



Early Riser

Jasper Fforde

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An instant *New York Times* bestseller

The new standalone novel from bestselling author Jasper Fforde

Every Winter, the human population hibernates.

During those bitterly cold four months, the nation is a snow-draped landscape of desolate loneliness, devoid of human activity.

Well, not *quite*.

Your name is Charlie Worthing and it's your first season with the **Winter Consuls**, the committed but mildly unhinged group of misfits who are responsible for ensuring the hibernatory safe passage of the sleeping masses.

You are investigating an outbreak of viral dreams which you dismiss as nonsense; nothing more than a quirky artefact born of the sleeping mind.

When the dreams start to kill people, it's unsettling.

When you get the dreams too, it's weird.

When they start to come true, you begin to doubt your sanity.

But teasing truth from the Winter is never easy: You have to avoid the Villains and their penchant for murder, kidnapping and stamp collecting; ensure you aren't eaten by Nightwalkers, whose thirst for human flesh can only be satisfied by comfort food; and sidestep the increasingly less-than-mythical WinterVolk.

But so long as you remember to wrap up warmly, you'll be fine.

Early Riser Details

Date : Published February 12th 2019 by Viking (first published August 2nd 2018)

ISBN : 9780670025039

Author : Jasper Fforde

Format : Hardcover 402 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Science Fiction, Humor

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From Reader Review Early Riser for online ebook

Sarah says

I'm being more kind with this book than my last couple. In truth I think it's probably a 3.5 Star read. Not as meh as 3 stars, but not as great as a 4 Star read.

In the beginning, the reader is just dumped into this bizarre world where humans hibernate and have winter coats and "bulk up" for winter. It takes a long time for all the pieces to come together and get the hang of it, but on the bright side, there aren't many info dumps.

I loved all the humor. There were a couple parts that had me laughing out loud. The intrigue takes a while to pull the reader in, but otherwise it was a pretty quick and easy read.

It was a little predictable in terms of the whodunnit, but I think there were enough twists and turns added in to the journey to make it feel unpredictable. Thinking back on the plot I feel like there were a couple plot threads that didn't contribute much to the overall story, but they provided a little comic relief.

If I could change something about it I think I'd make the world building a little clearer. There's talk about child bearing responsibilities- I would have liked to know more about why this was necessary? Winter is a killer, okay- but how many people are dying that they need to force child bearing duties upon people? I get that there is a higher rate of death among over winterers, but we aren't given many stats about how many people aren't surviving due to straight up starvation. The given (and inconsistent stats) don't add up to making this a necessary requirement.

I was also very unclear on the time line. The latest reference I found was to something in 2003, but some references go back to the 19th century. The technology didn't seem super advanced, but some of it also wasn't familiar.

The other thing I will say is that I think it would have made a fantastic horror novel. The setting was great. Sector 12 was creepy and eerie. The myths and legends about wintervolk added to the horror vibes, but it never went full throttle. Nothing about it is truly scary but it could have been, so it ended up feel like missed potential.

All in all, not a bad read. I might check out other work by Fforde in the future.

Phrynne says

Jasper Fforde is one of my favourite authors and I have been waiting it seems for ages for him to write something new! Here it is at last and it is worth every minute of the wait.

This new book is written in Fforde's typical quirky and inventive style. The setting is an alternate Wales where the population hibernates through Ice Age like winters and only a few people stay awake to take care of the sleepers. Our hero, Charlie, becomes a Winter Consul and this story tells of his first winter spent

awake with mostly rogues and thieves for company.

I love this author's writing style. It is smart and witty and there are lots of little topical references which are always slightly askew like "...knowing all the old Nesbits was like knowing every actor who ever played Jane Bond, especially the solitary male one, something which was quite controversial at the time." Food also is very important in a world of snow and ice and I enjoyed all the references to things like Nesquik and Jaffa Cakes, things from my English childhood!

This is a fun book which I enjoyed very much BUT now that Mr Fforde has his writing mojo back I do hope he has another Thursday Next book up his sleeve and of course we are all wishing for the sequel to Shades of Grey. Just saying:)

Nigel says

In brief -

The start - a bit indifferent.

