

# THE ALIEN REVIEW

ISSUE # 2

AUGUST 2021



# THE ALIEN REVIEW

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**THE ALIEN REVIEW 2**  
**August 2021**

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Design and layout by David Grigg.

Cover by David Grigg

Schedule: quarterly.

This publication is available by editorial  
whim, trade, letter of comment or via  
[efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) or [fanac.org](http://fanac.org).

Responses, in the form of either letters-  
of-comment or emails-of-comment are  
encouraged and will be acknowledged.

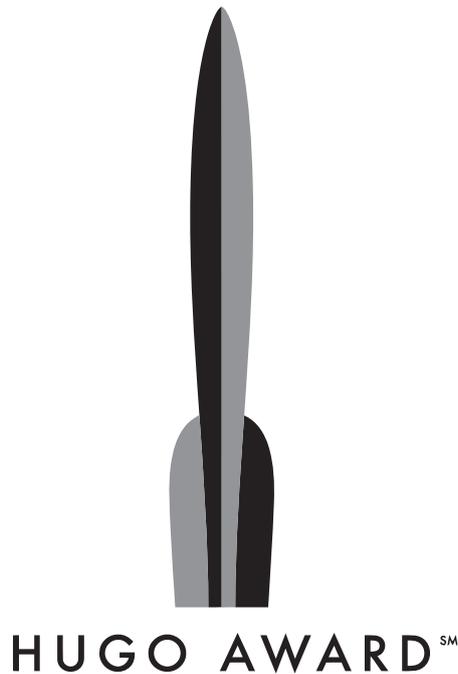
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Traditional Owners of the land on which  
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pays respect to the Elders, past, present  
and emerging.

# Initial Notes

## by *Perry Middlemiss*



It's usually about this time of year that I'm heavily invested in the annual Hugo Awards. Generally I'm reading the various works in the four main fiction categories in order to get myself into a position of being able to vote with some sense of clarity. This year I've let things drift a bit. I've read all of the Novella nominees (which you will read about later in this issue) but haven't really looked into the others as yet. That's partly because of other things I've been working on (this issue again), and also because I have more time this year with the Worldcon being pushed back to mid-December. That will mean I get longer to read through the other categories. Always a good thing.

But the Hugos haven't been out of my mind.

I've been thinking about the appearance of the Natalie Luhrs blog post—"George R. R. Martin Can Fuck Off Into the Sun, Or: The 2020 Hugo Awards Ceremony (Rageblog Edition)"—as a nominee on the ballot for the Hugo Award for Best Related Work and believe that it is in clear violation of the Worldcon's Anti-Harassment section of their Code of Conduct; specifically "Comments directly intended to belittle, offend, or cause discomfort". I also believe it should have been deemed ineligible by the Hugo subcommittee on those grounds, and the fact that it has not now raises a very real problem of Worldcon governance.

First some background: the World Science Fiction Convention (or Worldcon) is allocated each year to a host location by the World Science Fiction Society (WSFS) according to a specific set of site selection rules. Worldcons are, in the main, not-for-profit incorporated associations which adhere to the legal requirements for such organisations in their relevant legal jurisdictions. Each of these associations is governed by an overseeing Board that is answerable to the WSFS for the conduct of the convention. But the Board is not responsible for the actual detailed running of the convention. That is left to an Executive Committee which is appointed by, and which reports to, the Board. So the Board sits over the top of any Worldcon structure. It is their responsibility to ensure that all legal reporting and oversight is adhered to, both at local government and WSFS levels.

One of the other roles of any Worldcon's Board is to ensure that the convention is run in accordance with its own agreed policies and procedures, as well as those of WSFS. These are normally put in place by the Executive Committee and ratified by the Board. All levels of the Worldcon structure are bound by these policies. If the Board believes the Convention Committee, or one of its sub-committees, is in breach then it needs to bring that breach to the attention of the convention executive, and the relevant Division Head, and request some form of action. If the Board believes that the resultant action is not adequate to address the issue at hand then it is duty-bound to step in and take control to rectify the situation.

The problem I see with the nominee mentioned is that the issue is really with the Hugo sub-committee, which has long been situated at arm's length from the rest of the committee in order to maintain its integrity. Section 3.13 of the WSFS Constitution allows for the creation of such a "Subcommittee whose decisions are *irrevocable* by the Worldcon Committee" (emphasis mine). Normally that's fine. You don't want a member of the Worldcon committee interfering in the Hugo Award process, either at the nomination or the voting stage. But what if that sub-committee creates a situation that the Board believes will leave it open to possible punitive legal action? Is it not then incumbent on the Board to step in, over any objections that may be raised by the Worldcon committee? I believe that it is.

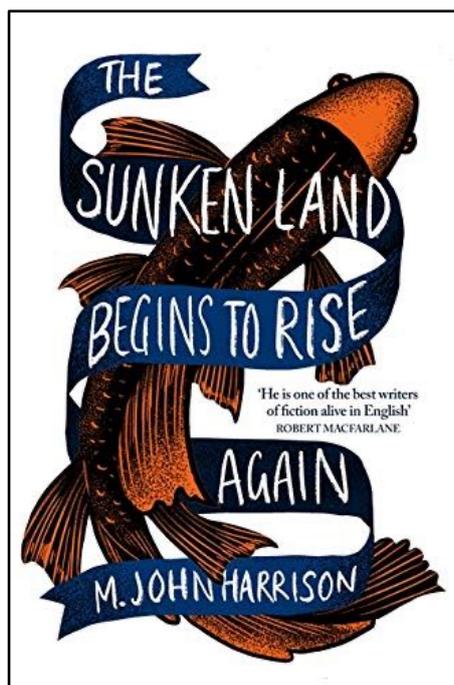
Have we reached the situation here where legal action will be taken? I don't want to speak for George Martin here though I suspect the answer would be "No". But the recent legal action taken out by Jon Del Arroz against Worldcon 76, who rescinded his attending membership to that convention, should be a reminder that if such events can occur then sooner or later they will.

Do I have a solution? Not in detail, though I think it will involve some extensive changes to the WSFS Constitution in order to better and more fully describe the governance relationships between a Worldcon's Board, its Executive Committee and its Hugo sub-com-

mittee. Without them it may just be a matter of time before individual volunteer Worldcon Board members are sued by a Worldcon member. And who knows what would happen after that. If the current situation holds then I certainly would avoid becoming a member of any such Worldcon Board, and I think most people would think similarly. ◀◀

## SF in Dialogue

### **Lucy Sussex and David Grigg discuss THE SUNKEN LAND BEGINS TO RISE AGAIN by M. John Harrison**



**The Sunken Land Begins to Rise Again**  
by M. John Harrison  
Gollancz, 272pp (2020)

**Lucy:** When did you first become aware of Mike Harrison?

**David:** This is the first book of his I've read and the only reason I read it at all was that Perry sent me an article about it, which was when it had just won a prize. Is it the Goldsmith's Prize?

**Lucy:** Yes, for fiction that breaks the mold. The previous winner was Lucy Ellman's, *Ducks, Newburyport*, which is a brick of a book in entirely one sentence about the stream of consciousness of an American housewife. I couldn't get very far into it.

**David:** This one, I thought, was very engaging. It got me in right from the start. Even though he's talking about two very ordinary people when he begins, middle-aged people, but then it takes you in some very strange directions.

**Lucy:** I don't want to be too rude about *Ducks, Newburyport* because I do know people who like it. But Harrison knows his way around narrative, and he's written a few space operas with a kind of weird twist. I remember an extract from one in *New Worlds* where the spaceships all got named after decadent or aesthetic images, such as *The Green Carnation*. So he's got a very strange sensibility, but really knows what he's doing. The novel begins with "During his fifties Shaw went through a rough patch." That shouldn't be an enticing beginning and yet you're hooked about halfway down the page. A different writer would have started with Victoria's line on that same page: "I'm someone who saw her first corpse when she was fourteen." He does this slow build-up and continues that way. The book is unputdownable while not being a madcap rush of incidents. I think it's something to do with his sentences.

**David:** It's really well written in that sense. For a fair proportion of the book, maybe the first third of the book, nothing really weird starts happening. Or the things that are weird you don't see as weird at the time—it's just as they develop. When Shaw gets involved with Tim, he meets this guy who is digging a hole in a park and scooping water out of the pool in

these bottles. Which is kind of weird but he is a strange guy. Then Tim offers him a job. And it's only you get into the job that things really start to turn odd.

It's the same with Victoria. Victoria's decided that she wants to go and renovate her mother's house—her mother's died—so she goes to this place in Shropshire and she starts to get this house back into some sort of order for her to live in. But it's only when you start to find out how odd the neighbours are and the strange ways they react to things that you start thinking that something is going on here. What is it that's going on? And really the whole thrust of the book is: what the heck is going on?

**Lucy:** The book is an unsurpassable picture of Britain on the brink of Brexit, lingering on past glories with covert, or overt, xenophobia. The sense that things are declining and it's no longer Great Britain. The meta-fiction behind this book is *The Water Babies*. Everybody is reading it and people are passing copies to-and-fro, which is odd for a nineteenth-century children's book. It actually links very closely to the theme of this book. And I'll tell you why I think that is. I have read *The Water Babies* and I remember "Mrs Doasyouwillbedoney". Even as a kid, I noticed that the book was pretty sadistic. One of the things I didn't know about it then was that Charles Kingsley, the author, was a very muscular Christian and a rather strange man. It's a book about a chimney sweep who's cruelly treated and falls into water and turns into a water baby and is rejuvenated.

**David:** He drowns and turns into a water baby. I think that's significant here.

**Lucy:** That's it, yeah. But what I didn't know about the book was that it was written in response to Darwinism, of which Kingsley was a supporter. It's a book about evolution, in that Tom evolves into a being that can survive underwater. My feeling is that this theme is carried over into Harrison's book but

as a satire of devolution: the devolving of Britain.

**David:** Yeah, that makes sense, but there is this sense, as you say, that there's something rotten in the state of Britain and that the rot is coming up from below like rising damp. There is so much water in this story with all this drenching rain and things flooding and pools of water forming places and strange things arriving in the water. As you say, there is kind of weird feeling of rot at the core. Oh, and it's the same with Victoria's house really.

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**There is so much water in this story with all this drenching rain and things flooding and pools of water forming places and strange things arriving in the water.**

**As you say, there is kind of weird feeling of rot at the core.**

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There's a rot at the core of her house and the cellar's got problems, and there's rising damp, and there's all these really quite nice metaphors throughout it, I think.

**Lucy:** I think also that he's writing about global warming, and the rising waters and that's the one evidence of climate change I can find in the book. It reads like realism but it's not, it's on the edge. It's what's called Slipstream, which is a term that has never really caught on except among science fiction people: work on the borderland between the mainstream and genre fiction. I'd say that this a cross-over book, and I made the point on Facebook that more usually genre writers complain bitterly about writers in the mainstream taking *their* motifs, and being successful with them, and also thinking they've invented "cli-fi", which is a term I hate. Harrison's gone in the opposite direction. He's actually invaded the mainstream in such a superlative fashion through the strength of his language, and shown that he does it better. The analogy I might make is with another book from America, Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*. It has in some respects an extremely silly premise: that the Underground Railroad really was an Underground Railroad. Because he introduces this quite outlandish metaphor it acts to release him in other areas. It's this strangeness that gives the book its edge. Harrison, who is a past master of this sort of thing, also introduces a really strange metaphor. Are sea creatures really arising

from the deep, and even worse, are they indistinguishable from human beings? And are human beings morphing into these creatures? And that's the metaphor which disrupts what otherwise would be a very acute, and, in fact, quite scathing view of Brexit Britain. It's a superb piece of realism which crosses boundaries through this very disturbing horror element.

**David:** Yes, one of the most horrible parts of the book, I think, is that bit where they visit Helen's house and she's got this pool outside, and the whole bunch of these guys that Shaw's with are splashing in this pool, and something comes out the pool and they wrap it in a tarpaulin and they bundle it away in the back of a taxi, and there's a greenish hand dangling out of the bundle. Is this underground stuff generating these people? Is this sunken land rising in the form of these people? I love that sort of stuff, it's really very clever and it really pulls you in.

**Lucy:** It's very funny in places...

**David:** It's a very funny book.

**Lucy:** But really, really dark. The funniest bit to me is the only people who really know what's going on are the conspiracy theorists, but nobody takes them seriously.

**David:** That's exactly right.

**Lucy:** Somebody made a very interesting comparison. I was looking at the critical reception and it said Harrison wrote the best sentences in English since PG Wodehouse. I thought, "yes", but PG Wodehouse is very comforting and they're pure escapist enjoyment. Unless he's deciding to have a go at Oswald Mosely which he does very successfully. But, some of these sentences here from Shaw and Victoria: "They met a couple of more times, went to bed, argued back-and-forth the way people do when they're just slightly more than attracted to one another." And that's a very interesting phrase, it's got a

lot of acuity to it. Anybody else couldn't get away with this amount of metaphors: "He redirected himself like a parcel." Or, on the same page: "Life drew itself closed as suddenly as cheap curtains." It's poetry, but it's poetry of the mundane. And it's a real linguistic facility. I must admit that I have read some Harrison before but it went in one eye and out the other. But this one is different. He's 75, it took him all this time to get to this point. He's had success within genre—he won a Tiptree Award—and he went to Wiscon and there's a wonderful description of him after he'd won his award—you get a crown—and there he was with his crown on looking like Oberon the King of the Fairies with his long white hair. As the evening went on, he'd had a few drinks, he looked like the increasingly debauched King of Fairyland.

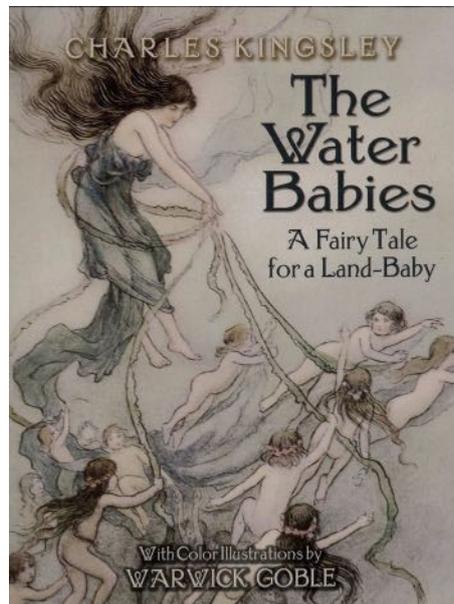
**David:** That sounds wonderful. I liked the book so much that I read it twice within a month and a half. I did that as much as anything so I could talk sensibly about it but this really is a book where you have to go back and try to figure out what

he's telling you. I thought that was an interesting aspect of it.

The other thing I thought was interesting is the number of references he makes to other books. There's a link definitely to *Pincher Martin*, William Golding's book...

**Lucy:** ...he drowned.

**David:** ...which gets mentioned several times. Which is a book where you find at the end that the narrator is actually drowned. And the other thing is all the paintings he talks about. He keeps talking about various paintings that he's got up as posters or they are hung as paintings in his mother's aged care facility or he's got up on his wall as paintings. And it's actually worth looking up those paintings on Wikipedia and having a look at them because they all have this same sort of disturbing feel about them of things happening in the water



or at the edge of water. This really does throw light on all the rest he's saying I think. It's well worth doing that.

**Lucy:** When I wrote this up on Facebook it was under an occasional series I have called "writers who really know what they're doing" and I'd put Harrison in that category very firmly. In some respects you could say he owns the mainstream, it just looks so effortless. And it's such a performance.

It's very rarely that I look at a book twice and sometimes when I do that I want to see how they've done it. And sometimes they're a big disappointment, but with this one you notice stuff you hadn't before. Even then, the mystery is never quite revealed...

**David:** No, no, it doesn't become clear.

**Lucy:** ...but there is this suspension of disbelief.

**David:** I think that's part of what he's aiming for. Sometimes things are inexplicable, or that from various points of view you may never understand what's going on, even though the other people, as you say, the conspiracists seem to have a better idea what's going on than either Victoria or Shaw, but so they're kind of bewildered at the end of the book. In fact, Victoria steps out of the book towards the end. I can't talk as knowledgeably about it as you but I just thought it was a great book, a great read.

