

FANTASTICAL WORLDS AND FUTURES AT THE WORLD'S EDGE: A HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

by
Simon Litten and Sean McMullen

CHAPTER 5: NEW ZEALAND WRITES - CONTEMPORARY FICTION

From here on we shall be covering the last twenty years in the history of New Zealand's science fiction and fantasy. People from outside the country may be astounded by how much has happened in these two decades, but New Zealanders will probably think of it as merely the new normal, or even old news.

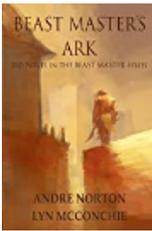
The arrival of the new millennium brought two major changes for New Zealand's aspiring science fiction and fantasy authors. The internet was changing New Zealand from the most remote SF community on the planet to being within a mouse click of everywhere. From the late 1990s onwards email and electronic publishing also allowed small presses to be set up and run at a fraction of their former cost, meaning that economies of scale allowed amateurs to enter the market. Science fiction fans tend to be very computer savvy, so they were among the earliest to adopt word processing in the 1980s, but when email and the World Wide Web came into widespread use in the 1990s, people realised that they could form both new types of fan communities and personal publishing companies.

The Sir Julius Vogel Awards were the other major change. New Zealand's awards for science fiction were established in 1989, with categories determined by the organising committee of the particular year's convention. However, the awards originally concentrated on fan writing and achievements. The 1998 national convention featured some important guests - Neil Gaiman and Michael Hurst as Guests of Honour, with George R. R. Martin and Sean McMullen also featured. They had some important advice for the local authors, and one particularly important suggestion was that a cheap, easy but highly effective way to help New Zealand authors get established was putting "Award winning" in their submission letters and publicity blurbs. Four years later the Sir Julius Vogel Award were inaugurated, and included original fiction by New Zealanders. The Vogels have since become a showcase for the best of New Zealand's science fiction and fantasy. By 2011 there were nine categories for professional work, which is an astounding result for a country with a population smaller than some Australian cities.

Patterns soon became visible in the voting. Two of Dale Elvy's *Shinto* series novels won best novel in the first three years, and Elvy also won Best New Talent in 2002. In the Short Fiction category, Peter Friend's stories won four times in the first seven years of voting. Kevin MacLean had won three times in Short Fiction in the same period, while three of Lyn McConchie's collaborative novels with US author Andre Norton had won by 2006. The awards were inaugurated just in time to recognise *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy of films, so Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh, and Philippa Boyens were honoured for Services to Science Fiction and Fantasy in 2002, then Weta Workshop and Weta Digital won in the same category in 2003, and a special award went to Peter Jackson and those responsible for *The Lord of the Rings* films in 2004.

Anyone wanting to know what was being done in New Zealand apart from *The Lord of the Rings* films could now look at the Sir Julius Vogel Award nominee lists and see which authors were well regarded, relatively prolific and being published internationally. Twenty of the more prominent of New Zealand's science fiction and fantasy current authors are introduced in the all too brief accounts that follow, but bear in mind that there are an estimated 140 New Zealand authors currently active in the field.

Peter Friend was born in New Zealand, and his stories have been published in Australia's *Aurealis* and *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine*, America's prestigious *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, and elsewhere. *The Good Earth* was the winner in the short fiction category of the professional Sir Julius Vogel Awards, *The Alchemist* (*Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine* #8) tied for the award in 2004, *The Real Deal* (*Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, July 2005) won outright in 2005. He was shortlisted in the same year for *The Christmas Tree* (*Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, December 2004), and he won again with *Western Front, 1914* (*Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine*, March/April 2006) in 2007. His short, animated film *Monocular* won the Hobbyist Category and the overall prize at the 2007 Movie Fest short film competition.



