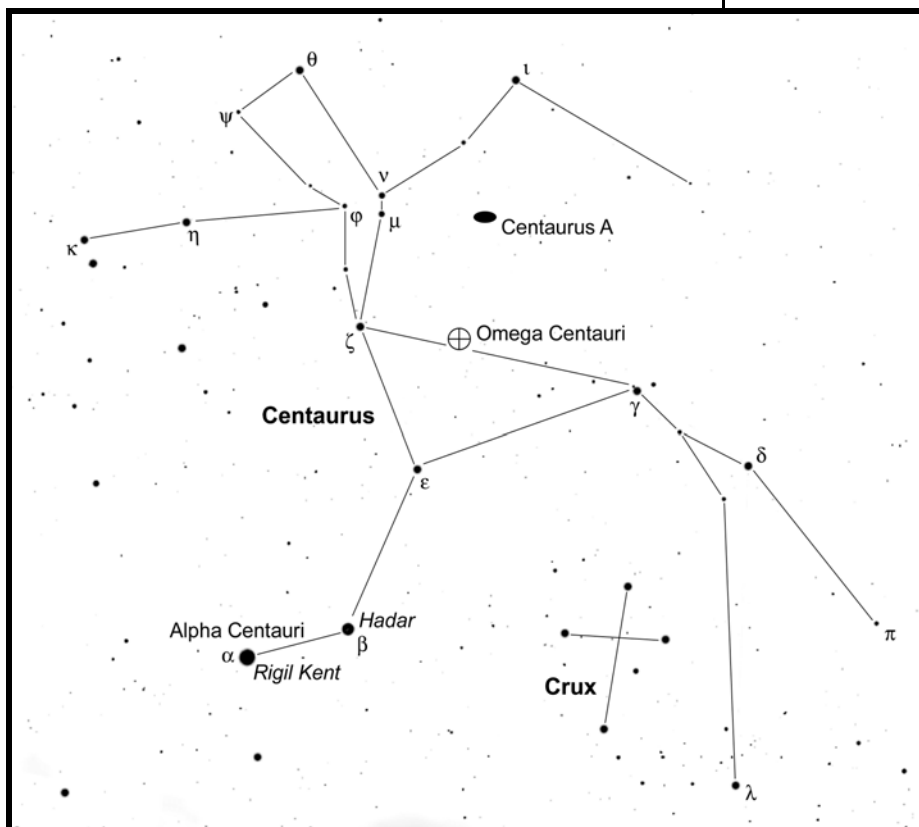
The most distinctive object in the sky is the curve of Scorpius which should be prominent in the eastern sky. To the Maori, it was known as the ‘fishhook of Maui’. The bright star overhead in the evenings is Spica, and nearby is the diamond shape of Corvus the Crow. Down to the north from Spica is the star Arcturus in Bootes. Further to the north and east from Arcturus is the curve of Corona Borealis, the Northern Crown.

Just about right overhead is the Southern Cross and the two Pointers. Both Acrux (the bottom star in the Cross) and Alpha Centauri (the pointer star, furthest from the Cross) are binary stars and are resolvable in small telescopes. Another object worth pointing a telescope at is Omega Centaurus, which is a globular cluster. This can be found by taking a line through Beta Centaurus (the other pointer) through Epsilon Centaurus (see map) and the same distance beyond. You should see a faint fuzzy blob. That is Omega Centauri and it consists of a tight mass of stars. Seen though binoculars or a telescope, the stars can be resolved.

There are two other interesting objects in the Southern Cross. The Milky Way runs right through Crux but nestling to the left of Acrux and extending up to the leftmost star in the Cross (Beta Crucis) is what appears to be a void. This is the Coal Sack, a patch of dark nebulosity which blocks out the light from the stars beyond. The second object is what appears to be a faint star near Beta Crucis, known as Kappa Crucis or NGC4755 more commonly known as the Jewel Box. It is called that because, through a telescope, it is a cluster of many stars of different colours.

(Information taken from information provided in the NZ Astronomical Yearbook and the Astronomical Society Newsletters.)