**Lucy:** Yes I thought it was extremely interesting and a pretty bravura performance, and by someone who was totally in control, totally at home with the material. It's not necessarily a pleasant experience, but it's very edifying one. I was just looking around on the net—this is bizarre—there is a copy in the Parliamentary Library of Australia. I can't imagine who would have ordered it for that library and who in Parliament would read it.

**David:** That would be interesting indeed to know.

**Lucy:** I guess there's science fiction fans in the oddest of places.

**David:** That's very true. This is an aside, but I saw that on Barack Obama's best books of 2020 that Kim Stanley Robinson's latest book

[*The Ministry for the Future*] was included. I have yet to read that but I thought it interesting that he had it on his list.

**Lucy:** Perry's read it but I haven't. Various people have spoken very highly of it. Stan's been writing lots on the theme of climate change but this may be the book that gets the most attention. And if you get a recommendation from Barack then you'll have a big readership.

**David:** Well worth following up his list I find.

**Lucy:** Unlike Oprah Winfrey who I always find very sentimental.

**David:** There are some very good books on his list. Several of which I did read last year, so I'm not too far behind I guess.

What more is there to say about Harrison's book? The title, by the way, is actually from a quote from something by Charles Kingsley himself, the guy who wrote *The Water Babies*. The title is something about being in a quarry and seeing the shape of the land or the shape of the strata in the quarry and he's talking about sunken land rising again.

**Lucy:** There's also an Australian connection that's interesting in that his brother, Henry Kingsley, came out to Australia and wrote a novel, *Geoffrey Hamlin*, which was for years thought to be the best Australian novel. It's still on the syllabus of what's left of Australian Literature University teaching in this country. It's quite a reasonable book for its time, but it's not quite as disturbing as *The Water Babies*.

**David:** No, that's right. Yes, I think we probably said enough about this don't you think? Thank you very much for that.

**Lucy:** Okay, thank you. Yeah, I think we covered it. ◀◀

*This interview was originally featured in Episode 45 of the Two Chairs Talking podcast.*

# Short SF from 1965

## *A Re-Evaluation by Perry Middlemiss*



### Introduction

Every once in a while David Grigg and I enter the “Hugo Time Machine” on our podcast, *Two Chairs Talking*, and take a deep dive into the sf&f works on the Hugo Award ballot for a particular year.<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing the most recent year we’ve had under the microscope has been 1966, with the awards presented in that year being for work originally published in 1965. We generally try to cover all the long and short fiction on the ballot, which in 1966 consisted of two categories: Best Novel and Best Short Fiction, each with five nominees.

1966 was an interesting year in the sf field as it was the first year that the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) presented the Nebula Awards.<sup>2</sup> These awards differed from the Hugos in that nominating and voting rights were restricted to members of the association, and only works published in English in the United States of America in the year in question were eligible. This “country of publication” issue will be important in the discussion that follows.

From the beginning the Nebula Awards differed from the Hugos in that they allowed for four fiction categories, as opposed to the two for the Hugo: novel, novella, novelette and short story. The final voting ballot also differed by including all works which received even one nomination during the year, rather than being restricted to five works in each category for the Hugos.

After reading the Nebula and Hugo Award shortlists from 1966 I began to wonder what the final Hugo ballot would look like if it had three short fiction categories, just like the Nebula. Pitting stories at all different lengths against each other didn’t seem to me to constitute a level-playing field. The only way to determine which story was the “best” from 1965 would be to examine them within their relevant categories. If I was to re-evaluate all short fiction published in English in 1965, sort them into lengths, and compare the stories that way then I felt I’d have a much better idea of what should have been presented with a Hugo. It would eliminate the Nebula “problem” concerning USA publication, and get over the difficulty Hugo Award nominators had in obtaining works originally published in the UK.

I also thought it would be intriguing to re-evaluate the stories from 1965 from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective. If I ran

the whole exercise as a pseudo Hugo Award nomination and voting exercise it would be interesting to see if my feelings and thoughts about the awarded stories aligned with those of the 1966 award voters, or if some items had been missed, either as a result of publication restrictions or availability of the material. In this year of 2021 neither of these should apply to the 1965 publications, as all of the prozines and the relevant anthologies are available, somewhere. I thought of it as a free and open contest.

Science Fiction was changing in the mid-1960s. The "New Wave" was starting to emerge in the UK prozine *New Worlds* after Michael Moorcock has taken over its editorship in 1964, and 1965 was only two years shy of the release of Harlan Ellison's groundbreaking *Dangerous Visions* anthology. Some sections of the sf field were becoming more experimental both in terms of style and of story, though by no means all. And the focus of stories was changing: the prevalence of space opera and planetary romances was diminishing and the so-called "soft" sciences were becoming more evident. I felt it was incumbent upon me to keep that in mind while I read through the stories from 1965 and to judge the stories on overall merit as opposed to just the author's name, or theme.

I admit though, that there is one restriction that I find myself unable to overcome: that of original publication in English. Given my lack of language abilities it is the one constraint that I feel I must adhere to. The best I could hope for was that some sf&f stories, originally published in languages other than English in 1965 or earlier, would be available in that language for the first time in 1965. If I found any of them I would be happy to consider them as original works.

## Towards a Recommended Reading List

In order to be able to tackle this task in a systematic way I needed a plan.

The first problem was to identify what was published and where. In this regard the Internet Science Fiction Database (isfdb.org) website was invaluable. It provided links to all

issues of all professional magazines (prozines) published in 1965 – US and UK – and, if I tweaked the search facility properly, could also provide a list of original anthologies published in the year.

The professional magazine list was easy enough as there were only two from the UK (*New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*) and eight from the US (*Amazing Stories*, *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*, *Fantastic*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Galaxy*, *Gamma*, *Worlds of If Science Fiction* and *Worlds of Tomorrow*).<sup>3, 4</sup>

Few original anthologies were published in 1965, with *New Writings in SF* (edited by John Carnell out of the UK) being the only one I could identify. There may be some individual original stories lurking in other, mostly reprint anthologies, but a simple method of identifying them escaped me.

The second task was to determine how much sf&f short fiction had actually been published in the year. Given the extensive work that has been undertaken in the isfdb website I decided early on in the process to follow their determination of category, with a couple of exceptions.

What followed was a simple examination of the contents pages (on isfdb) and a counting of the different category of story in each issue. In all there were 90 issues of the ten prozines and four publications in John Carnell's *New Writings in SF* series. Details of the numbers of story types in each issue of each prozine are given on the page at right.

The immensity of this task became immediately apparent when I tallied the total numbers of original stories published in 1965: 24 novellas, 111 novelettes and 319 short stories!<sup>5</sup>

That was way too much to work my way through on my own. So I needed to come up with a way to reduce the numbers down to a manageable size. Not all of the stories would be of a quality to be considered for an award and I frankly didn't want to have to read a lot of work that would have no chance of making a final award ballot. The model I decided on was to follow *Locus* magazine which each

### 1965 Prozine Analysis

Novellas	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Totals
Amazing	0	0	1	0	0	0	-	2	-	0	-	0	3
Analog	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Fantastic	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	1	-	0	-	1
F&SF	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	5
Galaxy	-	1	-	0	-	1	-	0	-	0	-	0	2
Gamma	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2
If	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
WoT	1	-	1	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	2
New Worlds	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Science Fantasy	0	-	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>21</b>

<b>New Writings in SF, Issue:</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	
	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>Ace Doubles:</b>			<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
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**Total Novellas:** 24

Novelettes	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Totals
Amazing	1	1	1	2	1	1	-	0	-	0	-	1	8
Analog	1	1	1	3	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	0	16
Fantastic	0	1	2	0	1	1	-	-	0	-	0	-	5
F&SF	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	2	11
Galaxy	-	2	-	4	-	2	-	1	-	2	-	3	14
Gamma	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	1
If	3	3	2	2	2	3	0	3	3	2	1	1	25
WoT	3	-	1	-	3	-	2	-	3	-	2	-	14
New Worlds	1	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	9
Science Fantasy	1	-	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>111</b>

<b>New Writings in SF, Issue:</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	
	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>

**Total Novelettes:** 124

Short Stories	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Totals
Amazing	3	3	3	3	2	3	-	1	-	1	-	0	19
Analog	4	3	3	0	2	1	3	3	3	2	3	2	29
Fantastic	5	3	4	6	6	4	-	-	1	-	0	-	29
F&SF	6	7	7	6	3	7	4	4	5	5	4	4	62
Galaxy	-	2	-	5	-	2	-	2	-	5	-	2	18
Gamma	-	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	13
If	2	3	3	2	3	1	3	2	4	4	3	4	34
WoT	1	-	2	-	2	-	1	-	2	-	1	-	9
New Worlds	3	4	3	6	2	4	4	6	5	4	6	6	53
Science Fantasy	7	-	3	5	3	6	3	6	7	4	4	5	53
<b>Totals</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>319</b>

<b>New Writings in SF, Issue:</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	
	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>15</b>

**Total Short Stories:** 334

- indicates no issue was published in this month

year asks a number of critics and reviewers to nominate worthy stories in categories in which they have a level of expertise. The resulting nominations are then combined to produce a *Locus* Recommended Reading List, an invaluable reference tool. If I could produce something like that I might be able to get a grip on the task and get it under control.

For example, the 2021 *Locus* list contains recommendations for 19 novellas, 36 novelettes, and 69 short stories.<sup>6</sup> That is a lot, but probably manageable. If I could reduce the 1965 story counts to something similar then I might be in business. The problem was: how? I didn't have a group of reviewers I could call on to help with the reading, and I certainly wasn't going to do it myself. I had to find books, magazines, fanzines or websites that would help me with the culling required.

The Science Fiction Award Database website ([sfadb.com](http://sfadb.com)) lists all awards ever presented in the sf&f genre and also lists the nominees for the awards. Here, along with the winners, were the nominations for the Nebula Awards, all of them: 6 novellas; 18 novelettes; and 30 short stories. Add these to the short story winner of the Hugo Award, and the 3 novellas and 1 novelette nominated for the award, and I had the basis of a list.

But the problem of USA publication-only for the Nebulas and the availability issues for the Hugos meant the initial list was not definitive. It just didn't cover enough of the field. I needed extra suggestions.

My first stop was with Jo Walton's book ***An Informal History of the Hugo Awards***. This is a compendium of the author's weblog entries that she wrote for [Tor.com](http://Tor.com) between 2010-2012, including responses and comments she received from a number of well-credentialed sf people such as Gardner Dozois and Rich Horton, among many others. Walton discussed the novels and short fiction on the ballots and also offered suggestions for what else might have been considered in each category. And, as is the case with these sorts of things, her correspondents rapidly joined in on the conversation offering sugges-

tions of their own. A good start. Items were so noted.

As best I could determine there were only two anthologies published in the 1960s that aimed to provide a reader with a list of the best short sf from 1965: ***11th Annual Edition: The Year's Best S-F*** edited by Judith Merril, and ***The World's Best Science Fiction Second Series*** edited by Donald A. Wollheim and Terry Carr. Entries were noted and duplicates dropped. Both of these anthologies were useful and both had limitations. But I wasn't expecting any one publication to provide me with all the answers I needed. It was always going to be a combination of sources that would get me to my final goal.

I also knew of Damon Knight's anthology ***Nebula Award Stories 1***. It offered a couple of recommendations, though these were already covered in the Nebula nominations. The fact that Knight had chosen them for this anthology would give the stories an extra little push along when the culling actually started. I then came across ***The Best From F&SF 15*** edited by Edward L. Ferman, and ***Analog 5*** edited John W. Campbell Jr., which covered the best, supposedly, from the two prozines, as chosen by the respective editors. By this time I was starting to get a reasonable list together.

These books and anthologies I had consulted had helped up to a point but there were a number of story sources that didn't seem to be covered at all. In particular the UK prozines and ***New Writings*** anthologies.

Luckily enough the good people running the fannish archive site, [FANAC.org](http://FANAC.org), had scans of the British Science Fiction Association (BSFA) fanzine *Vector* from 1965 in their catalog. This fanzine basically acted as the clubzine for the BSFA and carried news and reviews which would come to be very useful. Each issue the fanzine carried a review column dedicated to the UK prozines written by Graham Hall. These weren't in-depth reviews of each story in each issue but they were informative enough for me to get some idea of the worth of a particular story.

Then, sometime during the period when I was facing this story selection problem, I came across the *Galactic Journey* weblog/fanzine.<sup>7</sup> And in particular the entries on that weblog from 2020. Fortuitously, for me, the editors at *Galactic Journey* in 2020 looked at every prozine published in 1965, both from the UK and the USA. Their reviewers wrote capsule reviews of each story and applied a five star rating system. Finally, I had found my reviewers, and they had already done the work needed.

Combining all the information I'd uncovered I found myself with a recommended list of 16 novellas, 39 novelettes and 87 short stories (see the full lists following this article). Much better figures than my earlier set, and relatively similar to the number for the 2021 *Locus* Recommended Reading List. It looked like I might be getting somewhere.

Now it was just a simple matter of reading through all of the material, and noting the ones I thought good enough to be included in a reduced longlist, and then further down to a shortlist that would resemble an award's ballot, i.e. no more than five per category, as the shortlists were at that time.

## Novellas

### Introduction

Various critics have argued that either the novella or the novelette is the best length for a science fiction story, the eminent critic James Gunn among them. But this is not the place for such a discussion and, as you will read later, this is not a year on which to base such an interchange given the relative qualities of the 1965 stories in these two categories.

From a personal perspective I tend to prefer the novella length. I believe it gives the author time to set up their world and to set the ground rules, and it provides the word length that allows the story to run through its full three acts. Novelettes seem a little rushed if they try to do all of that, and short stories, well, short stories are really a different entity all together.

Of the 22 novellas I found from 1965 I believe the shortlist rather picked itself. The Cordwainer Smith story (**On the Storm Planet**) probably came closest to sneaking into the final five but was let down by being too long for the tale it was trying to tell. It felt padded to me. The Hugo nominated novellas by Anderson (**Marque and Reprisal**) and Farmer (**Day of the Great Shout**) read like the part of longer works that they later became. The Leiber (**Stardock**) was a decent sword and sorcery tale but it just didn't take the reader anywhere new. It could quite easily have been written and published ten years earlier and had exactly the same impact.

Most of the rest were tired and old-fashioned, with little to remember them by. So I was left with just five.

### Shortlist

**The Saliva Tree** – Brian W. Aldiss (*F&SF* Sep 1965)

Brian Aldiss's homage to the sf of H. G. Wells involves the crashing of a meteor into a pond on a farm near the small English town of Cottersall. A scientifically-minded young man, Gregory Rolles, who is actually a correspondent of Wells's, goes to investigate and discovers that it is actually an alien spaceship inhabited by invisible aliens. Strange happenings begin to occur around the farm such as a huge increase in the fecundity of the farm animals and crops, with the farmer's wife giving birth to 9 children, and the sow to 18 piglets. But before long it becomes clear that the animals are being fattened up as food for the aliens and Rolles must do all he can to force the aliens to leave and to save the inhabitants of the farm. As much horror as sf. Aldiss here delivers a novella very much in the Wellsian style.

*(Joint winner of the Nebula Award for Best Novel)*

**The Ballad of Beta-2** – Samuel R. Delany (Ace)

In the distant future mankind has spread to the stars. One group set out on a centuries-

long mission only to be overtaken by technology—FTL travel had been developed and Earthmen were already in the star system when they arrived. Two of the ships failed and nobody understands why. Joneny, who is a student of galactic anthropology, is assigned the task of finding out, armed only with the text of the poem “The Ballad of Beta-2”. This well-written story becomes a problem-solving tale that rises above the general level of these sort of sf stories involving spaceship disasters. I have some quibbles about Delany’s “solution” but they don’t mar my overall feelings about this short novel.