It is no surprise that **Lyn McConchie** has won the Sir Julius Vogel Award six times, with 43 books and over three hundred stories published. Since going professional as a writer in 1990 she has averaged a book every eight months, and has also been published under the pseudonyms Jan Bishop and Elizabeth Underwood. Her output ranges across science fiction, fantasy, and horror fiction, non-fiction and children's picture books. McConchie was born in New Zealand in 1946, and was crippled in a motorcycle accident in 1977. She worked in the Justice Department and the Office of Agriculture and Fisheries in Wellington before writing professionally. Her first book was *Farming Daze*, the first in a series about life on her farm and its animals.

In 1990 she won her first award, a New Zealand Science fiction and Fan Award for Best Fan Editor. When the Sir Julius Vogel Awards commenced, her collaborations with Andre Norton on the *Beastmaster* series were quickly recognised, with *Beast Master's Ark* (ebook 2002, Tor, 2003) winning Best Novel in 2003, *Beastmaster's Circus* (Tor, 2004) in 2005, and *The Duke's Ballad* (Tor, 2005) in 2006. In 2011 she won two Vogels, tying for Best Novel with *The Questing Road* (Tor, 2010) and winning Best Young Adult Novel outright with *Summer of Dreaming* (2010). Her collaboration with Sharman Horwood, *Queen of Iron Years* (Kite Hill, 2012) won Best Novel in 2013.

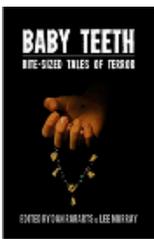
In addition to her science fiction, fantasy and horror, McConchie has had dozens of Sherlock Holmes stories and books published, and some of these have also won awards. Animals are a very strong theme in her writing, and many of her books are science fiction or fantasy involving animals. For example, in *Flying Free* (Sky Warrior, 2013), a girl discovers that the baby bird in the nest on her roof is the chick of a Haast's Eagle, a supposedly extinct but enormous New Zealand raptor.



James Norcliffe is best known as a poet and editor, but he makes extensive use of fantasy and science fiction themes in his work. Born in New Zealand in 1946, he has written novels, short fiction and poetry while working as a teacher and editor. His first book was published in 1992, and *The Assassin of Gleam* (Hazard Press 2005) won the Sir Julius Vogel Award for Best Novel in 2007, and was shortlisted for the 2007 LIANZA Esther Glen Medal. *The Loblolly Boy* (Longacre Press, 2009) was shortlisted for the Sir Julius Vogel Award, and won the 2010 New Zealand Post Junior Fiction Award.

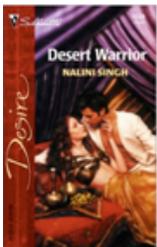


Anna MacKenzie was born in Palmerston North in 1963, began writing stories aged seven, and wrote for children while running reading groups at her children's school. She is a psychology graduate from Victoria University of Wellington. She had nine novels published between 2003 and 2015, ranging across historical, contemporary and speculative fiction for adult and young adult readers. She has won several awards, including the 2008 Sir Julius Vogel Award for *The Sea-wreck Stranger* (Longacre, 2007), which tied in the Young Adult category. It was also awarded a White Raven Award for Outstanding Children's Literature.



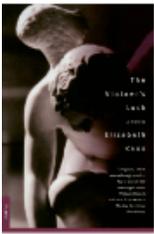
Lee Murray incorporates Maori mythology with her science fiction, fantasy and horror, and the combination has won her the Sir Julius Vogel Award an astonishing twelve times in eight years. She started writing as a child, but like many authors only began writing with publication in mind once her children were at school. Her fiction inclines to dark themes rather than outright horror, but there is a sufficient connection for her to have been nominated for the international Bram Stoker Award three times, and to win the Australasian Shadows Award for Best Edited Work with Dan Rabarts for the anthology *Baby Teeth* (Paper Road Press, 2013) in 2014. The book won the Sir Julius Vogel Award in the same year. She was Guest of Honour at Australia's Conflux 14 convention in Canberra in 2018.