To around the halfway mark - very Jasper Fforde but I've read better

After that it simply got better and better.... Ho hum, the joys of reviewing :)

In full

This is a new standalone story from an author I am a real fan of. In practice he has written nothing for some years now and I was a little worried and pleased when I got my review copy. This is set in Wales though not the Wales we know. In this story we are loosely in the current era however Wales enjoys temperatures in the winter that can descend to lower than -50 degrees. In the main inhabitants hibernate and have done so for years. A few people do stay awake. The Winter Consuls are one group who keep order over that period. The Hibertech corporation also works through the winter. The other humans awake are largely unfortunates or criminals - in either case food is very important to them.

Cue the arrival of Charlie. Charlie is an orphan of sorts and desperate to leave the institution he is in. He joins the Winter Consuls as a novice. Novices lives tend to be short and the first winter takes a toll. It's bizarre and is very Jasper Fforde.

While this is wildly inventive it does take some scene/world setting. This seemed to slow down the first third or so for me quite a bit. Charlie's first "simple" job does not go well and he is stranded in Sector 12, loosely mid Wales, which has a bad reputation for all kinds of things. In particular it appears that a viral dream make be killing people off It is also a centre for the Hibertech corporation. Fforde has a penchant for manipulative, shady corporations and this is no exception. Throw in the Womads and Wintervolk and almost anything could happen. Charlie - or Wonky as he prefers NOT to be known - finds himself in the centre of everything that is going on.

As far as the key components are concerned there is great humour here and the characters are rich and interesting. Aurora and Toccata are wonderful creations for example. Charlie too is excellent. Charlie actually has a feel of Eddie in Shades of Grey for me (although it is a while ago I read it). Maybe the basic outline has some similarities too - state/corporations plots to do what? The writing is very effective; simple in some senses and yet complex enough to be interesting. I did find it is best if the reading can be sustained.

For me this is definitely not Fforde's best work. As I said the first part of the book seemed rather slow. The

book became progressively faster, clearer and more appealing as time went on. The graph of my enjoyment went up and up as the temperature went down and down! Ultimately it was great to read a new book by Jasper Fforde and I enjoyed it. I sincerely hope that he can now add to Shades of Grey because that first book is probably one of my all time favourites - more please Mr Fforde!

Note - I received a digital copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for a fair review
<http://viewson.org.uk/fantasy/early-r...>

Book of the Month says

Why I love it
by Liberty Hardy

Zip up your snowsuit and grab your pillow and blanket! It's time for a chilling, sharply funny novel, where humans hibernate half the year, and dreaming can be deadly. Welcome to the delightfully zany world of Jasper Fforde!

Charlie Worthing is a new recruit with the Winter Consuls, the scrappy agency that watches over the lucky tranche of humanity that gets to hibernate through each brutal winter instead of risking frozen limbs, starvation, and death. What's his first day on the job like? Well, his mentor is immediately assassinated, a viral dream is killing off hibernators, and that's just the beginning. Throw in cannibalistic Nightwalkers, the dreaded WinterVolk people, and the other undesirables he must deal with while being awake, and you've got all the makings of a very fun adventure story. Can Charlie save the day?

I'm trying hard not to gush here, but I have been a diehard Jasper Fforde fan since his first novel, and this one makes me SO HAPPY! Fforde has such an incredible talent for witty dialogue, and the imagination he pours into this novel is astounding. I loved how the exposition builds and builds, gaining momentum like a runaway snowball, until its fabulous conclusion. Whether you're a longtime fan or a first-time Fforde reader, this novel is *ffun* for everyone!

Read more at: <https://bookofthemonth.com/early-rise...>

MTK says

By giving three stars, I am being generous (or perhaps grateful for the delight Fforde's previous books brought me). It's not a bad book, but it is extremely exposition-heavy and badly paced; we are constantly being bombarded with endless minutiae of this alternate universe where humans hibernate like bears, most of them delivered in barely comprehensible jargon, that's it's hard to penetrate to the heart of the story, and the plot, when at last it happens, moves either too fast or too slow. Worst of all, all these details that bog down the story ultimately fail to paint a vivid picture of this winter world.