(*Nebula nomination.*)

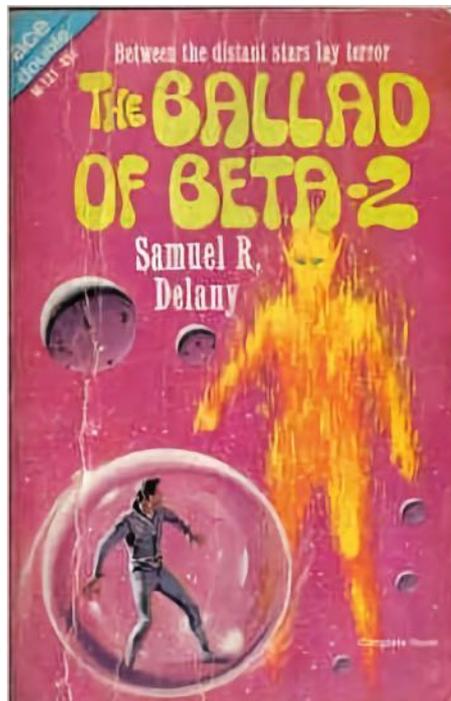
**The Muddle of the Woad** – Randall Garrett (*Analog* Jun 1965)

This is a story that fits into the author’s Lord Darcy series (present day, alternate history, Richard the Lionheart did not die, England and France under one king, magic follows very scientific rules). Darcy is on holidays back in England when he is called in, by the King himself (John IV) to investigate the discovery of a body, painted in blue woad, in a coffin recently built for the Duke of Kent. This is essentially a police procedural with the forensics component undertaken using Garrett’s intricate Laws of Magic rather than science. The mystery unfolds properly and there is no “cheating” on the author’s part. An excellent combination of mystery and magic.

**World of Ptavvs** – Larry Niven (*Worlds of Tomorrow* March 1965)

The second story in the author’s **Known Space** series which was later expanded into the novel of the same name. Humans have discovered a reflective statue on the ocean floor which they later determine is an alien stuck in a stasis field. Using a newly developed time-slowng device the alien is released

and we discover that it is a member of a long-extinct race that at one time ruled the galaxy by way of its telepathic abilities. The alien was stranded on Earth 1.5 billion years before and now must retrieve a telepathy amplifier unit from the outer solar system in order to complete the total subjugation of the human race. This is space opera in the old sense, but also a precursor of newer works such as **The Expanse** by S. A. Corey. It is a complex, fast-moving adventure story, though simply written, concentrating more on the scientific problems the plot throws up rather than the interactions between the characters.



**He Who Shapes** – Roger Zelazny (*Amazing* Jan-Feb 1965)

Dr. Charles Render is a psychologist who practices in the new field of neuro-participation, that is, via some futuristic tech he is able to enter the dreams of his patients and to manipulate those dreams in order to further treatment. He meets a young woman who has been blind from birth and is also a trained psychologist. The two agree to work on teaching the woman how to “see” and understand the

visual world. I normally find dream sequences to be a death sentence for a story but Zelazny uses them sparingly and well enough not to ruin the work. The author was hitting his peak during 1965 so anything by him had to be considered. Later expanded into the novel **The Dream Master**.

(*Joint winner of the Nebula Award for Best Novel*)

### Winner

**The Ballad of Beta-2** – Samuel R. Delany

This was not a great year for sf novellas. The prozines seemed reluctant to publish them (only *Amazing* and *F&SF* carried more than 2 during the year) and Carnell’s *New Writings*

series only offered one in 1965. I suspect the economics of publishing and marketing in that year precluded the thought of a novella appearing in a standalone volume and with few new original anthologies in the book shops there weren't many markets for stories of this length.

In any event the Delany novella stood out from the rest in terms of style and content. The runner-up would have been Aldiss's *The Saliva Tree*. And after that it would be anyone's choice.

I should note here that although the Internet SF Database lists this story as a "novel", it originally appeared as half of an Ace double, and it was nominated for the Nebula Award as a novella.

## Novelettes

### Introduction

The stories that fit under the novelette label for 1965 are the weakest of the three categories here. Many of the offerings from the year seem thin and sparingly thought-out, or stretched out from short story length, to their detriment. Deciding on the stories for the longlist was a relatively easy exercise – certainly easier than for the short story category which follows—and then, to reduce the list further for the shortlist, was also comparatively straightforward.

For no reason other than because it seemed like a good option given the number of novelettes under consideration, I chose 10 stories for my longlist.

### Longlist

**"The Decision Makers"** – Joseph Green (*Galaxy* Apr 1965)

A first contact story. The seal-like aliens of this water world use a collective intelligence and communicate telepathically. Allan Odegaard is a Practical Philosopher who is charged with determining whether or not the creatures are truly intelligent, at least from a human perspective. The implications of this decision will impact not only the aliens but

the commercial and industrial uses to which the planet is put. As a result Odegaard is put under intense pressure to make a decision and to make it quickly. You can read this as a metaphor for many earth-based commercial/nature quandaries. It is certainly entertaining but could have been better with more work.

(Nebula nomination, included in *The World's Best Science Fiction Second Series*)

**"No Different Flesh"** – Zenna Henderson (*F&SF* May 1965)

This is one of Henderson's People stories. A young human couple, Mark and Meris, find a young girl in a storm and look after her until her father arrives. Their act of charity allows them to form a bond with the People to their mutual benefit. A quietly confident story that attempts to be no more than the surface detail. This story formed the major part of the framing device in the author's collection of People stories that was published under the same title as this novelette.

(Included in *Best From F&SF 15*)

**"Four Ghosts in Hamlet"** – Fritz Leiber (*F&SF* Jan 1965)

A ghost story revolving around a performance of *Hamlet* in a small American town by a travelling Shakespearean company. The company's bit-player, who usually plays the part of the ghost in the play, is indisposed, so two other members of the party prepare for the role, only to find, on the night, other ghosts waiting in the wings. This is an excellent little piece that is much better than the year's Hugo-nominated sword and sorcery novella by the same author. Told with the eye of an actor it has only the hint of the supernatural. That hint is just enough.

(Nebula nomination; included in *Best From F&SF 15*)

**"The Planet Player"** – E. Clayton McCarty (*If* Sep 1965)

Archaeologist and musician Charles Maxwell is part of an expedition to explore the alien planet of S-60, which has been reported as showing signs of an alien civilisation. The

team discovers an amphitheatre with a dead creature in every seat, and soon realises that every alien on the planet died at exactly the same moment. Maxwell wonders if it has something to do with the unique acoustic powers of the civilisation's crystalline structures. Despite opposition from his tone-deaf, egotistical leader Maxwell solves the puzzle, though some time after the reader has come to the same conclusion, and becomes obsessed with the aliens' music and its possibilities.

**"The Survivor"** – Walter F. Moudy (*Amazing* May 1965)

War has been replaced by an Olympic War Games where 100 Americans attempt to kill 100 Russians in an arena 3 kilometres long and 1 kilometre wide. The ending is a bit obvious but better than most in this "future violence as television entertainment" sf subgenre.

(Included in *11th Annual Edition: The Year's Best S-F*)

**"The Adventure of the Extraterrestrial"** – Mack Reynolds (*Analog* Jul 1965)

In a rare crossover for this time, Reynolds mixes the sf and detective genres with this amusing story about Sherlock Holmes's last case, as he is engaged to use his deductive powers to determine if any extraterrestrials are living in London.

(*Nebula nomination.*)

**"Manipulation"** – Keith Roberts (as by John Kingston) (*New Writings in SF-3*)

This story's narrator is a man with psi powers who has to battle his abilities while making his way in the world. But his power and his anger

start to overwhelm him. Very interesting story.

**"Trouble Tide"** – James H. Schmitz (*Analog* May 1965)

On the planet of Nandy-Cline the planet's sea beef herds are mysteriously disappearing and other sea creatures are dying during their annual migration. Two scientists from Girard Pharmaceuticals team up to determine the cause. They suspect a rival commercial company is involved. This is an interesting tale of the ecology on an alien planet which is disrupted by humans for nefarious purposes. In this period of the 1960s where female characters were generally just included for romantic reasons, Schmitz integrates the female scientist into the story in a refreshing manner.

**"Shall We Have a Little Talk?"** – Robert Sheckley (*Galaxy* Oct 1965)

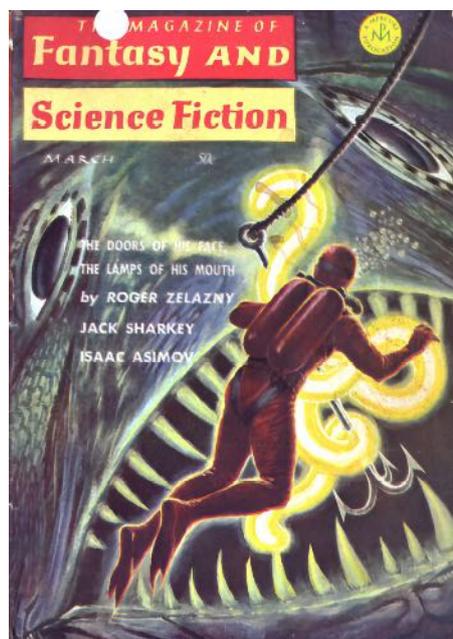
The linguist Jackson is the first human on the planet of Na. He has been sent by Earth's government in order to establish some form of communication channel with Na's dominant life-form. He applies himself to learning the main global language Hon, which he does. After gaining a basic level of competence he attempts to purchase a parcel of land with the idea of establishing a foothold for Earth to exploit. The only trouble he finds

is that the language appears to change rapidly each day, so rapidly that he can't keep up. But is this the true nature of the planet's language or is it all a ruse? This is absurdist humour of a type that Sheckley did so well.

(*Nebula nomination.*)

**"The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth"** – Roger Zelazny (*F&SF* Mar 1965)

An entry in that sub-genre of "Alternate Venus" stories, where Venus is cloud-cov-



ered, hot and watery, but ultimately habitable. Carlton Davits is a fisherman, obsessed with landing the largest water creature on Venus, *Ichthyform Leviosaurus Levianthus*, a 100-metre long monster. He lost a fortune in his own attempt and is now hired by Jean Luharich, a super-rich cosmetics model – the two have some past romantic history. The story follows the straight-forward account of the hunt but told in typical sparkling style by Zelazny. This is a Great White Hunter story in a science-fictional setting which would generally have made it rather boring but Zelazny saves it with his writing verve.

*(Winner of the Nebula Award for Best Novelette; Hugo nomination; included in **Nebula Award Stories 1**); included in **Best From F&SF 15**)*

### **Shortlist**

**"No Different Flesh"** – Zenna Henderson

**"Four Ghosts in Hamlet"** – Fritz Leiber

**"Manipulation"** – Keith Roberts (as by John Kingston)

**"Shall We Have a Little Talk?"** – Robert Sheckley

**"The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth"** – Roger Zelazny

### **And the winner is...**

**"The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth"** – Roger Zelazny

As much as I have some reservations about this story it's still the best of the shortlist. It stands out from the next two in my ranking (Leiber then Sheckley) purely due to its imaginative setting – even if it is scientifically incorrect – and the way Zelazny was able to harness his sense of the *fantastique* within the story's hard-science framework. Subverting a tired-out old literary trope didn't harm his cause in any way either.

It was hard to separate the Leiber and Sheckley stories. They couldn't be more diverse but I enjoyed both of them immensely, for completely different reasons. You could be

forgiven for thinking of them as being in very different genres.

The Henderson and Roberts entries follow, in that order. Both good stories but not really to the level of the top three.

## **Short Stories**

### **Introduction**

I always thought that the Short Story category was going to be the hardest of the three to bed down. With 87 stories in the recommended reading list then even if 20% of them reached a superior level that was going to leave me with 17 or 18 stories in my longlist. Even so I thought that might be manageable. I wasn't close.

My first run through presented me with 23. Way more than any longlist should contain. So some hard cutting was required. In the end I came up with a list of 15 stories; I just couldn't keep it to a ten. All of them have something about them that floats them to the top of the pile, something that, in any number of years might just have been enough to get them onto a Hugo ballot. Unfortunately not all of them would, or could make it.

### **Longlist**

**"Girl and Robot With Flowers"** – Brian W. Aldiss (*New Worlds* Sep 1965)

The main character here is an author, Aldiss, who is discussing with his wife, a science fiction story he wants to write. What starts as a simple domestic scene gradually changes to become something deeper and more interesting. Shamelessly dropping the names of other sf authors (Ballard, Anderson, Harrison, Pohl and Moorcock) and comparing his proposed approach to the plot with his suppositions of theirs. A story within a story that you feel could only have been written for, and published in, *New Worlds* at that time.

**"Man in His Time"** – Brian W. Aldiss (*Science Fantasy* Apr 1965)

The only survivor of a mission to Mars has mysteriously appeared on Earth with no idea of how he got back here. In addition, the effects of the inter-planetary travel have impacted him in a very strange way, as he now appears to be living 3.3077 minutes ahead of standard Earth time. The story details the toll this takes on him and his relationships with his family.

**"The Drowned Giant"** – J. G. Ballard (*Playboy* May 1965) (aka "Souvenir")

This story was originally published in ***The Terminal Beach***, a Ballard short story collection, in 1964. But as it featured in Damon Knight's anthology of Nebula Award stories and in Merrill's "Best of the Year" collection, I've decided to allow it to stay in contention under the modern Hugo rule that if a story may not have been seen by enough readers in a particular year it could become eligible in the year in which it was seen. The story concerns the remains of a giant man which washes up on a beach in the UK. It is an odd little piece. No explanation for the giant's appearance is given, and it is seemingly accepted by everyone who goes and gawks at it.

(*Nebula nomination; included in **Nebula Award Stories 1**; included in **11th Annual Edition: The Year's Best S-F***)

**"Come to Venus Melancholy"** – Thomas M. Disch (*F&SF* Nov 1965)

This story is told from the point of view of a robot that has been left severely damaged and alone in a hut in the Venusian swamp. This fits into the Old Venus subgenre (ie hot and wet, rather than the hell-hole we know it to be), similar to the Zelazny novelette. Disch had only been writing in the field for a few years at this point but he was really starting to hit his straps here.

(*Nebula nomination.*)

**"Repent Harlequin, Said the Tick-Tock Man"** – Harlan Ellison (*Galaxy* Dec 1965)

In a totalitarian state the Master Timekeeper (nicknamed the Ticktockman) enforces a rigid adherence to punctuality, docking life-spans by the amount of time a person is late for scheduled appointments. The Master Timekeeper is Ellison's Big Brother to his Winston Smith (Harlequin) but this story is a triumph of form over content. While it should be applauded for its ground-breaking style it reads as a product of its time more than a revelatory story for the 21st century. Despite all that it does succeed in its aims and needs to be respected for its place in the genre.

(*Winner of the Hugo Award for Best Short Fiction; Winner of the Nebula Award for Best Short Story; included in **Nebula Award Stories 1**; included in **The World's Best Science Fiction Second Series***)

**"The Music Makers"** – Langdon Jones (*New Worlds* Nov 1965)

On Mars a human violinist performs the Berg Violin Concerto to great acclaim. After the concert he takes a walk in the Mars desert, and stops to play his violin once more. As he does so he hears other music all round him and discovers the elusive Martians at the same time. This is very much a homage to the Mars of Ray Bradbury, with breathable air and strange, ethereal natives.

**"Slow Tuesday Night"** – R. A. Lafferty (*Galaxy* Apr 1965)

A wonderful satire about the pace of modern life and the way it tends to get completely out of control: stock market fortunes are won and lost overnight and marriages last only an hour. This could only be a Lafferty story, told in his typical whimsical style, with depths appearing if you only take the time to look for them.

(*Nebula nomination.*)

**"Traveller's Rest"** – David I. Masson (*New Worlds* Sep 1965)

The world of this story appears to be a deep time well at the bottom of which a war is being fought. A few seconds at the front can be equivalent to days or weeks at a distant location. The main character is a combatant in the war who is relieved and who then builds a new life well away from the fighting. Twenty years later he is re-called only to find that a few minutes have passed in the battle. The story is written with precision and ingenuity: names and language change the further the protagonist gets away from the war front, and back again as he returns. This was possibly way too weird for the Hugo voters of that time.

*(Included in **The World's Best Science Fiction Second Series**; included in **11th Annual Edition: The Year's Best S-F**)*

**"Becalmed in Hell"** – Larry Niven (*F&SF* Jul 1965)

This is a puzzle story about the first manned landing on Venus (this time a true depiction of the hot hell-hole that it is). The astronaut, Howie, must figure out a way to fix his AI-enabled landing module before the heat and pressure destroys the craft. The question is: is the problem mechanical or psychological? Or maybe a mixture of both? You could be excused for thinking that this might have fitted in quite well at *Analog*, but Niven never sold a story to Campbell, oddly enough.

