Void Star

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A riveting, beautifully written, fugue-like novel of AIs, memory, violence, and mortality

Not far in the future the seas have risen and the central latitudes are emptying, but it's still a good time to be rich in San Francisco, where weapons drones patrol the skies to keep out the multitudinous poor. Irina isn't rich, not quite, but she does have an artificial memory that gives her perfect recall and lets her act as a medium between her various employers and their AIs, which are complex to the point of opacity. It's a good gig, paying enough for the annual visits to the Mayo Clinic that keep her from aging.

Kern has no such access; he's one of the many refugees in the sprawling drone-built favelas on the city's periphery, where he lives like a monk, training relentlessly in martial arts, scraping by as a thief and an enforcer. Thales is from a different world entirely—the mathematically inclined scion of a Brazilian political clan, he's fled to L.A. after the attack that left him crippled and his father dead.

A ragged stranger accosts Thales and demands to know how much he can remember. Kern flees for his life after robbing the wrong mark. Irina finds a secret in the reflection of a laptop's screen in her employer's eyeglasses. None are safe as they're pushed together by subtle forces that stay just out of sight.

Vivid, tumultuous, and propulsive, *Void Star* is Zachary Mason's mind-bending follow-up to his bestselling debut, *The Lost Books of the Odyssey*.

15 hrs 58 min

Void Star Details

Date   : Published April 11th 2017 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux
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From Reader Review Void Star for online ebook

Adam Morgan says

One of my favorite SF novels of the year thus far. Not for everyone, but if you like thoughtful, philosophical, forward-thinking fiction that grapples with technology, this is a gorgeous book. Mason writes with the cold clarity of an AI.

Bon Tom says

Damn. I usually like complex books, but ccomplexity here seemed a bit self servient. Without trace of irony, I know there's value somewhere inside and I'm sorry because I couldn't extract it. But the basic premise and occasional glimpses of insight and clarity are so promising that I think I'll have to give it another go, after I find some good guide written by some noble Goodreader, or at least synopsis. To all who intend to read it: this is the one you don't read at your usual speed. Don't you dare even try it. Go slow and be prepared to go back if you miss something, otherwise you'll waste your time and become frustrated.

Nicki Markus says

Void Star is a tough book for me to review. I didn't dislike it per se; it simply never grabbed me. I failed to connect with any of the characters, and though I read to the end, I never reached a point where I cared about their dilemmas or what would happen to them. Neither the character nor the plot inspired me to the point where the story truly gripped me. Although the premise appealed to me when reading the blurb, perhaps this just wasn't the right book for me. Maybe other, more hardcore, sci-fi readers will find it enjoyable, but for me it was only 2.5 stars.

I received this book as a free eBook ARC via NetGalley.

Leo Walsh says

VOID STAR by Zachary Mason is an interesting, tightly-plotted cyberpunk novel. Part of me thinks, "Hey... this is William Gibson, but with without characters who are heavy drug users." yet the tale maintains many Gibson-like qualities, like Mason's focus, is on AI and cyber technology and how it can, and will, impact culture.

But Mason draws on other sources as well. Indeed, there are parts that read like an updated holy knight or Buddhist warrior-monk story. This is a world where people fight and kill, and yet there's honor in the pursuit, not brutality. And there is a distinctly Philip K. Dick-like surreal edge to many of the sections. Since I love PKD, well... I'll just say it worked for me.

Big-picture aside, the story is hard to grasp at first since three intertwining stories as set into motion, and Mason flips between them. It's disorienting, but Mason's gives readers (at least this one) just enough

connection to pull me forward, wondering about the characters and what they're doing which pulls you in. And before long, I was hooked.

The novel's more-or-less hero is Irina, a highly talented computer expert whose implants maker her quite simpatico with AI's, which are super-smart but not yet Turning-Test-Ready due to computing power constraints in Mason's near future universe. Still, AI's handle most of the engineering design work in this world. This creates a social structure where a handful of coders control all the wealth, leaving the rest of the world poor and often scrapping for food.

We see this reality through the next character, Kern. An orphaned street urchin who, A young Kern finds a by a by-then outmoded laptop with an education module on it while scavenging. He fires it up, and the computer's education AI determines that the best way to teach the teen boy was via a first-person shooter/ action-adventure computer game. Along with thrilling fight simulations, it taught Kern math and reading skills which were needed to solve puzzles in the game. What's more, responding to Kern's inclinations, the educational AI has fed him all sorts of classical warrior mythos in order to keep him reading, so he's read thousands of pages on Bushido and Zen warrior-monks, as well as western Christian knights. This makes Kern a compelling character. He's young and deadly with his hands and yet innocent and idealistic.