Kyra Leseberg (Roots & Reads) says

"Winter isn't a season --- it's a calling."

I first heard of author Jasper Fforde on Litsy (my favorite book app of all time) when tons of people had rave reviews for **The Eyre Affair** (the first novel in the *Thursday Next* series). I picked up a copy at the library and devoured the book, impressed with the overall originality and the humor! I don't read many books routinely placed in the sci-fi / fantasy genres but Fforde has a way of taking the weird and making it seem normal in a parallel universe sort of way. And the humor. Oh, the humor sells it if you're on the fence!

I was thrilled to find that Fforde took a break from the *Thursday Next* and *Shades of Grey* series to write this standalone!

In **Early Riser** we meet Charlie Worthing. She grew up in a Pool, raised by The Sisters of Perpetual Gestation (with names like Mother Fallopia, Sister Zygota, and Sister Vulvolia) who took their pledge of procreation pretty seriously. After all, the population needs to stay strong and survive the winters.

In this world, humans hibernate in the winter. A portion of the population is supplied by the company HiberTech with the drug Morphenox, allowing for a dreamless sleep. The problem is, some people on Morphenox don't fully wake up in the Spring - they turn in to 'nightwalkers', which are essentially zombies (they have cannibalistic tendencies if not given regular snacks).

Charlie has joined the Winter Consul, a group of misfits who become law enforcement in winter, in charge of staying awake and ensuring the safety of the hibernating population from nightwalkers, villains, and the WinterVolk (mythical or not...?)

While most people hibernate dream-free through the winter, the guests on the ninth floor of a dormitory in Sector Twelve all begin dreaming the same dream about a blue Buick. When the dreamers begin to die, Charlie investigates the "viral dream" and it leads her straight to the doors of HiberTech. She has been on Morphenox since childhood so she's surprised when she suddenly begins dreaming about the blue Buick. When the dream becomes reality, Charlie questions her own sanity.

Who can she trust in the Consul? Keeping the nightwalkers in line and avoiding villains isn't easy, her superior has split personalities (literally) so she can't seem to stay on her good side, and now she has to interpret a bizarre dream in order to make it through her first winter, though it could reveal dangerous secrets about HiberTech and the Morphenox most people depend on.

Fforde's signature style of compelling and quirky with a strong dose of humor shines in **Early Riser!** This is definitely the book I would recommend to readers who want to give sci-fi/fantasy a try and obviously those who are already huge fans of the genre and/or enjoy dystopias.

Thanks to Viking and Edelweiss for providing me with a DRC in exchange for my honest review. **Early Riser** is scheduled for release in the United States on February 12, 2019.

For more reviews, visit www.rootsandreads.wordpress.com

Marianne says

Early Riser is the fourteenth novel by Welsh author, Jasper Fforde. Twenty-two-year-old Charlie Worthing gladly deserts his Assistant House Manager job at St Granata's Pooled Parentage Station in Cardiff when the opportunity to become a Winter Consul presents. With a bare minimum of training, he starts as the new

Novice for the famous Jack Logan. With Slumberdown (for Winter) mere days away, their first assignment is, ostensibly, to deliver a Night Walker to the Hiber-Tech HQ in the often-dangerous Sector Twelve.

He's already not doing too well at this when his mentor is killed, and Charlie has to make the delivery on his own. He also intends to fulfil Logan's intention to speak to the Sector Chief Consul about the recently reported spate of viral dreams involving a blue Buick, an oak tree, boulders and grabbing hands, and ending in psychotic episodes. Accidentally(?) stranded in the Sector, Charlie wakes up to realise that he, too, has had this dream.

The world that Fforde builds is certainly different. This is Wales, but not as we know it: it gets very cold in Winter; a mere 0.01% of the population (Winter Consuls, winsomniacs, Villains, Wintervolk and the mythical Gronk) does not spend the eight months of Winter in Hibernation; everyone spends the eight weeks before Slumberdown prodigiously eating, putting on enough weight to see them through; the lucky ones get to use Morphenox which stops them spending their energy reserves by dreaming; population numbers reduce each winter because of the cold, so there is compulsory child-bearing legislation.