*(Nebula nomination; included in **Nebula Award Stories 1**; included in **The World's Best Science Fiction Second Series**)*

**"There's a Starman in Ward 7"** – David Rome (*New Worlds* Jan 1965)

A man incarcerated in a mental institution claims that one of the other inmates came from Alpha Centauri. While he was there the "starman" helps effect a cure for the other patients so he can make his escape and get back to his spaceship.

*(Included in **11th Annual Edition: The Year's Best S-F**)*

**"The Wall"** – Josephine Saxton (*Science Fantasy* Nov 1965)

A fable set in a city in a saucer-like valley that is divided in two by an impenetrable wall. The story here concerns lovers separated by that wall and the lengths they go to to finally meet. A rather bleak, though uplifting story by one of the few women published in the field during this year.

*(Included in **11th Annual Edition: The Year's Best S-F**)*

**"Balanced Ecology"** – James H. Schmitz (*Analog* Mar 1965)

On the alien planet of Wrake humans have settled comfortably and are sustainably harvesting the native diamond-wood trees. A corporation attempts to take over one of the forests only to discover that the planet has integrated the humans into its balanced ecology. This story was noted as being on the Roll of Honour for the Nebulas so would have ranked highly. A very satisfying and interesting story.

*(Nebula nomination; included in **Nebula Award Stories 1**)*

**"...And Isles Where Good Men Lie"** – Bob Shaw (*New Worlds* Oct 1965)

The United Nations Planetary Defence Unit based in Iceland is tasked with protecting Earth from a fleet of alien spaceships. Originally thought to be invading it becomes apparent that they are actually migrating. The question is how to stop the daily ships from landing. Well handled and better than most sf of the time.

**"Over the River and Through the Woods"** – Clifford D. Simak (*Amazing* May 1965)

A simple time travel story that starts to get going just as it comes to an end. Two young children are sent back to 1896 Mid-West America from around 100 years in the future to stay with some ancestors. There are hints that something bad is happening up the timeline. Classic Simak: rural, simple and yet with deeper themes than are first thought.

(Nebula nomination.)

(Included in *The World's Best Science Fiction Second Series*)

"Apartness" – Vernor Vinge (*New Worlds* Jun 1965)

A post-apocalyptic story after the North World War wiped out the Northern Hemisphere countries. A South American expedition finds an unknown settlement on the Antarctic continent that proves to be the remnants of the South African white hierarchy. This was Vernor Vinge's first story. The title comes from the direct English translation of "apartheid".

(Included in *The World's Best Science Fiction Second Series*)

### Shortlist

"The Drowned Giant" – J. G. Ballard

"Repent Harlequin, Said the Tick-Tock Man" – Harlan Ellison

"Traveller's Rest" – David I. Masson

"There's a Starman in Ward 7" – David Rome

"Over the River and Through the Woods" – Clifford D. Simak

### Near misses

"Come to Venus Melancholy" – Thomas M. Disch

"Slow Tuesday Night" – R. A. Lafferty

"The Wall" – Josephine Saxton

"Balanced Ecology" – James H. Schmitz

"Apartness" – Vernor Vinge

### And the winner is...

"Traveller's Rest" – David I. Masson

I think the top three in this category (1. Masson, 2. Ballard and 3. Ellison) pick themselves. That is not to say that the other two are poor stories; by no means. It's just that these three stand out as being literate and innovative.



This result might come as something of a shock to some people, given that this Ellison story is considered by many to be one of the greatest sf stories ever written. And it may well have been my choice if I were voting in 1966. But with the advantage of distance I can step away from the "shock of the new" value that story represented at the time and consider it on its strict merits, and rank it against the others. And of those I found the Masson story to be a superior piece of writing. As noted above Ellison's story is mainly about the content and presentation while Masson's does something that I had

never seen before, and don't believe I have ever seen again.

And to finish off, I ranked the last two stories as 4. Simak and 5. Rome.

### Conclusion

In many ways this was an interesting exercise, if a long and arduous one. In the process I gained a better understanding of where the sf field sat in the mid-1960s, on the cusp of great new themes and literary methods while still hankering for the old stories of hard science and adventure. I have gained an appreciation of R. A. Lafferty's short fiction which I never had before, something I consider a distinct bonus, and

showed me where they were and where they were heading.

The lack of stories by women was a major surprise. Le Guin had published her first short fiction in 1962 but nothing appeared in 1965 (that I could find) under her name. Bailey, Beauclerk, Henderson, Saxton and Wilhelm published little, though it is impossible to determine if this was due to a lack of output or prejudicial editorial practices. Most likely a combination of the two. Although it would take some time for women to become a force in the field signs of change are evident here.



### Notes:

1. The Hugo Awards are run each year by a sub-committee of the organisation responsible for overseeing the World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon). After a nominating period open to members of the current and previous years' Worldcons, a ballot is produced with voting restricted to members of the current Worldcon only. First presented in 1953, in 1966 they consisted of only two fiction categories: novel and short fiction. For more information see the Wikipedia page on the award.
2. Wikipedia: "Science Fiction Writers of America, Inc. was founded in 1965 by Damon Knight in association with a group of writers connected to the Milford Conference, which he also headed...In 1991, the name of the organization was changed to Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, to reflect the fact that the organization had always included writers working in multiple genres." The standard abbreviation of SFWA was adopted in 1996.
3. Just to reduce the tedium of reading the full titles each time the names of some of these prozines will be abbreviated for this rest of this article. So, *Amazing Stories* becomes *Amazing*, *Analog Science Fiction and Fact* becomes *Analog*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* becomes *F&SF*, *Worlds of If Science Fiction* becomes *If*, and *Worlds of Tomorrow* becomes *WoT*.
4. *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, were both published by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company up until June 1965 after which they were taken over by Ultimate Publishing Co. Inc., and thereafter published mostly reprints. Such reprints were not considered in the scope of this article.
5. In the year of 2021 both the Hugo and Nebula Award rules define a novella as a work of between 17,500 and 40,000 words; a novelette as between 7,500 and 17,500 words; and a short story as being less than 7,500.
6. 2021 Locus Recommended Reading List <http://https://locusmag.com/2021/02/2020-locus-recommended-reading-list/>
7. Galactic Journey <http://http://galacticjourney.org/>

## 1965 Recommended Reading List

The lists below were compiled from the following sources: Hugo and Nebula Award shortlists; the Merril and Wollheim/Carr anthologies containing their choices of the best of the year; the Damon Knight Nebula Award anthology; the Analog and F&SF magazine anthologies for their "bests of the year"; Jo Walton's selections, including her correspondents, from her Tor.com Hugo Award blog and subsequent book publication; four and five star selections from various reviewers on the *Galactic Journey* weblog; reviews in various fanzines of the time, including *Vector* and *Riverside Quarterly*; and from my personal reading.

### Novellas (17,500-40,000 words)

**The Saliva Tree**, Brian W. Aldiss (F&SF 9/1965)

**Marque and Reprisal**, Poul Anderson (F&SF 2/1965)

**Rogue Dragon**, Avram Davidson (F&SF 7/1965)

**The Ballad of Beta-2**, Samuel R. Delany (Ace)

**Day of the Great Shout**, Philip Jose Farmer (Worlds of Tomorrow 1/1965)

**The Muddle of the Woad**, Randall Garrett (Analog 6/1965)

**Stardock**, Fritz Leiber (Fantastic 9/1965)

**The Mercury men**, C. C. MacApp (Galaxy 12/1965)

**The World of Ptavvs**, Larry Niven (Worlds of Tomorrow 3/1965)

**Lone Zone**, Charles Platt (New Worlds 7/1965)

**Under Two Moons**, Frederik Pohl (If 9/1965)

**Mission "Red Clash"**, Joe Poyer (Analog 12/1965)

**On the Storm Planet**, Cordwainer Smith (Galaxy 2/1965)

**Vashti**, Thomas Burnett-Swann (Science Fantasy 5/1965)

**Research Alpha**, A. E. Van Vogt & James Schmitz (If 7/1965)

**He Who Shapes**, Roger Zelazny (Amazing 1-2/1965)

### Novelettes (7,500-17,500 words)

**"The Life of Your Time"**, Poul Anderson (as by Michael Karargeorge) (Analog 9/1965)

**"In Reason's Ear"**, Hilary Bailey (as by Pippin Graham) (Science Fantasy 6/1965)

**"Takeover Bid"**, John Baxter (New Writings in SF-5)

**"The Shipwrecked Hotel"**, James Blish & Norman L. Knight (Galaxy 8/1965)

**"Vanishing Point"**, Jonathan Brand (If 1/1965)

**"Sunjammer"**, Arthur C. Clarke (Argosy 1/1965)

**"102 H-Bombs"**, Thomas M. Disch (Fantastic 3/1965)

**"Half a Loaf"**, R.C. Fitzpatrick (Analog 8/1965)

**"Overproof"**, Randall Garrett (as by Jonathan Blake MacKenzie) (Analog 10/1965)

**"The Decision Makers"**, Joseph Green (Galaxy 4/1965)

**"No Different Flesh"**, Zenna Henderson (F&SF 5/1965)

**"Greenslaves"**, Frank Herbert (Amazing 3/1965)

**"The Girl Who Drew the Gods"**, Harvey Jacobs (Mademoiselle 5/1965)

**"At the Institute"**, Norman Kagan (Worlds of Tomorrow 9/1965)

**"The Earth Merchants"**, Norman Kagan (F&SF 5/1965)

**"Laugh with Franz"**, Norman Kagan (Galaxy 12/1965)

**"Four Ghosts in Hamlet"**, Fritz Leiber (F&SF 1/1965)

**"The Planet Player"**, E. Clayton McCarty (If 9/1965)

**"Small One"**, E. Clayton McCarty (If 2/1965)

**"Potential"**, Donald Malcolm (New Writings in SF-5)

**"The Survivor"**, Walter F. Moudy (Amazing 5/1965)

**"One Face"**, Larry Niven (Galaxy 6/1965)

**"The Adventure of the Extraterrestrial"**, Mack Reynolds (Analog 7/1965)

**"Acclimatization"**, Keith Roberts (as by David Stringer) (New Writings in SF-5)

**"Manipulation"**, Keith Roberts (as by John Kingston) (New Writings in SF-3)

**"Sub-Lim"**, Keith Roberts (New Writings in SF-4)

**"Masque of the Red Shift"**, Fred Saberhagen (If 11/1965)

**"Goblin Night"**, James H. Schmitz (Analog 4/1965)

**"Planet of Forgetting"**, James H. Schmitz (Galaxy 2/1965)

**"Trouble Tide"**, James H. Schmitz (Analog 5/1965)

**"Maiden Voyage"**, J. W. Schutz (F&SF 3/1965)

**"Shall We Have a Little Talk?"**, Robert Sheckley (Galaxy 10/1965)

**"Blue Fire"**, Robert Silverberg (Galaxy 6/1965)

**"Three to a Given Star"**, Cordwainer Smith (Galaxy 10/1965)

**"The Masculinist Revolt"**, William Tenn (F&SF 8/1965)

**"The Recon Man"**, Wilson Tucker (If 1/1965)

**"The Overworld"**, Jack Vance (F&SF 12/1965)

**"The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth"**, Roger Zelazny (F&SF 3/1965)

**"The Furies"**, Roger Zelazny (Amazing 6/1965)

### **Short Stories (less than 7,500 words)**

**"Girl With Robot and Flowers"**, Brian W. Aldiss (New Worlds 9/1965)

**"Man in His Time"**, Brian W. Aldiss (Science Fantasy 4/1965)

**"Scarfe's World"**, Brian W. Aldiss (Worlds of Tomorrow 3/1965)

**"Say It With Flowers"**, Poul Anderson (as by Winston P. Sanders) (Analog 9/1965)

**"The Captive Djinn"**, Christopher Anvil (Analog 5/1965)

**"Jabez O'Brien and Davy Jones' Locker"**, Robert Arthur (F&SF 6/1965)

**"Eyes Do More Than See"**, Isaac Asimov (F&SF 4/1965)

**"Founding Father"**, Isaac Asimov (Galaxy 10/1965)

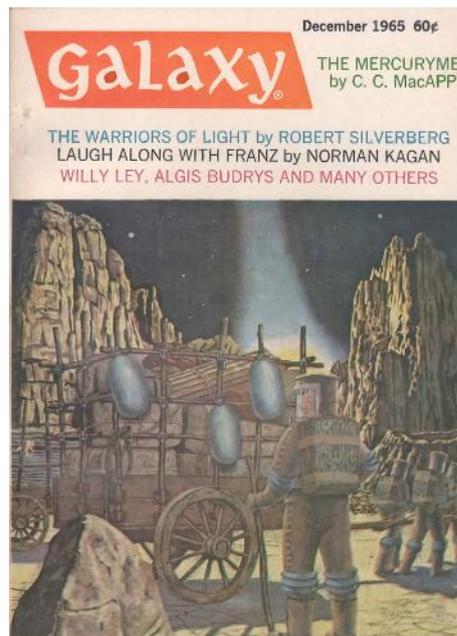
**"The Drowned Giant" (aka "Souvenir")**, J. G. Ballard (Playboy 3/1965)

**"Dune Limbo"**, J. G. Ballard (New Worlds 3/1965)

**"Game"**, Donald Barthelme (New Yorker 31 July 1965)

**"Testament"**, John Baxter (New Writings in SF-3)

**"Lord Moon"**, Jane Beauclerk (F&SF 4/1965)



"Eine Kleine Nachtmusik", Frederic Brown & Carl Onspaugh (F&SF 6/1965)

"Coincidence Day", John Brunner (Analog 2/1965)

"Planetfall", John Brunner (Analog 5/1965)

"Yesterday's Gardens", Johnny Byrne (Science Fantasy 11/1965)

"Uncollected Works", Lin Carter (F&SF 3/1965)

"The Answerer", Bill Casey (Amazing 2/1965)

"A Few Kindred Spirits", John Christopher (F&SF 11/1965)

"Maelstrom II", Arthur C. Clarke (Playboy 4/1965)

"The House the Blakeney's Built", Avram Davidson (F&SF 1/1965)

"Computers Don't Argue", Gordon R. Dickson (Analog 9/1965)

"Warrior", Gordon R. Dickson (Analog 12/1965)

"Come to Venus, Melancholy", Thomas M. Disch (F&SF 11/1965)

"The Roaches", Thomas M. Disch (Escapade 10/1965)

"Of One Mind", James A. Durham (If 3/1965)

"Repent, Harlequin! Said the Ticktockman", Harlan Ellison (Galaxy 12/1965)

"Fighting Division", Randall Garrett (Analog 8/1965)

"El Numero Uno", Sasha Gilian (F&SF 11/1965)

"Inside Man", H. L. Gold (Galaxy 10/1965)

"Calling Dr. Clockwork", Ron Goulart (Amazing 3/1965)

"Rake", Ron Goulart (F&SF 6/1965)

"Terminal", Ron Goulart (Fantastic 5/1965)

"Aunt Millicent at the Races", Len Gutteridge (F&SF 4/1965)

"The Liberators", Lee Harding (New Writings in SF-5)

"The Effectives", Zenna Henderson (Worlds of Tomorrow 5/1965)

"The Plot", Tom Herzog (Rogue 12/1965)

"The History of Dr. Frost", Roderic C. Hodgins (F&SF 4/1965)

"A Murkle for Jesse", Gary Jennings (F&SF 7/1965)

"The Music Makers", Langdon Jones (New Worlds 11/1965)

"Coming-of-Age Day", A. K. Jorgenson (Science Fantasy 9/1965)

"O'Grady's Girl", Leo P. Kelley (F&SF 12/1965)

"Somewhere Not Far From Here", Gerald Kersh (Playboy

3/1965)

"Better Than Ever", Alex Kirs (F&SF 3/1965)

"Those Who Can Do", Bob Kurosaka (F&SF 1/1965)

"Hog-Belly Honey", R. A. Lafferty (F&SF 9/1965)