Murray admits that the use of Maori legends and cultural material can be tricky, so she makes use of advisors and tries to maintain appropriate sensitivity to Maori oral history and religion. Some of her books can be described as future-setting thrillers, such as her series *Into the Mist* (Cohesion, 2016), *Into the Sounds* (Severed Press, 2018) and *Into the Ashes* (Severed Press, 2019). The first two both won the Sir Julius Vogel Award for Best Novel.



Paranormal romance has become an important part of contemporary fantasy, and the extremely prolific **Nalini Singh** has excelled in this field. She is of Indian descent, and was born in 1977 in Fiji. She has worked in Japan as an English teacher, and also as a lawyer and librarian. When aged just 22 she got third place in the Romance Writers of New Zealand's Clendon Award for 1999, and two years later the manuscript for *Coaxing the Sheik* won the Jane Porter Award and the Clendon Award's Readers' Choice Award. It was published as *Desert Warrior* (Silhouette Desire, 2003).

She has over two dozen novels published, and her books have appeared on the best sellers lists of the New York Times, USA Today, and Publishers Weekly. Her awards include two Sir Julius Vogel Awards for Best Novella/Novelette for *Beat of Temptation (An Enchanted Season Omnibus, 2007)* in 2008, and *Stroke of Enticement (The Magical Christmas Cat Omnibus, 2008)* in 2009. She was a Guest of Honour at the 2009 National Science Fiction Convention.



Elizabeth Knox was born in Wellington in 1959, and began writing at sixteen. She started work on her first novel, *After Z-Hour* (Victoria University Press, 1987), while studying for a degree in English Literature at Victoria University of Wellington, and it was published in 1987, the year of her graduation. She currently lives in Wellington with her husband Fergus Barrowman, a publisher at Victoria University Press. They have one son.

She has had eleven novels published. Her seventh novel, *The Vintner's Luck* (Picador, 1998) begins in early Nineteenth Century Burgundy, and follows the life of Sorbran Jodeau, a winemaker, and his relationship with a fallen angel, Xas. In 1999 it won the Deutz Medal for Fiction, Reader's Choice Award, Booksellers' Choice Award and Orange Prize for Fiction, and in 2001 the Tasmania Pacific Region Prize. A sequel novel, *The Angel's Cut* (Vintage, 2009), is set in 1930s Hollywood, and continues the story of the angel Xas.

In 2002 the New Zealand Queen's Birthday Honours conferred the letters ONZM (Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit) on Knox for services to literature. Nine years after publication of the book, *The Vintner's Luck* was adapted as film by Niki Caro, who was also director. Knox did not like the take on the adaptation, particularly on the relationship between Sorbran and Xas, and the general performance of the film could be described as disappointing. Nevertheless, it was rated a passable 5.7 by IMDB voters, and it won three New Zealand Film and Television Awards.

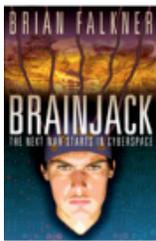
Knox's fantasy series, *The Dreamhunter Duet*, began with *Dreamhunter* (Harper Collins, 2005), then *Dreamquake* (Harper Collins, 2007). The young adult fantasy series was well received, with *Dreamhunter* winning the Esther Glen Award in 2006 and the ALA Best Books For Young Adults Award in 2007. In 2008 *Dreamquake* also won the ALA Best Books For Young Adults Award. *The Invisible Road* (Harper Collins, 2008) won the Best Collected Work category of the Sir Julius Vogel Award in 2009, and the following year Knox was a Guest of Honour at the National Science Fiction Convention. Her novel *Mortal Fire* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013) won the New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards for YA, and a 2014 White Raven Award, from the International Youth Library.



Many New Zealand authors move to Australia to live, but **Philippa Ballantine** moved to Virginia in the US with her husband Tee Morris. Born in Wellington in 1971, she graduated from Victoria University of Wellington, majoring in English and Political Science, then added Applied Science in Library Studies from the Open Polytechnic.