His fourteenth novel bears all the usual Jasper Fforde trademarks: amusing names (of people, organisations, publications, drugs); chapters prefaced by quotes from (sometimes bizarrely titled but always relevant) books, articles, press releases, a dictionary, magazines and, of course, from many of the ten editions of the Handbook of Winterology (Hodder & Stoughton); numerous footnotes that are occasionally humorous but always informative and therefore, ignored at the reader's peril.

Fforde's plot is original, as always, and there are plenty of twists and red herrings, and most of the characters are not quite what they first seem to be. There's plenty of humour, but also some thought-provoking observations about sleep and dreaming. A little bonus for those who read past the acknowledgements, are some clever fliers and posters in Fforde's latest creation. Very entertaining!

Ashley says

Jasper Fforde hasn't released a new book since 2014, and that is a long time for him. I have been waiting and waiting (so patiently) for the third Nursery Crime book, but it just doesn't seem to be happening. Neither does the second *Shades of Grey* book. But now there is this book, which is not actually out in the US until 2019, so I bought it from Book Depository. I'm glad I did this anyway because the UK cover is so much better than the American one. It has a cutout cover and when you lift it up those people are on the beach, and I just love it.

But, okay, the actual book. What *Early Riser* reminds me of the most in tone and style, if you've read his other books, is actually *Shades of Grey* (which was subtitled *The Road to High Saffron* after they decided it would, eventually, have sequels; but my copy just says *Shades of Grey* on it). It has a completely original world that can be a bit dense to get in to, and the satire functions in almost exactly the same way. Fforde builds a world that is so ridiculous and implausible that his characters' actions reflect the absurdity of our own society and behavior.

Early Riser is set in a world where winters are so severe that humanity has chosen to hibernate every year. Everything is built on this premise: their social structures, their reproduction, their body image, etc. And almost everything is completely upside down from our world. Because if you don't have enough body fat, there's a high chance you won't make it through the winter, attractive people are those who are fatter, and

skinny people are seen as undesirable. Larger bodies are seen as signs of wealth and stability (much as it was in the middle ages). There is a constant threat of population decline, and a high chance of not lasting the winter, either because you never wake up, you wake up wrong, or mysterious monster figures get you. As in other Jasper Fforde satires, there are also nefarious corporations, conspiracies, and absurdities abounding. But this book is actually the darkest thing I've read from him. Its humor is definitely humorous, but it's a darker, bleaker humor.

Our main character is Charlie Worthing, a somewhat hapless young man who blunders his way through a lot of things. He's decided to become a Winter Consul, one of the select few humans who stay awake all winter, caring for the sleeping others. It's a very dangerous job, most newbies not making through their first winter, and he basically only takes it out of spite. He has no idea what he's doing. As a result, his POV isn't the most helpful in decoding Fforde's world, because any clues dropped we as readers have to put together. Charlie ain't going to do it.

As other reviewers have noted, the barrier to entry on this one is pretty high, even higher than most of his books, as there is such a lot of worldbuilding and terminology to understand. You do eventually get it all (took me about 1/4 of the book), but it takes longer than it should. I don't think I've ever read a Fforde book I haven't enjoyed, but this one, though the premise is incredibly intriguing, isn't my favorite of his. The complications take away a bit of the enjoyment. Still, on re-read, I bet I would like it a lot better. It would also make for a fantastically creepy and funny movie. Nobody has yet been able to successfully translate Fforde into film yet, so I guess I'll be waiting a while on that.

[3.5 stars, rounded up]

Alvar Borgan says

Eine Welt, in der die Eiszeit nie geendet hat. In der die Menschen sich angepasst haben und Winterschlaf halten. In dieser Welt spielt Jasper Ffordes Roman "Eiswelt" - ein Roman, den man am besten im Herbst oder Winter liest, unter der Bettdecke, während man sich wünscht, den Wecker ausstellen und selbst in den Winterschlaf fallen zu können.

Ich habe die Geschichte (für meine Verhältnisse) in Rekordzeit gelesen. Tatsächlich ist sie wunderbar flüssig geschrieben, mäandert wie ein quicklebendiges Flüsschen von einem Schauplatz zum anderen. Der Hauptcharakter "Matschbirne" Charlie lässt sich großenteils einfach auf dem Fluss der Handlung treiben - dem Anspruch an einen Protagonisten, ein Handelnder zu sein, will er gar nicht gerecht werden.