"In Our Block", R. A. Lafferty (If 7/1965)

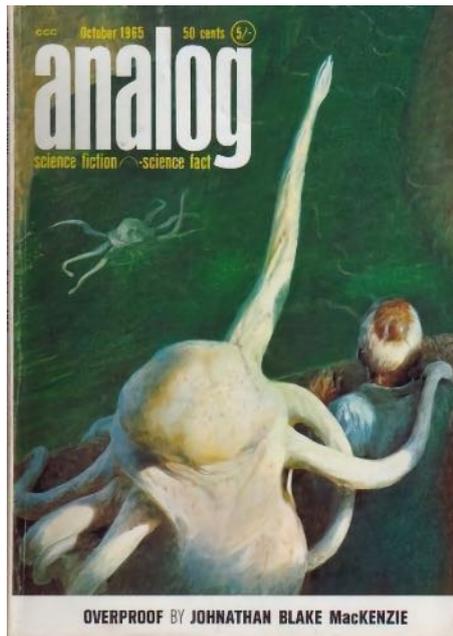
"Slow Tuesday Night", R. A. Lafferty (Galaxy 4/1965)

"Cyclops", Fritz Leiber (Worlds of Tomorrow 9/1965)

"The Good New Days", Fritz Leiber (Galaxy 10/1965)

"Moon Duel", Fritz Leiber (If 9/1965)

"The Peacock King", Larry McCombs & Ted White (F&SF 11/1965)



- "Everyone's Home is Guernica", Willard Marsh (F&SF 8/1965)
- "Traveller's Rest", David I. Masson (New Worlds 9/1965)
- "Countercommandment", Patrick Meadows (Analog 12/1965)
- "Sea Bright", Hal R. Moore (F&SF 9/1965)
- "Food", Ray Nelson (Gamma 2/1965)
- "Though a Sparrow Fall", Scott Nicholls (Analog 7/1965)
- "Becalmed in Hell", Larry Niven (F&SF 7/1965)
- "Wrong-Way Street", Larry Niven (Galaxy 4/1965)
- "The Mischief Maker", Richard Olin (Analog 10/1965)
- "Ado About Nothing", Bob Ottum Jr. (F&SF 3/1965)
- "A Better Mousehole", Edgar Pangborn (Galaxy 10/1965)
- "Paradise for a Punter", Clifford C. Reed (Science Fantasy 8/1965)
- "A Leader for Yesteryear", Mack Reynolds (If 10/1965)
- "Susan", Keith Roberts (Science Fantasy 4/1965)
- "The Typewriter", Keith Roberts (Science Fantasy 1-2/1965)
- "The War of Foxhanger", Keith Roberts (Science Fantasy 4/1965)
- "Keep Them Happy", Robert Rohrer (F&SF 4/1965)
- "There's a Starman in Ward 7", David Rome (New Worlds 1/1965)
- "The Wall", Josephine Saxton (Science Fantasy 11/1965)
- "Balanced Ecology", James H. Schmitz (Analog 3/1965)
- "...And Isles Where Good Men Lie", Bob Shaw (New Worlds 10/1965)
- "The Sixth Palace", Robert Silverberg (Galaxy 2/1965)
- "Over the River and Through the Woods", Clifford D. Simak (Amazing 5/1965)
- "Horizontal Man", William Spencer (New Writings in SF-6)
- "The Legend of Ernie Deacon", William F. Temple (Analog 3/1965)
- "Something Else", Robert J. Tilley (F&SF 10/1965)
- "A Singular Case of Extreme Electrolyte Imbalance", Robert D. Tschirgi (Worm Runners Digest)
- "J is for Jeanne", E. C. Tubb (New Worlds 12/1965)
- "Apartness", Vernor Vinge (New Worlds 6/1965)
- "The Man Who Painted Tomorrow", Kate Wilhelm (Fantastic 3/1965)
- "The Eight Billion", Richard Wilson (F&SF 7/1965)
- "Goodnight, Sweet Prince", Peter Wordley (Science Fantasy 10/1965)
- "On the River", Robert F. Young (Fantastic 6/1965)
- "Devil Car", Roger Zelazny (Galaxy 6/1965)
- "Thelinde's Song", Roger Zelazny (Fantastic 6/1965)

# Fannish Reprint

## Kilometre Devaluation Shock Report by John Bangsund

First published in SIKANDER 5, edited by Irwin Hirsh, June 1981

In a surprise move last weekend that caught even Treasury pundits and Reserve Bank prognosticators off guard, the Prune Minister announced that the Australian kilometre had been devalued by 10 per cent, effective immediately, and that in future it would be allowed to float against a mixed airline-bag of international distances. This is in line with the government's ongoing overall strategy to stimulate the economy, tighten liquidity and confuse motorists.

However, the Prune Minister warned, this meaningful and purposeful move could only accomplish its objective with the full co-operation of all sectors of the community, including minority groups, whose views he well understood, such as trade unionists and taxi drivers. Questioned as to the nature of this objective, the Prune Minister said that he had nothing further to add to his statement at that present point of time, but that full amplification would be given to the matter, and adequate opportunity for discussion, in the proper place and at an appropriate time.

The Leader of the Opposition said nothing surprised him any more. The move, as he understood it, implied that the kilometre would be tied in future to a mixed basket of international units of linear measurement. "If I may explain the absurdity of this," he said, "it means that this weds we may have parity with the Dutch kilometre and next week with the pre-revolutionary Russian verst or, for all I know, the Tongan pa'anga. How clearly. this will be very confusing to the average Australian motorist. It would not be true to say that lie won't know whether he's coming or going, because Labor's policy of universal free rear-vision mirrors did away with all

that, and try as it might, the present government will find it pretty hard to dismantle that bit of legislation. But it will still be confusing for the average outer-suburban commuter, whichever way he is going, and it is clearly a retrograde step, in my view."

Interviewed, the Minister for Lateral Mobility said that the move had been under discussion for some time in the Cabinet, or possibly in the Members' Bar or the swimming pool at the Lodge, but wherever it had been, he was of course aware of its full implications, and although some concern had been forcefully expressed as to its possible adverse effects on the primary producer generally, the Prune Minister enjoyed his full confidence and no doubt would amplify the full ramifications of the devaluation at some suitable juncture. Questioned, the Minister said that he understood from his colleague the Minister for Technicalities and Obfuscation that a 10 per cent devaluation of the kilometre amounted only to 0.06 of the imperial mile, or something like that, which was really only a drop in the bucket.

The Minister then caused a sensation by going on to say that he had never been in favour of fully abandoning the imperial mile for the kilometre, and indeed regarded this as one of the worst excesses of a totally irresponsible regime, but entirely typical of their attitude to the Empire, or Commonwealth as it was now called, and all that full-blooded Australians hold dear.

The Minister said in a later interview that his remarks on the subject had been grossly misinterpreted by all sectors of the media. It was true, he frankly and freely admitted, that he had not been totally in

favour of full metric conversion, and like many other ordinary Australians he still had a little difficulty recalling how many litres there were to a millibar and so on. Even his colleague the Minister for Passive Inculcation, he laughed, could occasionally slip up in this regard. This was taken by most commentators to refer to that Minister's recent nine-fold increase in funds to western-suburbs school libraries, which most observers agree was probably meant to be a 10 per cent cut.

However, he continued, his reference to "the worst excesses of a totally irresponsible regime" had been quoted completely out of context. Any fool knew that metric conversion had been a major initiative introduced by a previous Liberal government, he said. His reference to the discredited previous Labor government had been made in respect of an altogether separate matter entirely, and it was typical of some elements in the media that this pernicious and wilful misrepresentation should be made. He intended early consultation with his colleague the Minister for Gas-Fired Telephony as to what could be done about this, especially in regard to the Australian Broadcasting Commission, whose staff of journalists, both of them, were notorious for their one-sided reporting, particularly with respect to Ministerial comment on and as to major issues of the day.

On a radio talk-back program in Sydney, a Liberal back-bencher and former Prune Minister said that during his time in office he had been terribly concerned with this grave matter of devaluing things, especially the kilometre, which he understood had only just been introduced and deserved a fair go from every fair-minded Australian, and that he viewed last weekend's move in this direction with considerable foreboding. The honourable member declined to comment on the Prune Minister's possible reasons for the move, but said that he had every confidence in the Treasurer, whom he regarded as possibly the second best Treasurer Australia had ever had.

• • •

**Alf.** Listen, son, I don't like to butt, in, but is this stuff fair dinkum?

**Me.** Of course it is. You don't think I'd make it up, do you?

**Alf.** Well, I dunno, but you're taking an awful time getting to the point.

**Me.** The point is I'm practising to be an in-depth and out-of-sight all-round current affairs reporter and commentator. They're paid by the word.

**Alf.** I don't believe you. You were going to say eventually that, now the kilometre is devalued, at least Canberra is further away, and – don't interrupt! – then you'd say that no matter what they do, you Can only see Canberra getting closer to us, one way or another.

**Me.** Something like that, yes.

**Alf.** And you'd sign it "Laurie Hoakes" or something. Pathetic.

• • •

### **WE WAS WRONG**

For "Prune Minister" in the above in-depth report read "Prim Monster". The error was made by a proofreader.

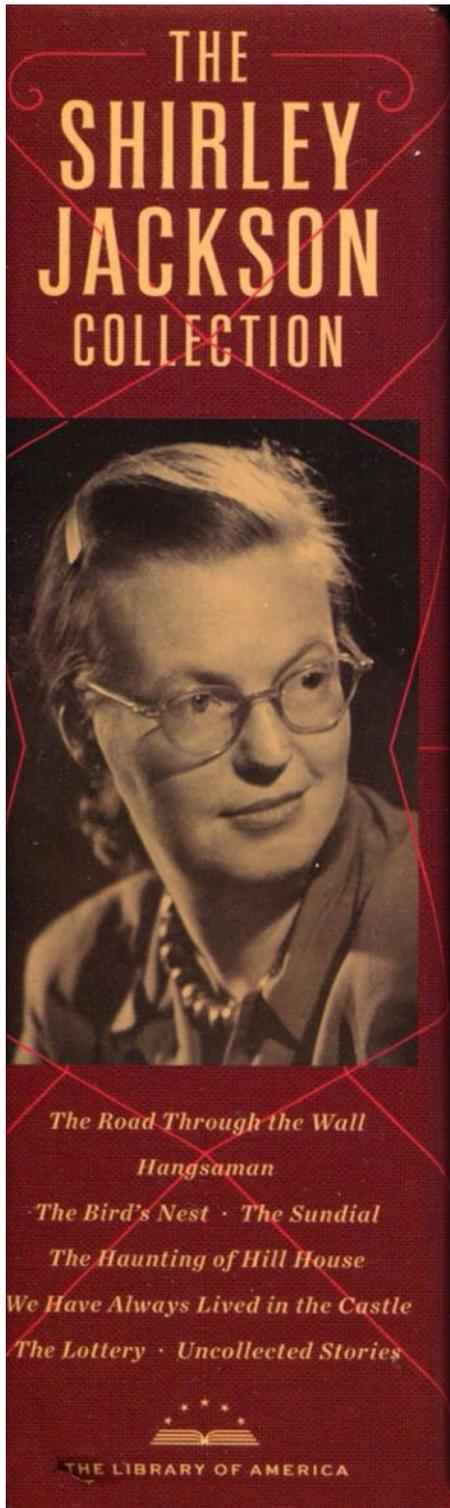
• • •

**Alf.** Rubbish, you did it deliberately. You don't think the PKIIT will let you get away with that, do you?

**Me.** Some of my best friends are proofreaders. ◀◀

# A Little Touch of Shirley in the Night

*An appreciation by David Grigg*



Shirley Jackson was a remarkable American writer of short stories and novels, writing with a unique and quirky look at life. Born in 1916, she unfortunately died in 1965 at the very early age of 48 due to a heart condition. Despite that, and despite having to become the major breadwinner for her husband and four children, she managed to publish more than 200 short stories, six novels and many other pieces of writing during her lifetime. She is now regarded as one of the greatest of American writers of the 20th Century, and I think justly so.

However, I personally hadn't encountered Jackson's writing until last year, when I first read her novel *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. After having read that, together with *The Haunting of Hill House* and a collection of her short stories, I'm now a very big fan of her work.

She's often described as a horror and mystery writer, but I find that description baffling, or at least a very superficial one. Nothing of her work that I've read so far fits neatly into those categories, as I hope to explain below.

All of the books I will discuss below are part of the Library of America edition of her works, which I highly recommend.<sup>1</sup>

## ***The Lottery; or The Adventures of James Harris***

Jackson came to fame—or rather notoriety—with her short story “The Lottery”, first published in *The New Yorker* in 1948. The story provoked a very strong, largely negative, reaction among readers of the magazine. The editor, and Jackson personally, received sackfuls of mail about the story. She describes this experience, and quotes some of the letters, in an entertaining piece titled “Biography of a Story”.<sup>2</sup>

“The Lottery” remains the story for which Jackson is most remembered. It is included as the penultimate piece in this collection of 25 of Jackson's stories, published in 1949, so we'll get to it in its turn.

The first thing I found puzzling about this book is the sub-title: **The Adventures of James Harris**. Who is James Harris? His name turns up in one of the early stories, and then he appears in many of the other stories, a continuing subtle theme. Subtle, given that these stories were all originally published independently. You have to reach the Epilogue of the book for this theme to become clear. We'll get there, be patient.

What is probably most remarkable about these tales is that they all feature mostly unremarkable people living in unremarkable places: New York apartments, or suburban and occasionally rural America. But strange things happen to them, or else they start to think very strange thoughts.

All of the stories are well worth reading, but I will only mention a few which I found particularly interesting.

"**The Intoxicated**," the first story in the collection, describes an encounter between a guest at a party and the teenage daughter of the household. He's had too much to drink and to get away from the hubub of chatter he wanders into the kitchen, where he finds a girl doing her homework at the kitchen table. He starts to chat to her and he's startled by her precocious acuity and unusual conversation: she's calmly convinced that the collapse of civilization is imminent and she tells him of her vision of how it will be, sounding wistful but also looking forward to a new world. Baffled, and too drunk to respond sensibly, the man retreats.

One can easily imagine a young Shirley Jackson as the intelligent, doom-forecasting girl at the kitchen table.

In "**The Daemon Lover**", an unnamed woman in her thirties is waiting for her fiancé Jamie to arrive at her apartment. It's their wedding day, and she bustles about in preparation. But Jamie (James Harris!) doesn't turn up at the appointed hour and after waiting for a long time she goes out in search of him. The people who loaned him the apartment where he was staying have now returned but have only the vaguest knowledge of him and can't even recall how they had met him. In any

case, Jamie is not there. She tries to track him down, following a series of sightings of him by shopkeepers and the like, and she is eventually directed to a room on the top floor of a building. She can hear voices inside, but no one comes to the door when she knocks frantically. The story ends sadly:

She came back many times, every day for the first week. She came on her way to work, in the mornings, in the evenings, on her way to dinner alone, but no matter how often or how firmly she knocked, no one ever came to the door.

In "**Like Mother Used to Make**", David, a house-proud man who loves to cook, invites his neighbour Marcia to dinner in his apartment. She's not very well off, and her apartment, to his eyes, is a messy disgrace. All goes well at first as David prepares the meal, but then a friend of Marcia's knocks on the door in search of her. His name is James Harris, a writer. Marcia invites him in and before David knows what has happened, she is taking credit for the apartment's furnishings and the food and is deep in conversation with Mr. Harris. After a while, having taken on the role of the hostess, Marcia makes it clear that David has overstayed his welcome. Bewildered, he feels compelled to leave, and finds himself alone in Marcia's miserable apartment, picking things up from the floor, while conversation and laughter drift down the hallway.

By now, of course, we're starting to suspect who James Harris really is. He pops up again in several stories, sometimes apparently innocuously, sometimes not.

There are many stories where very little seems to happen, and a brief summary would make them appear very bland. But each leaves you with a feeling that something isn't quite *right*. Ordinary conversations suddenly take a violent twist, such as in "**Renegade**", a story ostensibly about the owner of a dog which has taken to chasing chickens. In others, such as "**Charles**" we see that one of the characters has a completely wrong view of circumstances. Or "**Pillar of Salt**", in which a woman becomes increasingly bewildered, to the point of insanity, by a holiday visit to New York City.

