

## Clarke's novel is strangely provocative

By Charlie Olson

"Can a magician kill a man by magic?' Lord Wellington asked Strange.

Strange frowned. He seemed to dislike the question. 'I suppose a magician might,' he admitted, 'but a gentleman never could.'"

This is just one of many questions raised by author Susanna Clarke in her debut novel, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*. Ten years in the making, the book chronicles the "revival of modern English magic," following both the characters of Mr. Norrell and his impulsive pupil Jonathan Strange.

The book has a tremendous narrative drive that compels the reader forward, but it tends to drag at certain points in its hefty 800 pages. If you can stick with it however, you'll be wishing it were longer.

*The New York Times* touts the book as an adult version of Harry Potter but apart from the similar theme of "modern magic" that pervades both, the books are nothing alike. In *Jonathan Strange*, when the author says "modern magic," she actually means 19th century magic, because the book is set in an alternate England.

In this version of history, magicians were once numerous and had Fairy servants at their beck and call. Greatest among them was the Raven King, who conquered the North of

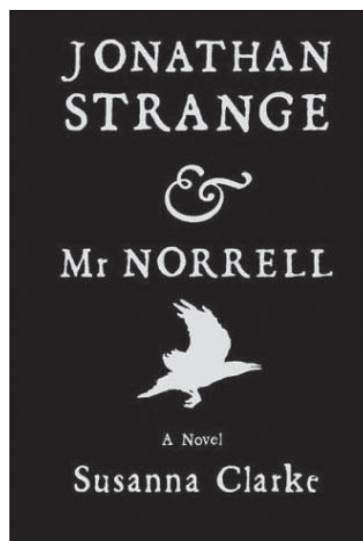


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Susanna Clarke's novel, *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, hit stores Wednesday, Sept. 8.

England, and was rumored to have three kingdoms. One in England, one in the magical world of Faerie, and one on the far side of Hell.

Since then, practical magic in England has all but vanished, leaving behind theoretical magicians who argue ceaselessly and write dry, dusty papers on the subject – until the last practicing magician, Mr. Norrell, comes out of seclusion.

The book picks up right around the middle of the Napoleonic wars in actual history. To reflect the time period, the book is written in a language that is more similar in its wit and prose to Charles Dickens than J.K. Rowling.

The practical magic which Clarke portrays is devoid of any of the pomp and flash of *Harry Potter*, but instead is sinister

and dark.

Harry Potter waves his wand and says something ridiculous to accomplish a spell. Clarke's magic is much more visceral. While aiding Lord Wellington in Spain, Strange cuts his arm and drips blood onto a corpse to interview it about the French position, spitting in its mouth to make it speak English instead of the language of Hell.

Clarke has the talent to create situations that are simultaneously uproariously funny and bone-chillingly frightening.

Her dark sense of humor is apparent in all of her fairy characters, namely "the gentleman with the thistle-down hair." He is very well-mannered, but is positively glib in his zest for doing horrible things, such as when he excitedly explains a celebration involving pushing kidnapped children out of a belfry: "I perform [the celebration] whenever I think of it. Of course it was a great deal more striking when we used real children."

As the rivalry between Strange and Norrell comes to a head, and every English wood seems to hide some lurking evil, the book is at its best. The care and style which Clarke has poured into creating an alternate mythology really shows that she is a master of her craft. So, drop that *Harry Potter*. And, pick up *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* instead. After all, adults shouldn't read children's books anyway, right?



Photo copyright DreamWorks SKG

*The Terminal*, starring Tom Hanks and Catherine Zeta-Jones, will be playing in the BLC Theater this weekend.

## Tom Hanks stuck in boring 'Terminal'

By Jodi Cantor

The names Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks are both precursors of good cinema. *Saving Private Ryan* backs this theory up. One movie that does not support it as well is *The Terminal* starring Hanks and directed by Spielberg. *The Terminal* is not as serious a film as *Saving Private Ryan* so it is understandable why Spielberg might have phoned a few scenes in, but it is a movie and therefore should entertain, not recreate the absolute boredom of waiting in an airport terminal for a flight.