In dieser Hinsicht erinnert mich Charlie an Rincewind, den Zauberer aus Terry Pratchetts Scheibenwelt, dessen Hauptaufgabe oft auch eher im Weglaufen besteht. Und ja, der Roman begegnet den Härten des Winters mit typisch englischem Humor (obwohl er streng aus walisischer Perspektive geschrieben ist). Insgesamt würde ich "Eiswelt" aber nicht mit den Werken Terry Pratchetts oder Douglas Adams vergleichen wollen.

Seine Stärken spielt das Setting immer dort aus, wo es unseren Erwartungen diametral entgegengesetzt ist: Den Bewohnern der Eiswelt geht es nicht darum, die schlanke Linie zu halten, sondern sich genügend Winterfett anzufuttern. Klimawandel spielt eine Rolle, aber nur insofern, als möglichst viel CO2 freigesetzt werden soll, um eine globale Erwärmung in Gang zu bringen.

Neben den humorigen Seiten ist der Winter in Eiswelt aber auch brutal - Todesfälle und Nachtwandler genannte Quasi-Zombies gehören zum Alltag, und auch die Lebenden zeigen oft erstaunliche Physiognomien. An den sarkastischen Umgang mit den allgegenwärtigen Grausamkeiten des Winters muss man sich als Leser gewöhnen.

Die Charaktere werden nicht gerade subtil gezeichnet - aber meist steckt zumindest mehr hinter ihrer Fassade, als der Roman zuerst preisgibt - und harte Winter sind auch keine Umgebung, in der subtile Eigenschaften gut gedeihen würden. Trotzdem war ich irritiert, wie kommentarlos der Ich-Erzähler über Faustschläge aufs Auge und Zombiebisse hinweggeht - der körperliche Schmerz wird kaum beschrieben. Auch an anderen Stellen, etwa beim Tod einer alten Bekannten, kam mir die Gefühlsebene zu kurz.

Wer mag, kann sich an Steampunk-Elementen wie Gaslaternen, Phonographenwalzen und Druckluftwaffen erfreuen. Allerdings werden auch LED-Lichter erwähnt, Cary Grant und die gesamte Palette moderner Kalorienbomben wie Snickers, Nutella und Cadbury's Trauben-Nuss-Schokolade. Insgesamt hinterlässt der Weltenbau (mit Ausnahme der genau beschriebenen Waffen) leider einen etwas verworrenen Eindruck.

Die Handlung ist im Großen und Ganzen logisch, auch wenn es durchaus fragliche Elemente gibt. Wie sich beispielsweise das außergewöhnliche Verhältnis von Toccata zu Aurora in der Praxis genau gestalten soll, darüber denkt man besser nicht zu genau nach.

Trotz der kritischen Anmerkungen hat mich das Buch absolut gefesselt. Nicht zuletzt, weil es zu allem, was es andeutet, dann auch liefert. Jedes Gewehr, das vorkommt, wird auch abgefeuert. Meine Empfehlung: Einfach lesen, solange es kalt ist.

Joc says

Winter is coming and the population needs to get fed for a four month long hibernation. Set in a present day alternate reality in Wales, Charlie 'Wonk' Worthing is assisting with the Fat Thursday celebrations which are aimed at getting people up to a weight sufficient to sustain them throughout the Winter. His job is pretty lack-lustre but gives him access Morphenox, a drug which prevents dreaming (which uses valuable energy resources) and only has a one in two thousand chance of turning you into a nightwalker (vacant, but alive). It's also only available to the wealthy and those in certain types of employment.

On a whim he applies for the job as Winter Consul which, if he gets it, will guarantee his continued access to Morphenox but he won't be hibernating because the Consuls stay awake to ensure that things keep running while everyone else sleeps. Charlie himself doesn't see the logic in his decision but that's what happens when one is irritated with a current employer. Staying awake presents so much more than Charlie bargained for. Cannibalistic Nightwalkers, Villians, mythical WinterVolk, viral dreams and competing agencies are just some of the things that come his way.