In 2006 she was the first New Zealand author to podcast her novel, putting her on the shortlist for the Parsec Award for Best Writing Podcast. *Geist* (Ace, 2010) appeared in book form four years after the podcast, quickly followed by three other books in the *Books of the Order* series. She has podcast nine of her books and written the *Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences* series of novels with her husband. The first book in that series, *The Janus Affair* (Harper Voyager, 2012) was a *Locus* magazine bestseller, and won the Steampunk Chronical Readers Choice Award for Best Fiction.

In 2012 she also won the Parsec award for a second time with *The Precarious Child* (Imagine That! Studios, 2012). She was Guest of Honour at the National Science Fiction Convention in 2008 and 2015, her novels have been shortlisted for three Sir Julius Vogel Awards. In 2016 the collection *Magical Mechanications* (Imagine That! Studios, 2016), was published, containing four steampunk novelettes written with Tee Morris.



Born in 1962, **Brian Falkner** studied computer science while at the University of Auckland, so it is not really a surprise that his young adult novels are quite high tech orientated. The first of his eighteen young adult novels was *Henry and the Flea* (Mallinson Rendel, 2003), and his fifth book, *Brainjack* (Walker, 2009) won Best Young Adult Novel in the 2010 Sir Julius Vogel Awards, and a New Zealand Post Children's Book Award in the Children's Choice category. The theme, a young computer hacker recruited by a secret organisation to fight cyber terrorism, could hardly fail

to appeal to young computer-savvy readers. His first *Battlesaurus* book, *Battlesaurus: Rampage at Waterloo* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2016) won the New Zealand Children's Book Award in 2016 in the Young Adult category, and in Australia was shortlisted for a New South Wales Premier's Literary Award.



David Hair was born in the Hawke's Bay region of New Zealand. His first novel, *The Bone Tiki* (Harper Collins, 2009), won a New Zealand Post Children's Book Award. He followed that with a further five books in the *Aotearoa* series. His next series, the four book *The Return of Ravenna*, were first published in India where he was living, as his wife had been posted there as part of the New Zealand consulate. He has since published two further four book fantasy series: *The Moontide Quartet* and *The Sunsurge Quartet*.

Emily Gee is the daughter of Maurice Gee and, by her own admission, she actively avoided becoming a writer. However, a bus trip across the Syrian desert resulted in a what if moment. She has published five books through Solaris, and has been a Sir Julius Vogel Award finalist several times. She writes historical romance as Emily Larkin.



Helen Lowe is another professional author who has a New Zealand Science Fiction Fan Award - for Services to Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror, in 2014. Two of her novels have won the Sir Julius Vogel Award:

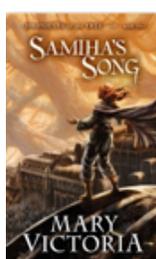
Thornspell (Knopf, 2008) in 2009 for Best Young Adult Novel, and *The Heir of Night* (Harper Voyager, 2010) which tied for Best Novel in 2011.

What we have seen thus far is just a sample of the higher profile science fiction and fantasy authors of New Zealand. But in many cases the winning of even a single Sir Julius Vogel Award flags an author with a very substantial career writing science fiction and fantasy.



Freya Robertson won a Sir Julius Vogel award in 2014 with her novel *Heartwood* (Angry Robot, 2013), which was the first book of an epic fantasy series.

Grant Stone lives in Auckland, and has also won two Sir Julius Vogel Awards for his fiction, both for Best Short Story: "Under Waves and Over" (*Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine* 37, 2008) in 2009, and "The Living Dead Boy" (*Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine* 41, 2009) in 2010. His fiction has been published in *Shimmer*, *Strange Horizons*, *Semaphore*, *The Year's Best Australian Fantasy & Horror*, and *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine*.