The third character is the son of a Brazilian diplomat named Thales. He's severely injured during the assassination of his father. Part of his treatment includes a memory implant similar to the one Irina has.

Once these characters are introduced, Mason begins weaving the plots together into a complex strand that's compelling. It's one-part THE MATRIX, one-part INCEPTION and one-part TOTAL RECALL. I'll give no spoilers, but it includes a lot of stuff that's just plain cool. MMA fights. real sword fights in Japan, and a completely immersive virtual reality. And there's plenty pulp-fictional goodness, like people confronting both their inner demons and external villains and, despite the long odds, standing up to do the honorable thing. And the villain's to die for, and yet beleiveable... making VOIS STAR a pulp fiction gem.

I'm sure some readers will find the plot too complex. There were times when I had to page back, re-read until I realized what was happening. But it all snapped together in the end into a satisfying whole. That sort-of updates the Arthurian legends and brings them to life in a near-singularity near-future.

A science fiction page-turner. Four stars. Not perfect bu perfectly enjoyable.

Scott Waldie says

I was so distracted by the grandiloquent prose in this one that I almost didn't notice there was a story here, or any characters living it. Too poetic, if that's possible. Author is talented with his words, no doubt, but dialing back every sensation, every stream of thought about every motion and process occurring in the setting and to the characters would have served the novel better for me. At times it felt like watching Ghost in the Shell or some similar near-future, tech-philosophy film in Slow Mo, and certainly there's an audience for that, but I just wasn't in it this time.

The Bibliofool says

I'd give this just under three stars if I could. I found this incredibly dense, sprawling, and challenging. Mason is obviously an extremely gifted writer, capable of towering world building and mind-bending technical prowess, but this book was overly long for me and I could sense early on that the payoff wasn't going to pay off the way I wanted it to. Certainly an achievement and dystopian sci-fi heads will probably love it, but I just didn't connect to the characters or the exhausting interweaving of their respective narratives.

Bronwen says

This book blew my mind. Simply put, Mason is brilliant. Through the crisp, poetic clarity of his prose, prepare to be swept around the world and back on a dazzling flight that will leave you breathless. Void Star will drop you in a near-future world unsettlingly similar to our own. In fact, at times it reads a little like a dire and all-too-likely prediction of what lies ahead. Though other writers have played with the perfect memory trope, here it's deftly handled and well-integrated. This isn't a simple book, but taking the time to soak in its multilayered narrative is highly rewarding. Under the grit and hard edges lies beauty and soulfulness finding its shape in restrained sentences packed with meaning. I've never read anything like this book. In its scope, voice, and themes, it defies genre. At a time when "new" media isn't much but rehashing old stories (seriously, I cannot - will not - watch one more Spiderman movie), Void Star is fantastically, refreshingly original.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

4.5 stars, and it's on sale as of this week! Recommended if you like SF novels that make you think. Final review, first posted on Fantasy Literature:

Void Star (2017) is a brilliant, dense and challenging hard science fiction novel with a literary bent, rich in descriptions and imagery. It's set in a relatively near future, perhaps a hundred years or so in our future. The chapters alternate between the viewpoints of three characters from vastly different social strata:

• Irina has a vanishingly rare type of cranial implant that enables her to communicate wirelessly with computers, from the simplest electronic devices to the most complex artificial intelligences, in addition to giving her perfect recall ? a true photographic memory. She's an independent consultant who acts as a troubleshooter for people who are having trouble with their information systems and AIs. But now her latest employer, a vastly wealthy and powerful tycoon, is mounting a chillingly deadly effort to capture her for some unknown but ominous-sounding purpose.

• Kern is one of the numberless poverty-stricken masses who live in favelas outside of the cities, formed of concrete walls and rooms many layers deep. With the help of programs and videos on a scrounged laptop, he has relentlessly trained himself in martial arts, and gets by doing odd enforcement and theft jobs. His latest job, a simple theft of a particular phone, goes bad, and he, like Irina, is on the run, helped by a mysterious woman who coaches him through the phone on where to go and what to do. Oddly, she doesn't seem to recognize him when they finally meet in person.