As always, Hanks is a very good actor and convincingly portrays his character Viktor Navorski, a foreigner from a small country near Russia stranded in a New York airport due to the technicality of his home country being dissolved. America knows Hanks and is familiar with him, so it is understandable why people might be wary of believing him as a foreign character, but he turns his audience into believers. Viktor's confused and helpless looks of frustration for the fact that he does not know any English and therefore can not communicate clearly with anyone, make the audience deem Hanks as an actual foreigner.

The countless unfortunate situations, mostly marked with loneliness, that Viktor is put in win him the hearts of the viewers, who feel just as lost and confused as Viktor, because they are seeing the airport through Viktor's unfamiliar perspective. As Viktor plays with his boundaries in the airport terminal that he is confined to, he meets new people and learns a few tricks of how to cheat systems.

His antagonist, because he must have one, is Frank

Dixon, played by Stanley Tucci. Frank is an airport official only interested in climbing the ranks of the airport world, and sees Viktor as a threat to this, so he goes out of his way to make Viktor's days miserable.

All the while, the audience sits back and waits with Viktor. It quickly turns boring as the experience of waiting at an airport is recreated. Sure there are many stores and places to go on the large set built to play the airport terminal, but when it comes down to it there is nothing to do but wait, and not many people enjoy waiting for flights at an airport, and almost no one would want the experience to be recreated for them.

Eventually Viktor gets distracted from his waiting and continues to explore the airport and meet new people to keep himself occupied. He meets Amelia Warren, an unstable flight attendant played by Catherine Zeta-Jones. He takes an immediate interest in her, but she has no time for Viktor whereas he has all the time in the world. She has a busy schedule and is in and out of New York, which means Viktor hardly gets to see her. This is a good thing because there is not much in the way of chemistry between Hanks and Zeta-Jones. Of course they are both good as their characters, but just not good at interacting with each other's characters.

The more interesting moments in the film involve his friendships with a few blue-collar airport workers. He easily gains friends, although they are skeptical of his identity at first. He wins them over and helps them out and they, in turn, make his stay at the terminal much more bearable for Viktor and the audience.

## Elliott Smith's last goodbye

By Lacey Korevec

Death is what has allowed timid musician Elliott Smith to speak his loudest. It was one year ago that his work on his latest and final album, *From a Basement on the Hill*, ceased. Now, after final touches were completed by friends, the album has been released and has provided fans with one last goodbye.

If Smith were alive, fans would be thrilled about the new record. Out of his other five, it can be argued that it is one of his best. It features a wide range of slow, intimate and stronger, though never upbeat, songs. Unfortunately, the emotion behind Smith's beautifully sad lyrics combined with his brilliantly written music is what makes it difficult to listen to.

Lyrics like "Haven't laughed this hard in a long time/I better stop now before I start crying/Go off to sleep

in the sunshine/I don't want to see the day when it's dying" paint a dark silhouette of Smith's last few months of life. However, the music is not dark, grungy or hard. Rather, the album's 'darkest' songs are soft, beautiful guitar pieces, marked with woe only through Smith's quiet voice and his sad words. Another artist has yet to produce poetry that is so intriguing and upsetting but is not whiney.

Smith provides music in its most honest and purest form, but at the same time his vocal harmonies, lyrical content and instrumental work make it extremely complex. More than any of his other songs, the ones on this CD require analysis so that they can be truly appreciated. It is not enough to listen to it while doing other things.

This is not an album to be celebrated, not because it is any less brilliant than his older records, but because it is the last of his music. It closes and



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Elliott Smith's album *From a Basement on the Hill* was released on Tuesday, Oct. 19, nearly one year after his death.

locks the door to Smith's sensitive and battered mind that so many listeners have found comfort in. At the same time though, it is some of his best work.

As the last track on *From a Basement on the Hill* trails off, listeners are plagued with both hope that there is still more to come and the painful realization that there is not.