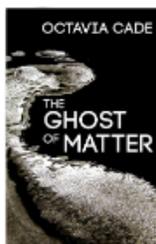
Mary Victoria continues a long tradition of authors migrating to New Zealand then establishing literary careers. She was born in Massachusetts in 1973, and she lived in Wellington with her husband and daughter for several years until he moved to Great Britain because of his job. She won Best Novel in the 2011 Sir Julius Vogel Awards with *Samiha's Song* (Harper Collins, 2012).

Douglas van Belle is an American-born and educated professor at Victoria University of Wellington's school of English, Film, Theatre and Media Studies. He has written several science fiction works, ranging from short stories to novels.

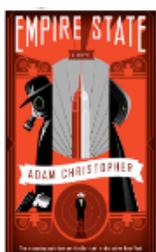
M. Darusha Wehm moved to New Zealand from Canada, and her CV contains a very prestigious Nebula Award nomination. In 2019 *The Martian Job* (Choice of Games, 2018) won Best Novella/Novelette in the Sir Julius Vogel Awards, and she has had five science fiction novels published. As Darusha Whem she also writes mainstream fiction.

Sean Monaghan is a New Zealand graduate of the Master of Philosophy Creative Writing course of the University of Queensland. He started writing in earnest in 2008 and has been published in various high profile venues including *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine*, and *Perihelion*. His story "Crimson Birds" (*Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, Jan/Feb 2017) won the Asimov's Reader's Choice Award for best short story of 2017. He has also published several novels and is an Aurealis Award finalist. The January/February 2017 issue of *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*

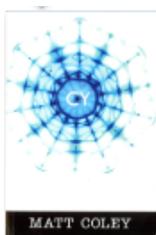
also included an Octavia Cade novelette, *The Meiosis of Cells and Exile*, which was the first time two New Zealanders were published together in a significant American science fiction and/or fantasy magazine.



Octavia Cade won two Vogels in Best Novella/Novel category with *The Ghost of Matter* (Paper Road Press, 2015) in 2016 and *The Convergence of Fairy Tales* (The Book Smugglers, 2016) in 2017, and she also won the New Zealand Science Fiction Fan Award for Best Fan Writing in 2017. She has had over forty stories published, some in high profile venues such as *Clarksworld*, *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, and *Strange Horizons*. She has been shortlisted for a British Science Fiction Association Award, and attended the Clarion West workshop in 2016.



Adam Christopher is the pen name of Adam Christopher McGechan, who was born in Auckland in 1978. He was the editor for nine issues of *Time/Space Visualiser*, the journal of the New Zealand Doctor Who Fan Club, from 2003 to 2009. This won a Sir Julius Vogel Award in 2010. He moved to North West England with his wife in 2006, and his first novel *Empire State* (Angry Robot, 2012) was published in 2012. Since then he has written several novels including the *Ray Electromatic* series and tie-in novels for television series.



Sadly, manslaughter victim **Matthew Coley** never knew that he would become a published author. His science fiction novel, *Cy*, was published posthumously from handwritten notes in 2017, a year after his death. He was killed in Invercargill by a "single blow to the head" from a local teenager during a night out. Coley had graduated from the University of Waikato with a degree in business management, and at the time of his death had been working for a decade on *Cy*. The plot ranges across artificial intelligence, archeological explorations in Egypt, and a spiritual quest among the Maori. It was made available online at cymattcoley.com.

This has obviously been no more than the briefest of introductions to New Zealand's contemporary science fiction and fantasy authors, but many of the remaining 120 or so others who have not been mentioned have won at least one Sir Julius Vogel Award, and some of those living in Australia have also won Australian awards. Can we say anything else about New Zealand authors in general before we move on? It turns out that they are very prolific as a group. The statistics for the number of novels they publish show that they write significantly more per head than their Australian counterparts, and the Australians are among the most prolific in the world.