• Thales is the youngest son of the former Brazilian Prime Minister, who died in an attack that also left Thales damaged. He's mathematically brilliant but having memory issues, and is now under medical care in Los Angeles. He, too, has a cranial input that assists his memory and saved his life. But when a ragged

stranger accosts him at a hotel, telling him that they are both victims and asking him (before being dragged away by guards) how much he remembers, he realizes that other than a few random memories, he recalls nothing of his life before he was brought to Los Angeles.

These three characters and their plot threads are entirely disconnected at first, only gradually beginning to weave together deep in the story, as the reader is illuminated, along with the characters, that all may not be as it seems.

Void Star contains all kinds of fascinating ideas woven into a complex and rather opaque plot: Climate changes that have made many places unrecognizable. Rejuvenation treatments offered by a future version of the Mayo Clinic that can keep you youthful well into your second hundred years, but are prohibitively expensive for most people ? and if you try to start the treatments too late or miss even one of your annual visits, you're done for. Automated drones and self-driving automobiles make life easier, at least for those who have resources.

But the world of *Void Star* is dominated by the AIs, independent of humans and impossibly complex (they've been manufacturing and upgrading themselves for several generations), and the ability (and sometimes curse) of people who have implants, allowing them to enter the virtual reality of cyberspace and communicate, to some limited degree, with the AIs that inhabit that space.

> … she turns on her implant's wireless, is instantly aware of the constellations of the thousands of nearby machines. She scans through them and finds the elevator and sees that its software hasn't been updated in years – infrastructure, she's noticed, is often lost in the shuffle. She tells it lies like bad patterns whispered in its ear, and it's soon persuaded that she's a long overdue maintenance program sent by the manufacturer and by the time the elevator starts to slow it's entirely hers and she's never been happier about committing a felony.

In Kern's laptop game, the "Void Star" is the ultimate challenge, where the final battle with the Lord of Shadows awaits, which has its analog in the plot of this novel. The phrase "Void Star" is also a reference to void * in C and C++ software programming: it's a pointer to an unspecified type of memory location, which is a a programming technique for more easily building a solution, but a risky one. As one programming website comments, "[t]he disadvantage of using void * is that you throw type safety out the window and into oncoming traffic." This concept, too, is echoed in the plot of *Void Star*.

Void Star is an ambitious, literary book that will frustrate some readers and delight others. It reminds me of some of Neal Stephenson's work, particularly The Diamond Age (to which Kern's laptop experience owes a clear debt), although I think Zachary Mason has crafted a much better ending. The language is often ornate and the concepts can be tricky to grasp. Sometimes the details threaten to overwhelm, particularly where the overall picture is elusive, only partially revealed until late in the book. It's also a claustrophobic world, one where danger is always around the corner, and where what seems to be real may or may not be so. The plot got a little murky at times, but *Void Star* is so creative and intriguing, with such distinctive characters and ideas, that I loved it anyway. It's already luring me in for a reread, to see how much more is revealed the second time around.

I received a free copy of this book from the publisher for review. Thank you!!

Content advisory: Some violence and adult content, nothing that struck me as overly graphic, and scattered F-bombs.

Ryan says

Neuromancer updated to the 21st century. Our Case-analog is a sort of AI therapist, or translator, or envoy of humanity. She comes equipped with a risky and extremely rare neural implant that includes wireless Net access and extensive hacking capabilities, as well as a nearly bottomless perfect-fidelity memory store filled with every moment experienced since the moment of installation. The characters are diverse, and the AIs suitably inscrutable and disinterested in the physical realm. The prose is brilliantly evocative, though a bit measured, and, perhaps, equipped with too many commas.

Charles Perry says

Wow...vivid.

Like watching a movie while doing mushrooms...everything is vivid and runs into each other and is amazing. Great writing! Kudos.

Simondlevy says

After the brilliance of Mason's "Lost Books of the Odyssey", I was eagerly awaiting his next book. Although different in both format (a traditional novel, not a collection of vignettes) and setting (the near future, versus the heroic past), "Void Star" doesn't disappoint. (The title is a sly reference to a common trick in C/C++ programming, allowing the programmer to undermine the safety features of the language in order to build a solution more quickly.)

Like the Achilles of the Lost Books, the hero of Void Star is a professional fighter/killer, a passionate, cerebral young man caught in a treacherous international intrigue from which there seems no escape but violent death. By putting him in a very plausible dystopian landscape -- a North America of favelas and criminal cartels -- Mason makes him and the other characters all the more vivid: they are the children or grandchildren of people alive today.