By
Keith
Smith



By Louise McCully

New Zealand June Board Game Releases

Fresco

(forgot it from Junes list)

Publisher: Queen Games
 Designer: Marcel Subelbeck, Marco Ruskowski, Wolfgang Panning
 No. of players: 2 - 4
 Time to Play: 45 mins

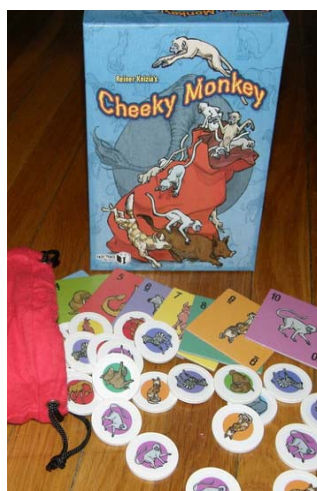


You are artisans trying to restore a renaissance church. Every day you have to plan what you are going to do with the day, are you going to sleep in to put yourself in a better mood, or is getting to the market early for better prices a higher priority (I suffer from this dilemma everyday!). This has been on my wish list since I read about it a couple of months ago.

Cheeky Monkey

Publisher: Face 2 Face Games
 Designer: Reiner Knizia
 No. of players: 2 - 6
 Time to Play: 20 mins

Combo of set collection and push-your-luck game with small poker chips with animals on them. Looks like a good filler game, and one that can be played with kids 7 plus.



Castle Panic

Publisher: Fireside Games
 Designer: Justin De Witt
 No. of players: 1 - 6
 Time to Play: 60 mins

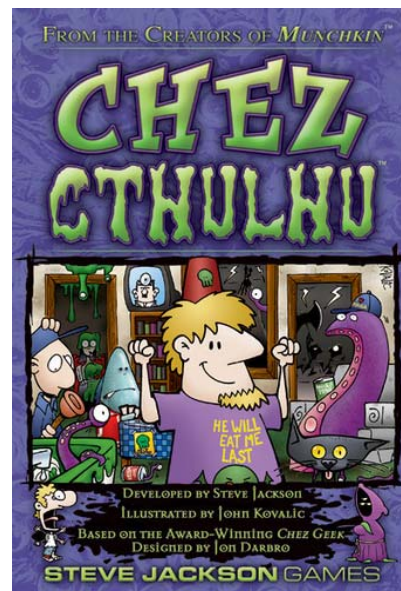


You and your friends cooperate to beat the monsters off who are trying to invade your castle. It's not an easy game to win against, but the set up is quick and the rules are simple, and the theme is exactly what any fantasy lover would enjoy.

Chez Cthulhu

Publisher: Steve Jackson Games
 Designer: Jon Darbro & Steve Jackson
 No. of players: 2 - 5
 Time to Play: 45 mins

It's another version of this game with Cthulhu as the theme. I had a short play test of this game a while back and being a person who doesn't really know the mythos I found it amusing. Still remember getting the 'Indescribably Horrible Nookie' card.



Zombie Dice

Publisher: Steve Jackson Games
 Designer: Steve Jackson
 No. of players: 2 - 99
 Time to Play: 10 - 20 mins

A push your luck dice game trying to collect braaaains without getting shot too much.

Cthulhu Dice

Publisher: Steve Jackson Games
 Designer: Steve Jackson
 No. of players: 2 - 6
 Time to Play: 5 - 10 mins

Suggested in review this would be a quick & fun luck dependent way to decide who is to be the first player in a more serious game. Entirely luck dependant game but what do you expect for something that can take 5 minutes



Days of Steam

Publisher: Valley Games
 Designer: Aaron Lauster
 No. of players: 2 - 4
 Time to Play: 60 minutes

A tile laying pick-up and delivery train game. The artwork isn't attractive to me, but the game play looks very clear and straight forward, which would balance (for me) the lack of pretty. Could be talked into a game of this quite easily.