In a number of stories such as “**After You, Dear Alphonse**” and “**Flower Garden**”, Jackson points out and critiques the hidden assumptions and ingrained but unspoken hostility held by many white Americans towards coloured people.

And behind many stories is Jackson’s sly, ironic humour. The little story “**My Life with R. H. Macy**” is a lovely little bit of satire about two days working in the department store. Or “**The Dummy**”, in which a middle-aged woman is so outraged by the snarky banter of a ventriloquist’s dummy that she marches up and slaps the dummy across the face.

One of the most memorable stories in the collection (other than “**The Lottery**”, which we’ll get to, I promise!) is “**The Tooth**”. In this story, a married woman, Clara Spencer, has travelled by bus a long way to New York to have a painful tooth seen to by the dentist. Because of the pain, she’s heavily dosed herself with painkillers. When the bus pulls in for a short break she drifts off to sleep in the cafe, to wake with a man sitting next to her who offers to get her coffee. But this strange man’s speech is larded with strange images or verses, apropos of nothing:

“Even farther than Samarkand, and the waves ringing on the shore like bells.”

or:

“The flutes play all night, and the stars are as big as the moon and the moon is as big as a lake.”

Back on the bus, he sits next to her and tells her that his name is Jim (guess who!). At the dentist she’s told that the tooth must be extracted and she’s sent off to a specialist surgeon. She’s feeling increasingly out of it, and after being given an anaesthetic has a disturbing dream. After the operation she’s given a small quantity of whisky to help her recover (hard to imagine that happening these days!). Increasingly divorced from reality, in the bathroom with a group of other women Clara realises that she has no idea which face in the mirror is her own. Trying to maintain her sanity, she goes downstairs to the street. As she stands there waiting, Jim

comes up to her and takes her hand, and the story ends:

Oblivious of the people who stepped sharply along the sidewalk, not noticing their occasional curious glances, her hand in Jim’s and her hair down on her shoulders, she ran barefoot through hot sand.

Brilliant stuff.

And so we come to the notorious “**The Lottery**”. It’s set in a rural town somewhere in America. It seems it is the day of the annual Lottery and the townspeople are gathering in the morning so everyone will have time to get home for dinner. The only ominous note is that the boys of the town are intent on gathering stones and cramming them into their pockets. A Mrs. Hutchinson runs up late, saying that she’d “clean forgot what day it was”. Then the lottery begins. Each family dips their hand into a box and draws out a slip of paper, unopened. Then when every family has one, they open the slips and look at them. One is marked with a black dot, and it’s held by Mr. Hutchinson. His wife cries out, saying it’s unfair, that her husband didn’t get enough time to choose a paper from the box. But the process is inexorable, and now each member of the Hutchinson family has to pick a paper from the box in turn. The lot falls to Mrs. Hutchinson, who screams out in despair. And then the stones begin to fly.

You can see why the story triggered outrage, and many readers, apparently not realising it was fiction, demanded to know where in America this town was. But all Jackson had done was to transpose into a modern American setting the well-documented practice of some early agricultural societies of randomly selecting someone to be sacrificed to the gods in order to ensure good harvests and the fertility of their livestock. If those in even a modern society were utterly convinced that such a death had to occur each year or the crops would fail, can we deny that they *wouldn’t* hold such a lottery? <sup>3</sup> Looking at some of the astonishingly bizarre beliefs such as QAnon held by millions today, it’s hard to do so convincingly.

And then we reach the **Epigraph**, which is an excerpt from a folk song called "**James Harris, The Daemon Lover**", which of course explains a great deal. In it, a woman has left her husband and child and gone off with a lover aboard his ship. But then she spies his cloven foot and realises that her lover is the devil and that they are on a voyage to Hell.

### ***We Have Always Lived in the Castle***

This is one of those books which I kept hearing about but had never read until last year, though it was published in 1962. It's short but excellent, and certainly one of the best books I've read for a long time.

Some people seem to consider ***We Have Always Lived in the Castle*** as a comic novel, a kind of slightly-more serious Addams Family, judging by some of the covers the book has been given. I don't see it that way at all.

Perhaps it's the book's memorable first paragraph which seems to lend weight to the gothic horror idea. Here it is:

My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood. I am eighteen years old, and I live with my sister Constance. I have often thought that with any luck at all I could have been born a werewolf, because the two middle fingers on both my hands are the same length, but I have had to be content with what I had. I dislike washing myself, and dogs, and noise. I like my sister Constance, and Richard Plantagenet, and *Amanita phalloides*, the death-cup mushroom. Everyone else in my family is dead.

This thread of ironic humour runs throughout the book, but Mary Katherine (or 'Merricat' as her sister calls her affectionately) is not a werewolf and nor are there any supernatural elements to the story. I was going to say that Merricat is an unreliable narrator, but that's not quite it. Everything she tells us appears to be completely accurate. It's just not

complete, and we slowly begin to recognise that there's something very wrong with her mental state.

Mary Katherine and Constance, who is about ten years older than her, live in an old mansion just outside a small town somewhere in New England.

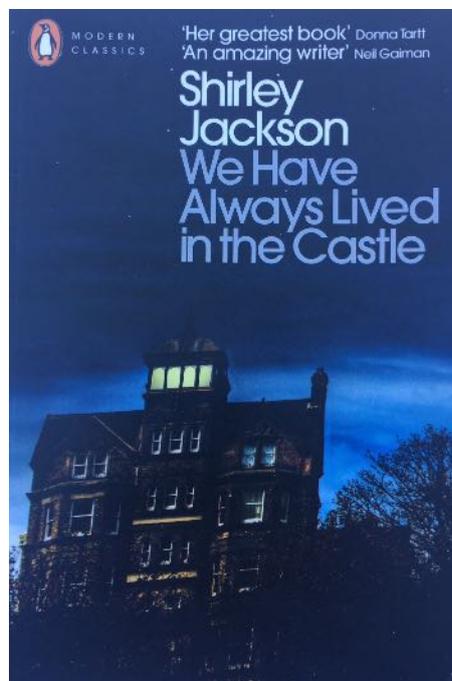
We start with Merricat doing the regular twice-weekly trip into the town to buy supplies. It's an endurance test for her, because her family is feared and loathed by the townspeople. "The people of the village have always hated us.", she says. The last sentence of the paragraph I quoted above is the key: "Everyone else in my family is dead".

It emerges that six years previously, Merricat's sister Constance had been arrested and put on trial for the mass murder by poison of almost all of her extended family. Arsenic had been put into the sugar bowl. Their father, mother, brother, and aunt all died from the poison, and though their Uncle Julian survived, his physical and mental health were both terribly affected. Constance

was acquitted for the crime, apparently for lack of evidence and motive, but it's clear that everyone in the village believes her guilty nonetheless.

The great interest of the book is the fascinating point of view character of Merricat, and the magical thinking with which she tries to control and understand her world. She loves her sister Constance deeply, obsessively. Although we are never told the reason for the mass poisoning of the family, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that Merricat's obsessive, greedy love for her sister had a good deal to do with it.

At the end of the book, despite a terrible fire which renders much of the mansion unlivable and has turned it into a kind of ruined castle,



Merricat and Constance are completely happy living there together alone, never venturing out. Or so Merricat tells us. Yet the reader can see that objectively the whole story is a sad and terrible tragedy. It's this contradiction which makes the book so interesting.

### **The Haunting of Hill House**

After having read *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* and realising it wasn't all at what it seemed on the surface, when I came to read this book, I was already prepared to look at it more deeply, too. On a superficial look, it would seem to be a classic horror tale set in a haunted house. But it's not that at all. Nothing really horrible happens and indeed none of the characters are ever more than just a little frightened. It turns out to be another study of a disturbed personality, and another love story. Bear with me here.

Quick summary of the story. Dr John Montague is a paranormal researcher, a true scientist interested in documenting apparently supernatural events. Hearing about strange happenings at a place called Hill House, he decides to rent it for a few months and live there in order to study these events. He makes a call for volunteers to join him, but in the end only two women do so. One is Eleanor Vance and the other is Theodora, whose surname I don't think we're ever given. They are joined by Luke Sanderson, a young man who is one of the owners, having inherited a share in the property. They all arrive individually at Hill House, though Eleanor is the first, and it's Eleanor whose point of view we mostly share. She is certainly the key to the book.

So, yes, there is a creepy old house, Hill House, which has had tragedies happen within it. Yes, there are spooky areas in the house like the freezing cold area at the entrance to the nursery. Yes, the old couple who act as custodian and cook seem very odd

and very creepy. Yes, long ago a young woman hanged herself in the library tower. And yes, while the group are staying at the house, very scary things happen, mostly overnight.

None of these things make it a horror story. I think it's pretty clearly a tragic love story, and Eleanor is one of the lovers. The other lover *is the house itself*.

Consider these things: the title of the book: *The Haunting of Hill House*. It's not *The Haunting at Hill House*. It almost appears that it's the house itself which is being

haunted by the people staying there. Or by one of them, at least.

Consider the first couple of sentences of the book:

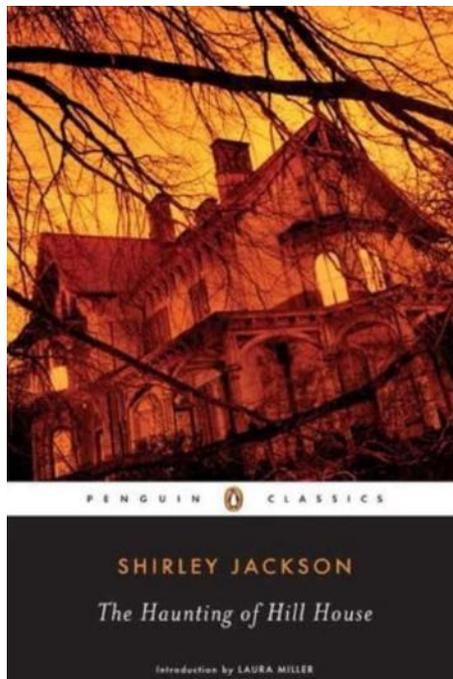
"No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within;"

Apart from the masterful quality of the writing here, the phrase "Hill House, not sane" makes it obvious that we are to consider the house as a *character*, a mentally

disturbed character.

But Eleanor, we slowly discover, also has a disturbed personality. She has spent decades looking after her mother in her declining years, unable to form relationships with others, unlike her younger sister, who is married. Now her mother is dead and Eleanor has a desperate need to be wanted by someone, to be needed. And when she arrives at Hill House, she finds an entity which *does* need her. *It's the house*.

All on the way there, Eleanor has had the tune of a song running in her head, but she can't identify it or recall the words until her arrival at the entrance of Hill House:



"It was an act of moral strength to lift her foot and set it on the bottom step, and she thought that her deep unwillingness to touch Hill House for the first time came directly from the vivid feeling that it was waiting for her, evil, but patient. Journeys end in lovers meeting, she thought, remembering her song at last."

It turns out the song is out of Shakespeare, quote:

"O stay and hear, your true love's coming,  
that can sing both high and low.  
Trip no further, pretty sweeting;  
journeys end in lovers meeting,  
every wise man's son doth know."<sup>4</sup>

And later, when spooky things start happening overnight, there are messages scrawled on the wall, initially in chalk, but later in blood:

"HELP ELEANOR COME HOME ELEANOR"

It's the house calling to her.

Eventually Eleanor's disturbed state of mind and her increasing attachment to the house lead the others to try to force Eleanor to leave and return to her own home (where we eventually discover she has a miserable existence, sleeping on a trundle bed in her sister's spare room). As the book closes, Eleanor, forced away, takes a drastic step, which we can imagine means that she will stay forever at Hill House.

This is all just brilliant stuff.

Jackson's writing style is simple and pelucid, but very powerful, and it leads you into strange places. I admire it greatly and I look forward to reading her other novels and stories.

I've also just received my copy of *The Letters of Shirley Jackson*, edited by her son Laurence Jackson Hyman.<sup>5</sup>

He says of his mother:

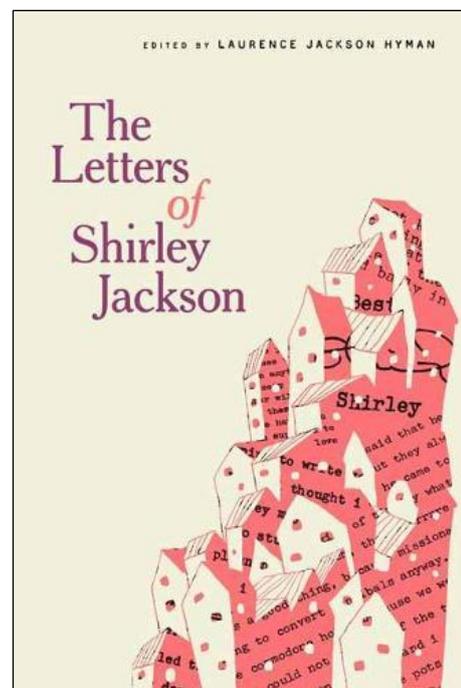
Shirley loved writing letters as much as she liked to write fiction, and later in her life,

when she had become an established professional author, the two would often vie for her time and attention.

In the reviews I've seen of this book, there were several examples of Jackson's letters which were highly entertaining, so I'm definitely looking forward to working my way (slowly!) through this opus. ◀◀

### Notes:

1. Library of America, *The Shirley Jackson Collection*. ISBN: 978-1-59853-671-3 (1687 pages).
2. This article, published in 1960, is included in the Library of America collection.
3. This idea is echoed in Ursula K. Le Guin's memorable 1973 short story "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas".
4. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*: Act II, Scene 3.
5. Random House, *The Letters of Shirley Jackson*, ed. Laurence Jackson Hyman, ISBN: 978-0-59313-464-1, 640pp.



# The Alien *Review* of Books

## by Perry Middlemiss

### 2020 Novellas Part 2

#### Ring Shout by P. Djeli Clark

*Winner of the 2021 Nebula and Locus Awards for Best Novella.*

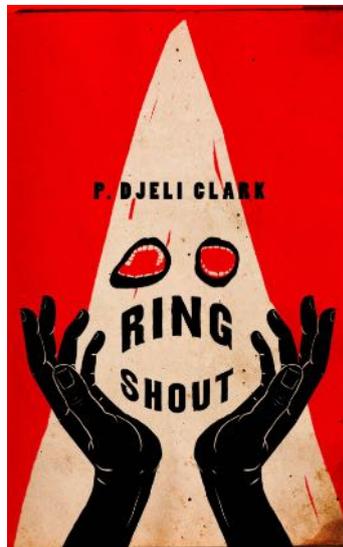
In an alternate American South the release of D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* is a means by which white men can summon demons. These are Ku Kluxes, pale, pointy-headed creatures that live alongside whites feeding off their racial hate, infecting them and turning Klan members into Ku Kluxes. Fighting these demons is Maryse Boudreaux, who has a magical sword, the sharpshooter Sadie and the explosives expert Chef. Aiding Maryse in her quest to destroy the demons are the Aunties, a group of supernatural beings who appear to come from the same place as the Ku Kluxes and who can only offer moral support and advice.

Set in 1922, seven years after the premiere of the film, plans are in place for another release. This time the film will be projected onto the side of Stone Mountain. The bigger the projection, the bigger the audience, and the hope of the organisers is to summon something called the Grand Cyclops with the aim of instigating a final conflict with Maryse and her companions.

I am a little concerned with the concept that white men are turned into race-haters as a

result of an external influence – Griffith's film in this instance – as it might diminish the impact of this story. It shouldn't, but some people might well decide to take it that way.

This is a rich and complicated story that shows the hate on all sides of the racial divide. The underlying plot is familiar though the setting is new and innovative. Clark is building an interesting set of fantasy and horror works that deserve attention.