I've read nearly all of Fforde's novels and I was ridiculously excited to get my hands on this one. While it was well-written, humorous, quirky and with a really clever plot, I found it to be slow going for 60% because it felt like all I was doing was separating the puzzle into edge pieces and colours (and a lot of them were white). After that the story kicks into gear and becomes the story I had hoped for all along.

Fforde has a phenomenal skill for world-building filled with bizarre and unusual characters and even though

this might not be my favourite book of his, it's still a good read.

Book received from Netgalley and Hodder & Stoughton for an honest review.

lucky little cat says

Confession: I have *never* been able to make it through a Jasper Fforde novel before this one.

The Eyre Affair and the *Thursday Next* novels have always seemed way too randomly, relentlessly pun- and gag-stuffed, and frankly, I get more than enough of that at home over the dinner table.

But *Early Riser* made me happy. It's a stand-alone, a fish-out-of-water story where a plucky, mostly self-aware young person goes out and finds adventure. The world he encounters has enough flexibility (and even occasionally unexpected kindnesses) to at least sometimes accommodate his inevitable mistakes.

It's a post-apocalyptic glacier-locked earth, at least for half of the year, and most humans have adjusted by growing a thin coat of fur and hibernating through the winter months.

Fforde has tremendous fun taking on numerous ripe targets: big pharma, marketing, sexism, the drudgery of menial labor, exploitation of the working class. The ingenious corporate meanies in *Riser* have worked out ways to squeeze work hours out of the public even as the public sleeps.

The book's ultimately a kind of an arctic Wild West story set in Wales. With zombies. It's also a save-the-monster story, once they sort out which are the innocent monsters.

Things get all cuddly and small-world interrelated by the end, but the earliest chapters reminded me of classic sci-fi like *End of Eternity* without the entrenched sexism.

With Tom Jones tunes and a multitude of other well-placed Wales allusions. Fforde being Fforde, even throwaway lines are allusive, for example this on-air announcer's repeated warm-up line, "We know a remote farm in Lincolnshire, where Mrs. Buckley lives. . ." which, if you're an Orson Welles fan, you'll recognize as an advertising jingle Welles famously rebelled against reciting in the twilight of his career. One of these days, Fforde's novels will digitally bristle with hyperlinks to segue to his allusions. 'Til then, we'll just have to make do with memory :)

Kelly says

I was delighted to receive an advance copy of this title on Netgalley as I am a massive fan of the authors works. Once again Jasper Fforde has created a world that initially seems insane but is written with such practical language and real characters that by the end of the book it's completely normal. The characters are really well written, I particularly liked the main character Charlie, and found the dialogue between them all was brilliant. The sense of peace and danger that the winter in this world presents really comes across in the writing and my only criticism would be that the book wraps up a bit too quickly for my liking. Saying that, this was a great read for all Fforde fans and those who like their dystopian fiction a bit quirky with a lot of

humour.

Andover Library says

Reading this book was like re-connecting with an old friend. The characters might be different and the setting new but the style and humour were undeniably Fforde.

As always Fforde makes you feel right at home in the most improbable of settings, this time on an AU Earth at the start of the Ice Age like winter that Humans need to hibernate through. We follow Charlie (or Wonky as he is known to his annoyance) as he stays awake for his first Winter joining a small band of hardened people who stay awake to ensure that others are looked after while they sleep.

Being his first winter, Charlie should be spending it somewhere nice and safe indoors filing and making tea but fate seems to have other ideas in store for him as he keeps hearing about a viral dream involving a Blue Buick and creepy hands. Of course Charlie can't just ignore something like that can he....

Charlie was a likeable character from the start and only got more so as the book progressed. A nice guy who tried to do his best but somehow always ended up way over his head. There were some nice subtle nods to Fforde's back catalogue with mentions going to gingham fabric and Caravaggio (I'm sure there are others that I missed but these ones stood out. Sadly no Dodo's this time though!)

A hugely fun read that I thoroughly recommend.

With thanks to Netgalley and Hodder & Stoughton for an early copy in exchange for an honest review.

