

☆ **Stemple, Adam. *Singer of Souls*.** Aug. 2005. 288p. Tor, \$22.95 (0-765-31170-4).

SF/FANTASY



One Minneapolis winter day, Douglas Stewart decides to quit junk. To stay clean, he needs to stay away from his junkie friends, so he decides to accept his grandmother's offer of hospitality whenever he needed it, even though she lives in Edinburgh. Though the offer was made nine years ago, when "Doogie" was 13, when he arrives, she takes him in, on the understanding that if he f---s her over, he's out. She even digs that he is a busker. A damn good one, too, so deft at melody spinning, rhyming, and scoping out a mark's personality that he makes quite a living. Then a beautiful, regal woman of indeterminate age contracts a separate song session with him, which he so enjoys that he waives his fee. She gives him a gift instead, which, however, looks like junk. Since he can't seem to throw it away, he does it up. It's not smack, but he soon wishes it had been. For now he can see the fairies, who vary in personal affect from scary to lethal. Stemple uses both Minneapolis and Edinburgh settings knowledgeably and effectively as his antihero tells a tale of personal salvation that turns astonishingly grim before ending as chillingly as, say, Jim Thompson's classic escape caper *The Getaway* (1959). A dour, nihilistic, absolutely marvelous grunge fantasy. —Ray Olson

**YA/M:** Some YAs will like the young antihero, who makes Holden Caulfield look wholesome and sappy. RO.

Yldii is attacked en route, he has a perfect opportunity. His BioRescue unit is sent to police the event, and Burn gets the excuse he wants to stay close to Liana, the Yldii ambassador's daughter. As the summit continues, it becomes clear that someone is out to sabotage it, and that something strange is going on among the Yldii. Not just among them, though, for there remain complications from conflict with the slavers and from interspecies tension, the latter including problems faced by a human new to the "Zangian homeworld, trying to keep the former Skartesh cult members happy, and the little matter of escaped Hlagg insects and some unforeseen side effects. Like previous volumes in Viehl's League of Allied Worlds saga, *Afterburn* is an entertaining adventure and a surprisingly thoughtful look at the ways greatly different species might interact. —Regina Schroeder

**Williamson, Jack.** *The Stonehenge Gate*. Aug. 2005. 320p. Tor, \$24.95 (0-765-30897-5).

The venerable Williamson's latest puts the quest for mysterious origins and grand destiny in the hands of four academics. Physics professor Derek brings a set of ground radar pictures to poker night. They show what appears to be, deep under the sands of the Sahara, the remains of a Stonehenge-like structure. They remind African professor of linguistics Ram of stories his mysterious great-grandmother told. Field anthropologist Lupe, however, is skeptical. It's up to English professor Will to narrate the story of their journey, first to the Sahara, where they find the ruins, and from there, on a path they find through an ancient, interstellar empire to a still-populated planet. There they become embroiled in a conflict between the peoples of Norlan and Hotlan. They lack a way home but, still driven by curiosity, try to discover all they can of the empire and its role in the origins of life on Earth. Williamson's combination of sf technological inventiveness

and heroic quest is surprisingly successful, offering a neat origin story for humanity, to boot. —Regina Schroeder

**Wolfe, Gene.** *Starwater Strains*. Aug. 2005. 368p. Tor, \$25.95 (0-765-31202-6).

In introducing his seventh hardcover story collection for Tor, Wolfe claims to be in readers' debt. But readers may politely quarrel with this, particularly since Wolfe's command of English makes even the shortest pieces (some short enough to be sent in Christmas cards) avoid slightness. "Calamity Warps" is an agreeable find in the highly felix-centric sf universe: a dog story, and not a shaggy one, either. "Graylord Man's Last Words" is very Dickensian (Wolfe is a Dickens aficionado) though set in the twentieth-century (Wolfe is an sf writer, after all). "Has Anybody Seen Junie Moon?" has the flavor of the late R. A. Lafferty (who? Wildside Press is reissuing his work, most recently his 1987 novel *Serpent's Egg*). "The Fat Magician" features one of Wolfe's ongoing characters, Sam Cooper. "Game in the Pope's Head" has a historical setting—the London of Jack the Ripper. Wolfe probably does demand serious—as in dedicated, not humorless—readers, and his success implies there are enough of them around. —Roland Green

**YA/L:** A fine introduction to the author's imaginative sf. CO.

**The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror:**

Eighteenth Annual Collection. Ed. by Ellen Datlow and others. Aug. 2005. 608p. St. Martin's/Griffin, \$35 (0-312-34193-8); paper, \$19.95 (0-312-34194-7).

Anyone worried about original coeditor Terri Windling's replacement last year by Kelly Link and Gavin J. Grant should chill now. Their second year aboard this annual excursion on the high-quality seas of fantasy, light and dark, shows no decline in quality or quirkiness from their maiden voyage, though

with original coeditor Datlow still in service, fans needn't have worried. Here one still gratefully finds so extraordinarily well wrought an exercise in fantastic literary realism as Peter Straub's "Mr. Aickman's Air Rifle" (how well wrought? John O'Hara might envy the dialogue). Here is one of the most grotesque stories imaginable, Chuck Palahniuk's "Guts," which, Datlow remarks, "contains some rather graphic elements" (it's about a very private pastime of 13-year-old boys). John Kessel's weirdly jolly rural grunge fantasy, "The Baum Plan for Financial Independence," may be less surprising, but the book wouldn't be as good without it, or without Andy Duncan's exquisite essay in biographical fiction, "Zora and the Zombie," about Zora Neale Hurston's anthropological researches in Haiti. As usual, lots of excellent genre reading. —Ray Olson

**YA/M:** A terrific collection for sophisticated genre fans, though "Guts" may cause some squirming. RO.

## Graphic Novels

**Beland, Tom.** *True Story, Swear to God, v.2: This One Goes to 11*. 2005. 176p. illus. AiT/Planet Lar, paper, \$12.95 (1-932051-34-1). 741.5.

When Hurricane Georges struck in September 1998, Beland and his girlfriend, Lily, seemed to be living at opposite ends of the earth, he in California's Napa Valley, she in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Worried to distraction, he called her frequently, and she faithfully reassured him about her safety in her fourth-floor apartment, above the flooding that was the storm's biggest danger. The experience made them realize that they needed to be together, and any lingering doubts were dispelled when Lily's flight to California soon afterward was delayed a day by bad weather in Texas. Beland decided to move to Puerto Rico. His graphic-novel account of this dramatic turning point in his life ends with him on an airport-bound bus. His funny-pages drawing style, reminiscent of the boldly curvy, speedy lines of Hank Ketcham's *Dennis the Menace*, maintains a positive tone even when the action is at its most emotionally moving, in the scenes of Beland's leave-taking from his lifelong home, family, and friends. How profound unsensational, everyday lives can be when chronicled with such candor and affection. —Ray Olson

**Carey, Mike and others.** *The Wolf beneath the Tree*. Aug. 2005. 160p. illus. DC Comics/Vertigo, paper, \$14.99 (1-4012-0502-X). 741.5.

The *Sandman* spin-off comic book *Lucifer* rebounds from recent doldrums with three story arcs: a novella, a short story, and a novel. The novella, "Lilith," shows how that precursor of Eve is responsible for two fallen angels (one of whom becomes Lucifer, so this is an origins legend for him) and the remaining angels' abode after Lucifer's secession. The short story, "Neutral Ground," is a grimly amusing demon-possession romp: while a failed punk rocker's soul is occupied by a high-level demon-