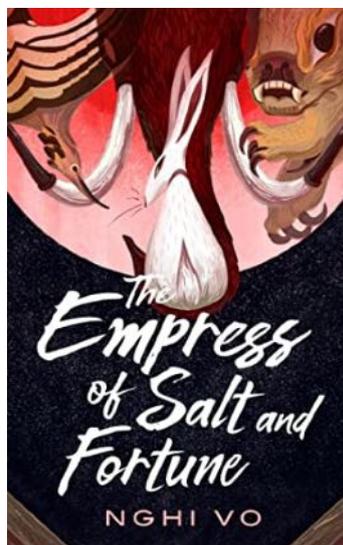


#### The Empress of Salt and Fortune by Nghi Vo

*Nominated for the 2021 Locus and Hugo Awards for Best Novella.*

In a fantastical fictional country somewhere in Asia the ungendered cleric Chih attempts to record the rise, fall and rise again of the Empress In-yo who has recently died. As a young woman In-yo was chosen as the new wife of the Emperor but soon bored him and was exiled to an estate at Lake Scarlet – better than the silk garotte of the alternative – where she plotted her revenge. Chih travels to the house, accompanied by their magical bird companion Almost Brilliant, where they encounter Rabbit, the Empress's companion during her rise and exile.

The full story of the life of the Empress gradually emerges like the layers of a cake, with secrets revealed at each turn. A beautifully quiet, exquisitely paced, dialogue rich novella that fully deserves its award nominations.



The first story in the author's *Singing Hills Cycle*.

### **When the Tiger Came Down the Mountain** by Nghi Vo

A sequel to the previous novella, though not a direct one, which doesn't quite have the same impact. This time Chih is travelling over a mountain pass under the guidance of Si-yu on the back of the mammoth Piluk when they are waylaid by three fantastical tigers who are able to speak and to take human form. In order to prevent the party being eaten Chih relates the story of the legendary tiger Ho Thi Thao and her human lover, the scholarly Dieu. The tigers are mesmerised by the story and offer their own version of events which Chih notes down to update the official record.

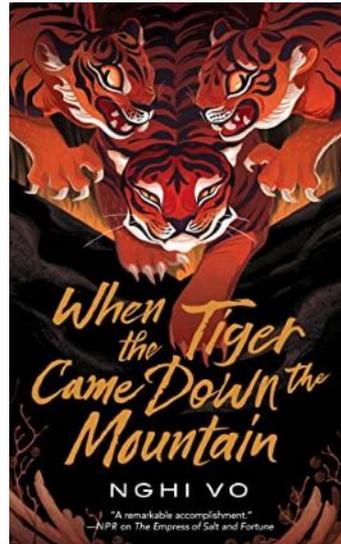
The basic structure of story-telling revealing a wider and deeper history is again employed but this time the setup seems rather contrived. Whereas the first novella revealed hidden secrets that were not revealed until very late, this novella telegraphs its ending rather more clearly. Still an excellent novella, just not up to the standard of the first. The second story in the author's *Singing Hills Cycle*.

### **Finna** by Nino Cipri

*Nominated for the 2021 Locus, Hugo and Nebula Awards for Best Novella.*

An elderly customer goes missing in a big box furniture store (think IKEA on steroids) and two minimum-wage employees, Ava and Jules, are tasked with trying to find her. Unfortunately for the two of them this involves navigating their way through a maze of inter-dimensional portals using a dodgy device called a FINNA which points an

arrow in the direction of the lost item. Generally this is green when the best fit (ie the actual person) is located, and yellow when the next best fit (ie a variant of the person in another world) is found. Added to their overriding problem is the fact that Jules and Ava have just broken up an intense relationship.



This novella is amusing and readable but hardly, in my view, of a level that would make it onto three awards' ballots. You have to wonder if it's the sexuality of the main characters that has won people over rather than the quality of the story itself.

### **Upright Women Wanted** by Sarah Gailey

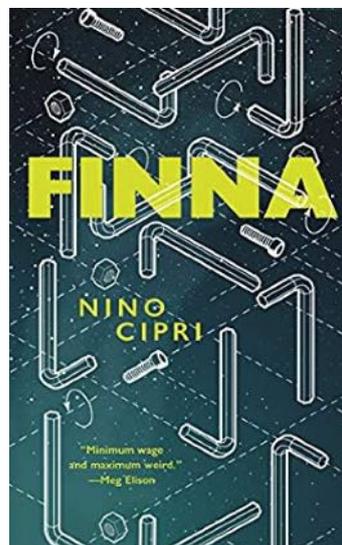
*Nominated for the 2021 Locus and Hugo Awards for Best Novella.*

Sometime in an indeterminate future the USA has fragmented into various political and religious segments. Technology and transport has collapsed and information is strictly controlled and spread across the countryside by authorised Librarians, an all-women nun-like organisation. Travel is by horse and wagon, and the feel of the world is that of the Old West. Esther Augustus stows away with these Librarians after her best friend is executed for accessing Unapproved Material, and eventually joins

the group and becomes an apprentice. This is essentially a Western with political overtones – you quickly determine that the Librarians are basically an insurrectionist organisation – and, possible modern-day metaphors aside, again concentrates too much on the romantic rather than the political element.

### **Riot Baby** by Tochi Onyebuchi

*Nominated for the 2021 Locus, Hugo and Nebula Awards for Best Novella.*



Ella is a young woman with a telekinetic power that she struggles to control. Her younger brother Kev, the riot baby of the book's title, is born in the middle of the riots following the beating of Rodney King in 1991 by LAPD officers. Their lives as African-Americans in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are hard and brutal.

Kev is eventually imprisoned for, supposedly, his role in an armed robbery, though whether this crime actually happened, or if it did, if Kev had anything to do with it is never fully explained. Meanwhile Ella has slowly begun to get her powers under control to the extent that she can see into the future and into the past. When she visits Kev in prison she is able to temporarily transport him to other places, some good and some bad, where he can see himself being born, and into a possible future.

This is an angry novella, with reason, though it ends on a note of hope that Black American can gain the power of White America and come to live in a form of harmony and peace.

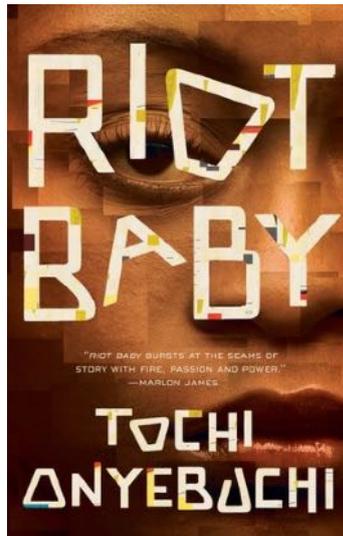
## Flyaway

by Kathleen Jennings

*Nominated for the 2021 World Fantasy Award for Best Novella.*

Bettina Scott's father walked out one day and her brothers have gone missing from the small Australian town of Runagate. Her search for them will take her out of her half-life in a house run by a reclusive mother into the Australian bush, where she will encounter strange mystical dogs, vanished schools and magical bottles.

This is the equivalent of a European fairy-tale set in an Australian landscape. The well-written prose doesn't do enough



to overcome the lack of character development, the rather mundane story and the fact that the author tries to put too much into too small a space.

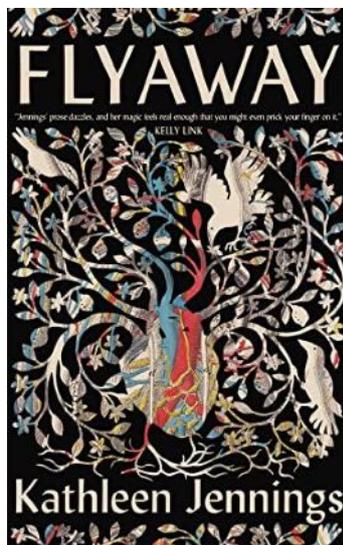
Not for me.

## The Four Profound Weaves by R. B. Lemberg

*Nominated for the 2021 World Fantasy Award for Best Novella*

The main character of this novella, the trans Uziya, is a carpet weaver. They were originally taught the first three weaves by their aunt Benesret, but she disappeared 40 years prior to the start of this story, leaving the last of the weaves – carpets woven from bones, signifying death – untaught, and possibly lost. A nameless man is also searching for Benesret, hoping that she will provide him with a name and identity. The two set out together to search for Benesret but their quest doesn't end as they expect.

I really wanted to like this story as it appeared intricate and interesting, but it soon becomes difficult to follow. The narrative is told from differing points-of-view that all seem remarkably similar. It just becomes confusing, and slow.



## 2021 Hugo Award Ballot for Best Novella

- **Come Tumbling Down**,  
Seanan McGuire (Tordotcom)
- **The Empress of Salt and Fortune**,  
Nghì Vo (Tordotcom)
- **Finna**,  
Nino Cipri (Tordotcom)
- **Ring Shout**,  
P. Djèlí Clark (Tordotcom)
- **Riot Baby**,  
Tochi Onyebuchi (Tordotcom)
- **Upright Women Wanted**,  
Sarah Gailey (Tordotcom)

Over the past ten years stories at the novella length have produced some of the boldest and most interesting works published in the sf&f genre. I am thinking here in particular of **The Man Who Bridged the Mist** by Kij Johnson (2011), **Binti** by Nnedi Okorafor (2015), **The Ballad of Black Tom** by Victor LaValle (2016), **All Systems Red** by Martha Wells (2017), and **Time Was** by Ian McDonald (2018). Not all of these will have had enough time yet to show the extent of their influence, and maybe some never will exert much, but if you want to look hard enough you can see some ripple effects on the genre already. The novellas on this year's Hugo Awards ballot don't reach the heights of those listed above, yet some of the 2020 novellas will certainly impact future works in this category.

The first thing you'll notice if you look at the list at the top is the unmissable fact that all six works were published by Tordotcom. This is undoubtedly a good thing for that publishing company but not necessarily for us readers.

Let me explain. There are a number of similarities between these works that work to reduce the diversity of themes and styles and you have to wonder if this is a product of the times, or their publishing origins. Maybe it's both, in which case we may see a similar ballot in years ahead. I hope not. I have a sense that what we are seeing here is an

### *Over The Edge of the World* by Mabel Forrest

Over the edge of the world  
The little stars dance in a silver ring,  
And twitch at the beard of the Comet King,  
Till he stamps in his rage and pain,  
Then the moon will laugh  
Till it splits in half.  
And becomes a crescent again.

Over the edge of the world,  
How the big bear rolls in the blue and grunts  
When the meteors shoot or Orion hunts,  
A faithful watch the Dog Star keeps  
Against theft or loss  
Of the Southern Cross,  
While the beautiful Venus sleeps.

Over the edge of the world,  
I would like to take a big jump some day,  
To trundle my hoop through the Milky Way,  
Right into the heart of the sun,  
From his burning bars  
Snatch the cool, white stars,  
And cuddle them everyone.

(1907)

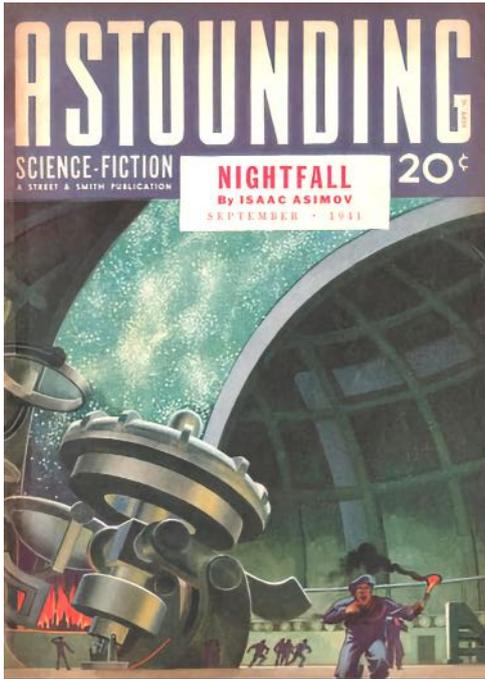
over-correction away from the overly male-dominated, sexless or heterosexual previous offerings. I hope in future that novellas will be considered for their worth as stories, as literature, rather than just for the types of human relationships they portray. And I hope we can see other publishing sources being represented.

As to the stories themselves I think that the Vo and Onyebuchi novellas work best for me. The McGuire and Clark works sit at the next level with Cipri and Gailey at the bottom end.

And, of the two at the top, I'd give my vote to **The Empress of Salt and Fortune** by Nghì Vo. I was impressed with the structure of the story; the way the details were slowly revealed; the way the author deceives the reader ever so gently until the final plot point delivers that refreshing sense of completeness. It is certainly my favourite of the year.



# Nightfall Revisited



*Astounding Magazine September 1941*

*Original magazine publication of  
"Nightfall" by Isaac Asimov*

Mark Kelly, of the [sfadb.com](http://sfadb.com) website, has compiled a list of the [top 100 SF&F novelettes of all time](#) according to his strict methodology.

The winner was "**Nightfall**" by Isaac Asimov, first published in *Astounding Science Fiction* in September 1941.

It didn't win any awards of course, as there weren't any in the field in the early 1940s, but has been reprinted many, many times since, which would certainly have affected its score in this survey. [See [this page](#).]

But how does it hold up now? Is it still living on its past reputation? Would a modern reader see it in the same light as someone in the 1950s and 1960s?

So I decided to ask a number of fannish friends what they thought of the story. Their responses follow:

## Constructing Nightfall by Charles Taylor

Writing "**Nightfall**", Asimov had to shape a story around Campbell's rejoinder to a religious sentiment about the glory of stars. The pleasure of reading "**Nightfall**" is in part a matter of seeing how Asimov wove together all sorts of then current ideas and tricks of the trade into a satisfying whole.

Simplifying a bit, Asimov faced four main issues. Two were in the science: how to get a scenario that restricted stars' visibility to once in millennia, and how to justify this sight sending people mad. The other two were in the fiction: how to dramatize and shape into a story the essentially static proposition that stars could frighten people out of their wits, and how to do all the necessary exposition without boring the reader silly. Below, I speculate on how he achieved this.

Clearly, there was no way on Earth to restrict the sight of the stars to once in thousands of years – subject to weather conditions, they are always going to be visible at night, on the side of the planet opposite to the sun. Two suns would only suffice to banish night when the planet's orbit took it exactly between them so they

could illuminate a hemisphere each. So, more suns would be necessary – Asimov decided to use six. That took care of the illumination of the whole planet – but now, with all this illumination, there was the opposite problem: how to get darkness? His solution was an eclipse – ever since the ancient Assyrians identified the Saros cycle it has been known that these occur at regular intervals, and eclipses notoriously frightened people.

Asimov was writing in 1941 so Toynbee's books about the growth and inevitable decay of civilisations had been coming out for decades, and of course many other archaeologists had been publishing on individual civilisations like those of the various dynasties of ancient Egypt, or less well-known ones like that of Lagash that flourished around 2400 BC in Assyria, and Asimov was certainly aware of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Wherever he got it from, Asimov adopted the idea of the collapse of civilisations as the dramatic kernel of his story: the destruction of the entire society would be both a direct but also a magnified and dramatized reflection of every individual's madness. Now, a standard story revolves around how someone tries to get something they really want, so "**Nightfall**" would be how a band of scientists trying to prevent this destruction, and the various conflicts and ups and downs that occur on the way to the resolution.

With the world building more or less in place, Asimov needed to work the exposition into his story – readers will put up with some expository lumps, but it is far better to give characters reasons to ask each other those questions whose answers will inform the readers of all the information they need. So, the story begins with a reporter who argues with an astronomer, thereby filling in the reader on the set up of the multiple suns, and foreshadowing the threat to civilisation, and then a little later a psychiatrist turns up so that the reporter can hear arguments and evidence as to why people will be driven mad. But perhaps the most telling of Asimov's strategies is something he doesn't do: typical stories about other civilisations try to make them relatable by having someone from our world observe them – like Gulliver in his travels, or the time traveller in the world of

the Morlocks, or any number of characters who fall asleep and wake up in a future utopia, or astronauts that land on other planets... the examples can be multiplied indefinitely. Asimov's strategy to make the civilisation relatable is audacious in its simplicity – he sets it in a US city in 1941 only changing the names. The Earth gets called Lagash, Los Angeles and the nearby Mt Wilson observatory get called Saro City and the Saro Observatory respectively, the scientists get Middle Eastern sounding names like Aton (the Egyptian sun god, also spelled Aten), or Beenay (an Iranian name) with a number instead of a surname. Only the cultist Latimer gets an Anglo sounding name. But everyone is human and of course speaks English. So simple, yet we accept it – after all we watch historical movies where Cleopatra, or Anna Karenina and their compatriots speak English!