Fiona says

No one who got cold and dirty in the Winter was ever truly welcome in the Summer. The citizenry didn't know or care what the Consuls did during the cold to keep them safe, they just wanted to wake alive in the Spring, same as always. For many people, the Winter didn't really exist except in an abstract sort of way, and by consequence, neither did we.

Jasper Fforde writes books that are a dream to read, and a nightmare to review, but here goes! It's been a long wait for this one - over two years since the last book was published - but his writing is always worth the wait.

It's a standalone novel this time, set in a world of climate change but in reverse; and due to a scarcity of resources, most citizens hibernate through winter (eight weeks either side of the winter solstice). The reader isn't coddled by the author, either, which makes for a slightly confusing beginning. But piece by piece, we're given more glimpses into this world, and some of them are glorious. From the pressure-weapons creating patches of clarity when fired through falling snow, to the Villains, English nobility who escaped to Wales and refuse to compromise their standards, each supporting character and piece of knowledge is finely tuned and builds a truly comprehensive world.

I enjoyed so much in this story. It may not be for everyone - it's slower in its pace than previous Fforde novels, and slower in allowing the reader to find their feet. But it was thoughtful and considered, and taking

my time with it felt more like savouring than dawdling. If you've enjoyed previous books by Jasper Fforde, I'd recommend it in a heartbeat. And if you haven't, you're missing out - get thee to the Thursday Next series, post haste!

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. - Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*.

carol. says

Jasper Fforde is one of those writers that defies genre conventions, and even within his own body of work, he's written some books that won't have cross-over appeal. The Tuesday Next series, for instance, is pure fantasy silliness, based on the premise that there is a book/media world that becomes a live-action play whenever a book is read. The Nursery Rhyme series--my favorite--is equally silly, revolving around a detective solving crimes related to Humpty Dumpty and The Three Bears. Fforde's pushed boundaries even further in the past few years with *Shades of Grey* and his latest stand-alone, *Early Riser*. I'd be hard-pressed to categorize it as either sci-fi or fantasy, as he does seem to take some pains to make his world semi-explicable according to Earth-laws, but at the end of the day, it's typical Fforde weirdness.

The set-up is a world that swings dramatically from frigid Winter to a normal Summer, requiring the majority of inhabitants to hibernate in Domiciles during the Winter months. It's a super-intriguing premise reminding me of Hugh Howery's silos in *Wool*, but really, that's not Fforde's point, and there are mostly just intriguing but limited details on how the society operates. There's a young person who becomes a member of the Winter Counsil, the group that sacrifices health to stay up and maintain order during the lean winter months. A supposedly quick mission of turning in a brain-dead 'sleeper' takes him and his preceptor Logan to the outlying and wild Sector Twelve, and unusual circumstances progress as they start to hear rumors of a 'viral dream' causing those who can't hibernate to go crazy.

It's a genre-bender to be sure. Sci-fi, fantasy, dreamscape fiction, apocalypse, mystery, coming-of-age; it draws elements from all. This is a book where--you may laugh--you need to *read all the words* if you want to enjoy it. (I don't always, especially with 'meh' level books). It was engrossing and consuming, and took a little work to read. There's very little background or exposition, and what is there may not matter again. For instance, the story opens at the place Charlie Worthington resides, a sort of orphanage/baby-making nunnery. Does it matter? Only in context of his beginning, and perhaps in assumptions others might make about him later on. But you have to be able to go with the reading flow, content to understand as much as Fforde gives and possibly extrapolate the rest if you are going to enjoy it.

Definitely less silly than Fforde's earlier books, which isn't to say it is without humor, both incidental and situational. It took me awhile, but there's a running joke about how awful various attempts at making 'coffee' on limited supplies are. There's also a cute running gag where two characters meet and one is invested in imagining a shared history that is both funny and a little sad. As usual, Fforde has quite a bit to say about capitalism. There's some side bits about the English and Welsh relationships as well. Thankfully, no cheese.

I found it a satisfying read, but fairly sure it isn't one that will make it into my library (unlike *The Nursery Crimes*) Cross-recommendation: *The Gone-Away World*. Also feels a little similar to China Miéville in general boundary-pushing.