Golden City

Publisher: Z-Man Games
 Designer: Michael Schacht
 No. of players: 3 - 4
 Time to Play: 60 mins

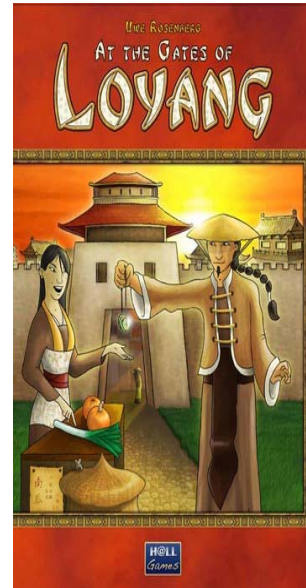
When looking for a graphic to show the game, there was a picture that made me say "Wow" out loud. It was when I realized the photo was just of the inner portion of the game board, because the detail is superb. Is it a bad thing when the pretty visuals make you want to try the game? The game is all about expanding your trading routes towards the centre of the city.



Gates of Loyang

Publisher: Z-Man Games
 Designer: Uwe Rosenberg
 No. of players: 1 - 4
 Time to Play: 120 mins

From the people who did Agricola and La Harve comes a new game in the series of thinky, calculating (mathematics... not skullduggery) games. Planting and selling your veges to give you maximum victory points whilst using the abilities of some of your helpers at advantageous times.



Martinique

Publisher: Z-Man Games
 Designer: Emanuele Ornella
 No. of players: 2
 Time to Play: 30 mins

And abstract deduction game where you place your pirates on the board trying to deduce where the 'lost treasure' is based on the map cards you have and what your opponent is doing (plus a few other things that I haven't mentioned).

Expansions:

- Carcassonne: Bridges Castles and Bazaars (another one... at least it doesn't involve catapults)
- Dark heresy: Dead Stars
- Game of thrones LCG: A King in the North
- Game of thrones LCG: Lords of Winter
- Munchkin Fairy Dust
- Munchkin Waiting for Santa (mid-year xmas gaming???)
- Race for the Galaxy: Brink of War (gimme!!)
- Small World: Tales & Legends (wonder what this would do to an already good game)
- Talisman: Highlands
- Warhammer Invasion LCG: Arcane Fire
- Wealth of Nations Super Industry Tiles
- Wealth of Nations War Clouds

The list of games was taken from the list at www.pixelpark.co.nz. All pictures in this article were found at www.boardgamegeek.com and I thank those who spent their time taking them.

ConText 2011

SF Convention in Auckland

ConText will be held over Queen's Birthday Weekend in Auckland, Friday 3rd to Monday 6th June 2011. The venue is the Centra Auckland Airport Hotel.

http://context.sf.org.nz/wiki/index.php/Main_Page

Catherine Asaro, an American author of both science fiction and fantasy novels, is the GoH. The fan GoH will be Lynelle Howell, editor of Phoenixine and an active Wellington fan. The crew are also in negotiations with other potential guests.

This is a marvellous opportunity for anyone who enjoys science fiction to participate in four days of sharing their hobby with other fans. There will be discussion panels, organised gaming, costuming events, the Quiz, a video stream and a chance to buy science fiction related items. The winners of the 2011 Sir Julius Vogel Awards for Excellence in New Zealand Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror will be announced on the Sunday night at the Conjunction Banquet.

Full and day memberships will be available if you wish to attend for one or two days only. Organised events will be going into the early evening. The bar will be open all day until late.



Stella Nova Wiki:

http://stella-nova.sf.org.nz/wiki/index.php/Main_Page

Nova Zine Back Issues:

<http://stella-nova.sf.org.nz/wiki/index.php/StellaNova:Novazine-new>

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This Month:

- BOOK Monday 26 July
- SPACE Friday 6 August
 at to be confirmed
- BOG Saturday 31st July
 at the Presidential Palace in Papakura

Next Meeting:

Wednesday 18 August, 2010
7:30pm
Auckland Horticultural Centre,
990 Great North Road,
Western Springs

Upcoming Events:

August 27-29 Au Contraire
2010 New Zealand NatCon Wellington
<http://www.aucontraire.org.nz/>

September 2-6 AussieCon IV
2010 WorldCon in Melbourne
<http://www.aussiecon4.org.au/>

September 23-26 GenCon Australia Brisbane
<http://www.genconoz.com/> (CANCELLED)