And the date? 1941 is the year that Jehovah's Witnesses predicted the end of the World. It is just four centuries after the 1543 publication of Copernicus's heliocentric theory, or "After Genovi 41 discovered that Lagash rotated about the sun Alpha, rather than vice versa –and that was four hundred years ago." (Coincidentally, the religious zealot Latimer was burnt at the stake only a few years later, in 1555). They use paper money and prices are comparable – there are a couple of scientists who buy a cheap house for 2000 credits (the median price for a house in 1940 in the US was a bit higher: \$2935).

For the rest the story is constructed solidly – the ending climax is carefully foreshadowed, and a countdown is established early in the first of the twenty sections "In just under four hours," he said, "civilisation as we know it comes to an end." In the sixth section we are reminded that the time is approaching "the eclipse – which will start in three quarters of an hour." Then in section nine comes another reminder "Do you realize that it's less than half an hour before deadline." Section eleven "with Beta's eclipse a matter of minutes away" is followed in the next section by the beginning of the eclipse "**Beta was chipped on one side!**" and in the following section we are told that "The chip on its side had grown to a black encroachment that

covered a third of Beta." In section fourteen, with totality "not quite an hour" away, "Beta was cut in half." In section seventeen "Beta was a mere smoldering splinter" just fifteen minutes from totality. In section eighteen "the last flash of Beta, the last ruby-red drop of flame flickered feebly over a humanity that had left only stark, universal fear." In section nineteen it is "just before totality" and finally in section twenty there is the culminating scene "the last thread of sunlight had thinned out and snapped". And we are treated to a great dénouement with people going spectacularly mad, frothing at the mouth, crying, whimpering and declaiming disjointedly - and the distant burning of Saro City.

There is a great deal to enjoy in "**Nightfall**", but of course Asimov has his prejudices, and they are on display - the survivalist Hideout needs "strong, healthy women that can breed children" - and we are told that there are 300 people in the Hideout "but three quarters are women and children".

There is more to the story, though, than careful world building, competent storytelling and solid plot construction, albeit marred by sexism, and quite apart from the science vs religion theme which forms so significant a part in the conflicts that power the plot.

This is the sense of humour Asimov deploys throughout - we see the scientists working out their theories and getting on the right track and then making glaring errors - perhaps the Stars are other suns. Perhaps there are as many as a dozen! Maybe the universe is really big - maybe a few light years across! Perhaps there could be a planet that orbits a single sun with darkness half of each day - but life "fundamentally dependent on light" couldn't develop under those conditions! And there is a lovely parody of clumsy expository lumps in other SF stories as the story pauses while Aton earnestly explains the workings of the newest ingenious technology developed by "our young men at Saro University" the burning wooden torch!

Is "**Nightfall**" the best SF story ever written? Hard to say unless you have read all the

others, but it is certainly one of the best that I have read!

### **Nightfall as a Fishbowl** by Nick Price

To answer the question 'Would a modern reader see this story ("**Nightfall**" by Isaac Asimov published in 1941) in the same light as someone in the 1950s and 1960s?' we need to take a look at the deeper theme rather than the surface.

(Turn away if you haven't read it as I am about to make a brief summary of the set up.) On the surface, we have a science fictional story based on the idea of an isolated planet with constant sunshine from six close suns. Once every two thousand years though, the suns move to a point where only one dimly lights the surface and that then disappears too for a short while. As this appears to be in a universe similar to ours, things called 'stars' are expected by some to then appear. The story explores the social consequences of that rare dimming touching upon astronomy, philosophy and religious interpretation.

Like a lot of science fiction of that time, this 'other world' is a projection of an Earth-like society, and an American one at that, on to another planet and setting. Today, multi-volume works of fiction make great world building efforts to set stories that, in the end, make no greater points than works written the time that "**Nightfall**" was crafted. It is the human story that is more interesting. "**Nightfall**" rises above other works because in its depths it is exploring a philosophical and critical thinking, position that humankind has pondered for thousands of years and continues to do so. Do we really know what reality is and how do different people react to that question?

Consider two other explorations of this theme. One from the far past and one from more recent times. From the past we have Plato's Cave from Plato's *Republic* in 375 B.C.E. Here the premise is people are chained up facing a cave wall from birth. They only see the world through shadows thrown onto that wall of people and things moving

through the cave behind them. Their reality is limited to the shadows that they are allowed to see.

A more recent exploration of the same question came from author David Foster Wallace in his 2005 Commencement address at Kenyon University. Wallace said:

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says "Morning, boys. How's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes "What the hell is water?"

The point of the fish story is merely that the most obvious, important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about.

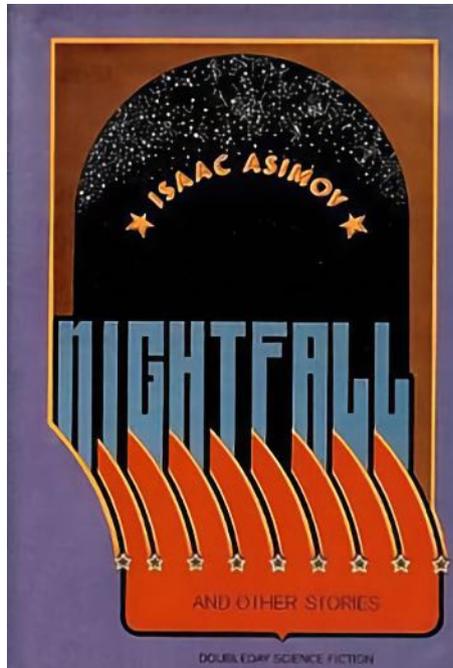
In our modern world, (dis)information warfare, populism and gaming of social media challenges us what to believe in. Windows into the different cultures and societies of the world, even if relatively unpolluted by the producer's own world-views, challenge our ideas of reality, truth and the premises of our own education and societies.

In my view this story from Asimov stands across time, and above stylistic advances, because he explores an enduring universal theme: What is reality?

### **Nightfall: A Little Light On by Marc Ortlieb**

Many classic science fiction stories survive later re-reading. Sadly, Isaac Asimov's "Nightfall" isn't one of them. I say sadly because there are many interesting and thought-provoking ideas in the story. It's just that it has been written very much in the spirit of its age and scarcely escapes from it.

The names of the characters are pure Hugo Gernsback. Thus we have Theremon 762, the aggressive reporter and Aton 77, the crusty old scientist. Not only are the characters' names clichés but so are the characters. Despite being set on a planet that has few, if any, similarities to Earth, the reporter is portrayed as a typical New York reporter of Clark Kent vintage, waging "vast newspaper campaigns". The scientist is a "queer duck" who delivers lines like 'You display an infernal gall in coming to me with that impudent proposition of yours'.



The sad thing is that there are aspects of the story that could ring true today, in that the media and the establishment refuse to listen to the science presented to them by experts. We have climate change deniers and religious extremists in our society today and Asimov portrays the like in his city of Saro on the planet Lakesh. He even presents a group of Survivalists locking themselves away from the impending doom. As an analysis of the relationship between science and the real world, it has merit.

What spoils the story for me are the inconsistencies.

Asimov's society has cities, cars, roller coasters, electricians, photography and Universities, but they've never illuminated anything, not even caves. Asimov's usual strong grasp of science also seems missing, with him misusing terms like aphelion and antipodes and I have serious doubts about the celestial mechanics that lie at the base of the story – I'm certain Hal Clement would have done this better. But that's a topic for an entire article, and I'm not sure I'm qualified to write that.

I think "Nightfall" deserved the quarter of a cent per word bonus John W. Campbell paid for it. For its time it was a ground breaking story. Seen in the light of today's science and science fiction it is, dare I say it, eclipsed by Asimov's later stories.

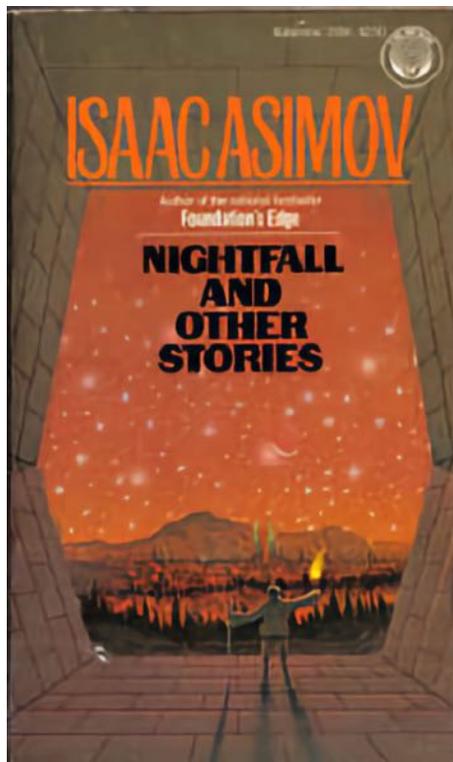
### Nightfall in the 21st Century by Rose Mitchell

The story is set on a planet in a solar system consisting of 6 suns, causing night to occur only every 2,000 years: a highly unlikely scenario as decreed by modern astrophysics. Asimov is able to explain away the dodgy science merely in a couple of paragraphs, creating plausible believability and suspension of disbelief, the fundamental tort of science fiction.

While Lagash has a sophisticated and advanced civilisation rooted solidly by evidence-based science and technology, the recorded histories from previous night events have been lost to time, and the setting of all 6 suns is shrouded in myth and dire speculation that there will be a catastrophic extinction event come the observing of celestial bodies in the night sky. Thus faith and religious systems have arisen based on fear of the unknown – familiar?

This is a story examining the dichotomy of science versus faith; the observed versus the theoretical. It is about the importance of ensuring there are accurate, truthful and permanent records of the Now so that the Future will be informed and not repeat or continue the mistakes of their forebears, advancing civilisation and not rebuilding every couple of millennium.

However the most striking aspect for me was the lack of women, in fact no female characters at all. They are mentioned as a throw-away line as existing in this society but none featured. I had thought that this was a product of the time rather than any overt misogyny and that Asimov used the custom of the day whereby male pronouns denote that gender is not core to the narrative.



Despite the story examining a flaw in humanity's development holding up very well, sadly this piece could not be sold to any publication in 2021. Editors and publishers would be too fearful of the Online Outrage from The Internet, for daring to publish a story lacking a female or at least, an "Other" character. The ensuing baying demands for resignations, calls for boycotts and eventually the hanging from the castle wall the author because of the absence of "diversity" in his, her or their work would instil cold, hard fear into even the bravest, most fearless editor.

This is a seminal work despite the lack of diversity, but the lack of padding is refreshing.

### Nightfall : Partially Eclipsed by the Moon by Simon Litten

Eighty years ago, Isaac Asimov's novelette "Nightfall" first appeared in the September 1941 issue of *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine. The story was published before the major fan (Hugo) and writer (Nebula) awards were created but it has consistently scored first in at least three reader polls and been anthologised at least 16 times. So, has the work

stood the test of time?

"Nightfall" offers little in the way of plot or character (which is customary for an Asimov story) and explores the impact of unexpected full night darkness on a society used to constant daylight. The principal plot devices are that the world, or the dominant society at least, is about to suffer an eclipse and experience full night darkness and the suggestion that eclipses have occurred regularly before, at intervals of 2,000 years, and have resulted in the cataclysmic crash of organised society each time. The story goes on to explore the effects of voluntary total darkness on various people (madness) and where the darkness was experienced. The story ends with the

forecast eclipse and the resultant societal collapse.

If one is into stories where the protagonists act and react like civil engineers with Asbergers syndrome then the story has aged well. Otherwise, the story is showing its age. The social mores are those of 1940's America with only male characters in play. Interestingly, the people are not described physically so the lazy reader will assume humanoid characters i.e. people just like ourselves.

Another surprise is the extent of Asimov's scientific inaccuracies. The planet upon which the story takes place, Lagash, has six suns; each of which can provide sufficient daylight to obscure the stars if alone in the sky. To achieve that effect the suns would need to be either as close as the primary or very bright with attendant climatic and tidal effects: the sun from Jupiter, at about three AU distance, is merely a very bright star. As there is no mention of how cold the day becomes with only the sun Beta in the sky then the companion stars to Lagash's primary are not as close as the story suggests (stars should be visible if only the companions are in the sky). On Earth, stars can be seen in daytime from the bottom of wells and narrow canyons—such should be the same on Lagash—so why the observatory is on a hill remains a mystery when here is a world that should dig a hole to better examine the skies. And then there is the if-here-then-also-everywhere-else effect of the eclipse. The eclipse supposedly induces total societal collapse but really should only impact one third of Lagash (the side facing the eclipsed sun Beta) at maximum. Those on the daylight side of Lagash and in the eclipse's penumbra should have been able to carry on regardless.

What has made "**Nightfall**" stand out and remain so powerful in the memory of most readers is the imagery of societal collapse when a certainty, such as the sun always shining, is removed. "**Nightfall**" was the first story to do this in a credible manner; even if it does read like a windup toy in action. ◀

## Final Thoughts

This issue ran a little later than planned; both David Grigg and I had other fannish publishing commitments to meet before we could get down to the final work here. The main hurdle was getting our material ready for the latest mailing of ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association). I had to finish a couple of smallish things but David, as the Official Bloody Editor of the apa, had much more to contend with, and a fine job he does of it. I have a feeling that this delay may be a problem every second issue. In which case I'll need to come up with a viable solution that suits both of us. It might just be a matter of accepting that any publishing schedule I come up with is just aspirational rather than set in concrete.

After covering the 2021 Hugo nominated novellas elsewhere in this issue next time we'll be looking at the other fiction categories: novels, novelettes and short stories. Hopefully it won't be just me providing the reviews. I have some promised pieces and I'm sure I can twist a few arms to help out. The more voices the better I think.

The plan is also to spread out the range of material covered in TAR with pieces written, or muted, about Richard Thompson's music, and Soviet and Russian films. I am also hoping to have a piece on one of the rising stars of current science fiction, the usual reviews of interesting books I've been reading lately and a reprint of a fannish piece from 30 years ago. This last item will be the first in a planned series of pieces exploring the notion of Melbourne as a fannish city, including how Melbournites see its history and how visitors view it as they pass through. Some of these will be reprints and some will be newer items specifically requested. We'll see how that turns out.

Overall I want this fanzine to reflect the things that interest me. If they interest you as well then that's a bonus. See you next time. ■

—Perry

# THE ALIEN REVIEW

## Notes on Contributors

### **David Grigg**

...is a retired software developer who lives in Melbourne, Australia. He worked in the field of interactive multimedia for over two decades, and has also worked in public relations and as a journalist and sub-editor. In recent years he has collaborated with Perry Middlemiss to produce a fortnightly podcast called Two Chairs Talking, in which they discuss books, movies, science fiction fandom and a great many other topics.

### **Perry Middlemiss**

...has taken to reading, drinking and eating too much during the current pandemic. In order to get some "exercise" he has also taken to producing a number of fanzines.

### **Simon Litten**

...is a semi-retired accountant and occasional grouch, who has too much time on his hands and which he fills by reading, watching TV and brewing and drinking.

### **Rose Mitchell**

...the other half of Perry Middlemiss's 2010 Worldcon Chair who is now enjoying all things fannish from the sidelines because she has learnt to say "No". While full-time employed, counting those beans, she can still consume a lot of science fiction in her spare time. She does not own a cat.

### **Marc Ortlieb**

...claims that he doesn't read science fiction. This is only true if you complete the sentence with the clause "written after 1999."

### **Nick Price**

...has said to have been seen at Science Fiction conventions but responds to these claims as "having wandered in by mistake" or "just looking for someone he knew he thought he saw going in there". When challenged about going into a movie theatre showing a rerun of Silent Running. Claims he got the queue wrong and was looking for the The Remains of the Day Redux. Works behind a keyboard and screen.

### **Lucy Sussex**

...is a writer with an appreciation for the weird.

### **Charles Taylor**

...has retired from educational admin and is now catching up on reading all those books that have accumulated over the years.