If your tastes in fiction tend to to space-opera spectacle, or encounters with wise, gentle aliens who teach us Important Life Lessons, then Void Star probably isn't for you. But if you are old enough to remember the thrill of early cyberpunk fiction (William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, et al.) or enjoy the rich near-future dystopias of Paolo Baciagalupi or China Mieville -- or if you just enjoy beautiful, skillfully-crafted narrative -- I can't think of a more exciting new novel than Void Star.

Jon Nelson says

This will be an odd review, because I'm going to spend most of it talking about a different author.

Reading Void Star was a really interesting experience. It's a pitch-perfect Gibsonian cyberpunk novel in the

style of the Sprawl trilogy, only it just came out and was written by a guy named Zachary Mason. It's obviously very directly inspired by Neuromancer and can't hope to achieve the same cultural import in its wake. But it's... kind of a better book in a lot of ways.

The thing about William Gibson is that his novels are mostly delivery vehicles for his fetishistic aesthetic obsessions. They have plots and characters, though the interaction between those two is often minimal - Gibson's characters rarely have much agency and their role is often to simply witness pivotal moments in clashes between larger, impersonal forces. His plots aren't without thrilling moments, but they're not typically very memorable overall. What sticks with me are the images they're built around.

Neuromancer came about because Gibson saw someone playing an early wireframe 3D game in an arcade and realized that the player was inhabiting an abstract digital space inside a computer that existed alongside our own physical space. He imagined this space expanding from a small, personal experience into a fully realized world that people of the future could visit and eventually come to live in - a cyberspace of glowing, abstract forms that we could use to escape from our mundane "meatspace". That's an incredibly compelling image, and it made for an astonishing book.

His later stuff isn't so consistent. He went through a phase of escalating object-fetishism. I didn't make it through the Blue Ant trilogy but I understand one of the volumes is about a cool pair of pants or something. He seems to be moving away from that as of late: The Peripheral centers on an unusual time travel mechanic and a wasted future, and it's a very good read.

I've read a lot of cyberpunk that imitates the early Gibsonian aesthetics, but doesn't quite pull it off - there's always something wrong with the mix, and it comes off comic-bookish, or cheap, or just weirdly nostalgic. The thing is, Void Star nails it. So many of the themes that made cyberpunk exciting are here - not in the exact same form as they were in the 80s, but in new and interesting versions that have grown with the times. I wasn't convinced I'd ever read a new book this good that felt like real cyberpunk. But the other thing is: until reading this, I sort of assumed that a book like Neuromancer required a certain amount of navel gazing because of how it's driven by a singular aesthetic obsession. But Void Star manages to avoid that - it has a brisk plot that's actually driven by the main characters, and captures the early cyberpunk aesthetic without indulging in the obsessive Cornell-box making urge that Gibson gives in to.

Previously, I would have told anyone looking to get into cyberpunk to start with Neuromancer. I think Void Star has actually managed to supplant it.

Kevin Kelsey says

Posted at Heradas Review

I'm notoriously picky, and it's hard to find something that checks every one of my boxes: worldbuilding, prose, characters, and story. Usually I'll find something that hits 2 or 3 of them; a great story, written well, but with weak worldbuilding or characters. Or a top notch world, with vivid characters, but only serviceably written. Void Star nails them all. It's true literary Speculative Fiction, and a rare find.

It not only has that famous sense of wonder that only SF can do so well, but also elegant prose evidencing an author well acquainted with the great works of literary fiction, solid worldbuilding, an engaging story, and well developed characters that feel like they've genuinely lived their lives. It's a novel of ideas, a hugely

ambitious narrative, and a character novel all rolled into one. If elements of Neuromancer and The Diamond Age merged with an epic mythology poem and in the process became more than the sum of their parts, you would have Void Star. I'd call it post-cyberpunk, minus the noir element. There is a mystery present, but no tropey, down on his luck detective piecing it all together while chewing the scenery.

Instead we have three main POVs, which build the narrative like three avalanches, accelerating as they accumulate, eventually converging violently and spiraling out in interesting and unexpected directions. The chapters are very short, often only five or six pages, seventy-seven chapters total in just under four hundred pages, which makes it really approachable. I would often sit down with not much time, intent on only reading a chapter or two, but the short chapters gave it a forward momentum that made it difficult to put down. The conclusion satisfies immensely, and I have a strong feeling that it's even better on subsequent readings. If I didn't have a few novels and novellas I still need to read before the Hugo vote this year, I would reread this one right now. I'm considering it a strong contender for the Hugo or Nebula awards next year. I do think it's a little better suited for the Nebula though, as that award usually embodies novels with terrific prose.

Mason's prose has an inherent beauty to it, and is a joy to read. It is poetically descriptive in a clever, nebulous way. He describes only just enough to jumpstart your imagination, leaving the hard-edged details for the reader to incorporate into the world themselves. You meet the novel halfway. It makes it highly engaging. It's an approach that can backfire if handled by a less steady hand, but it's wonderfully executed here. To me it's a little reminiscent of Jeff VanderMeer's prose.

The worldbuilding is so thorough: favelas that are nearly alive with their continually evolving construction by drone, layers of society and culture, poverty and wealth all clashing at their intersections, powerful corporations pulling strings, artificial intelligences that are as distant from us as we are to bacteria. It's near(ish) far future, but the tech isn't all state of the art. It's presented in a much more realistic way; the way things have always been. You might have some tech that is cutting edge (your phone, or tablet, etc), but you still interact with other bits of technology that are nearing their obsolescence (maybe you drive an old carbureted pickup truck, or an antique motorcycle, maybe you use an ancient fax machine at work). In this world there is tech that is still far in the future for us, but to the characters using it, it's a bit obsolete. This small detail makes all the difference in my suspension of disbelief as a reader, and makes this world that much more comprehensively thought out and impressive.

I love novels that tell a huge, satisfying science fiction story in a relatable world like this. Highly recommended.

Edward Goetz says

I feel bad writing cryptic reviews, but this was a great read. The future and the possibilities the author brings to the fore make this a ver good dystopian read.

Gabriel says

This book is an exceptional achievement. It's beautifully written, visually captivating, emotionally intelligent, and above all it makes you think about common futurist topics in new and insightful ways. Best

book on it's subject since Accelerando. Arguably better even. To say it is challenging is not a critique so much as an accolade. In fact I didn't find it particularly challenging, it was just intellectually stimulating in the best way.

I don't understand those who rate a book lowly because it's over their head, or they couldn't find the attention span to get past the first few chapters. Complaining that a novel is too literary, is like complaining that your shower gets you too wet. It seems the popular taste buds have the same evolutionary blind spots in literature as in nutrition.

If you can read at a college level and are interested in exploring futurist topics through story telling with a nutritional value then this is the book for you. It's not overly abstract, it's totally comprehensible. The prose is written beautifully, and the imagery is consistently cinematic. The characters are complex. My only criticism is that for a book contemplating the boundaries of experience, the archetypes are rather traditional. But that's a small complaint. I've been craving a satisfying book on these topics for awhile and this totally hit the spot.

Andrew says

Void Star by Zachary Mason, is a cyberpunk-style science fiction novel that takes place in the near distant future. The book follows a couple of characters: Irina, a women with special implants that allows her to examine complex AI. Kern, a boxer from the massive slums of San Francisco, who bites off more than he knows when he steals a prototype cellphone. Thales, son of a Brazilian politician, who is slumming in his expensive car around the city. These characters become embroiled in a mysterious plot by a tycoon, Cromwell, who has mysterious designs over the archived memories of our main characters. Irina discovers one of Cromwell's AIs has been hacked by an unknown entity, and becomes a target. She flees, while trying to get to the bottom of the plot against her. Kern becomes involved when someone on the other end of the phone he has stolen starts issuing instructions. Thales becomes suspicious after a surgeon he has been seeing recently due to a previous injury starts toying with his computer implant, and possibly altering his mood, thoughts and understanding of the world around him.

This book is a bit of a mind bender. It plays on themes of memory, immortality and artificial intelligence. Mason has written a compelling science fiction novel, very much in the cyberpunk sub-genre. The atmosphere is gritty, dystopic and high tech. The world is fragmented, and many gray areas outside of the law exist for businesses and criminals to ply their trade. Events in the book often lead to questions of existence, and the lines between real and artificial begin to blur. The book touches on many interesting topics in the high tech world - AI, online security and privacy, private sector power, and consumer culture. Their are a lot of interesting themes in Void Star.

All in all, this was an interesting book. It was a compelling and interesting read, and heavily inspired by the likes of Neuromancer or Blade Runner. It jumps on and off the net, questions existence in the virtual world, and has the feeling of an early cyberpunk story while still maintaining a modern feel. It was a refreshing science fiction read in a genre becoming crowded with similar ideas. Mason has written a great book, and one worthy of a read for fans of the cyberpunk genre, and those looking for a more grounded science fiction novel.

Aaron says

A book about technology, artificial intelligence, immortality, memory, the nature of existence itself... and confusion. That last one tends to dominate, for better or worse. I've seen reviews that love the book's florid descriptions and the depth of insight, and others that find it all impenetrably detached, slow-going, overly confusing. I land somewhere in between: *Void Star* is all of that and more, flawed and brilliant, ponderous and fascinating in turns. The technology shines brighter than the characters, and the plot is rather hard to follow, but there's *something* here that kept me going. I have no problem setting a book aside if it isn't holding my interest; this one took patience, but I'm glad I saw it through.

Mason writes what you might call "literary near-future SF": think latter-day William Gibson with the "detached chill" knob dimed. Descriptions are pristine and nearly constant, rich in $10 words like "imbricate" and "arabescato" that do fit rather well, despite their tendency to disorient. Human behaviors are coolly observed, subtle psychological insights described through a layer of glass, almost clinical in their sense of remove. The prose is sharp but often obtuse without meaning to be, like something written by a scientist who can't quite disengage the full weight of his intellect, so it has a tendency to dip into the pretentious zone. Similarly, the narrative is built around three unrelated characters whose actions and backgrounds we don't fully understand until much, much further into the book, which lends a sense of comfortable incomprehension (if that makes any sense at all): the language is generally gorgeous, and the snapshots of action within each chapter (some incredibly short, which I honestly love) are often fascinating on their own, but wrapping your head around the larger picture is an exercise in frustration until the final third of the novel.

Where *Void Star* shines, however, is in its vision: Mason, in the real world, spends his days as a computer engineer or something similar, studying artificial intelligence, and that deep understanding of unknowable complexity informs the story at every turn. Memory implants, rejuvenation treatments, perpetual surveillance, full integration of robotics into society... Mason's vision of the world in a hundred years feels less like science fiction and much closer to our own world after a few more generations of technological development. That is to say, it feels real. His vision of a "smart" laptop designed by an NGO to teach impoverished children to survive by any means necessary is brilliant; it occupies a single chapter of the book, but it's so perfectly drawn it ends up pulling the disparate threads of plot into something resembling *relief* against the backdrop of endless description and disorienting perspectives. Inevitably, a lot of readers will find this book frustrating, which isn't to say it's particularly hard to read—it just takes patience. Whether it's worth it is ultimately up to you. Caveats aside, I took my time and enjoyed myself.

Carlos says

This book was very intricate, it's plot was way too complicated and it feels like the author tried to do something way too big , it worked up to half the book but after that it just fell apart . The intent of the author was good but the science was not easily explained and the ending was not clear at all. Kudos for trying but the ending went over my head.

Jenne says

I have often wished that Neal Stephenson or William Gibson would write more novels (or possibly

collaborate on one?), and I get the impression that Zachary Mason felt the same way and decided to take matters into his own hands. High five.

Regan says

Forgive me, but I can't pick up this book without hearing David Bowie's "Black Star" and needing to sing a couple of bars of it before reading: "I'm a *Void* Star, I'm a *Void* Star; I'm not a monst[aa]r, ahhhhh ohhhhh aaaaaa." Singing the song several *several* times over led me to the totally unstoned conclusion that these works of art categorically belong together. One category under which they fall (for me) is Perplexing Things. Others are Sci-Fi, "Genre Fiction," Discursive Fiction, Detailed Fodder for RPG DMs.

I admire Mr. Mason immensely. *Lost Books of the Odyssey* was excellent, and the audacity of a first-time novelist daring to interpolate the greatest story ever told is...well, ballsy. Even as a consummate Ancient Snob I remain duly impressed. LBOTO has nothing to do with Bowie's Blackstar, and yet they both fall under my personal category: In the Presence of Skin-Prickling Genius.

I can't say that Mason's second novel impressed me on the same level. He's got a lot of very smart, interesting, philosophical ideas about time, memory and self-hood going on, but the attempt to reflect those ideas into the *form* of the novel itself seemed to me overburdened. He had too many good ideas; given more revisions I think Mason could've hit that sweet spot where form and content inform each other seamlessly.

I'll still read everything the man writes. This didn't thrill me like the first, but it also didn't leave me in doubt of Mason's talent.