



Spellsinger

Alan Dean Foster

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Among sentient animals and humans, hardheaded and hard-shelled wizard Clothahump searches across dimensions for a wizard to defeat looming armies of Plated Folk. Jonathan-Thomas Meriweather, part-time wannabe rock guitarist and janitor, makes magic to his well-worn rock repertoire on his duar instrument. While lyrics may be righteous, the magic is too often something else.

Spellsinger Details

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Author : Alan Dean Foster

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From Reader Review Spellsinger for online ebook

Kim says

I don't know why I decided to reread this but I'm glad I did. I forgot how much I liked some of Alan Dean Foster's work.

Spellsinger is the first in a series about a law student/amateur musician, nicknamed Jon-Tom, who is transported to a world of magic and talking animals that is seriously not Narnia. Unless Narnia is now inhabited by alcoholic, fornicating, foul-mouthed, violent creatures.

Jon-Tom discovers that his fledgling musical talents have now manifested themselves as magical with the ability to conjure items via song.

Unfortunately the book stops before it really gets into the meat of why Jon-Tom was transported but it's still worth reading. I look forward to finally reading the rest of the series.

Joe says

What an interesting book. It starts off similar to The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe, but the language is definitely not for kids. It's like Sci Fi took over some Fantasy and threw in a few words here and there that are "sciencey." There's also a long-going discussion sprinkled through the book between characters about Marxism, or some of the ideals, and that was pretty entertaining because the dialogue was used to keep another character's attention. I really enjoyed it, it's a quick read.

Ron says

"The strange quasi-science [he] called magic. Or was the wizard right and science was really quasi-magic?"

Dreadfully slow pace. Almost quit after fifty pages; almost quit again fifty pages from the end when I realized nothing was going to happen in this volume. This story merely introduces the characters, world and issue for the greater series. Still, Foster tells a good story.

"This land he now found himself in was no more alien-appearing than Amazonian Peru, and considerably less so than Manhattan."

Populating his world with human-like mammals is automatically works against stereotypes. In addition, Foster works counter expectations with an artsy male, who is repelled by the fantasy work he's been thrown into, and an athletic female who embraces it.

"The appetite for evil far exceeds that of the benign."

Many love these never-ending tales; I don't. I won't be back.

"It wouldn't be any fun if it didn't have any danger."

DavidO says

I read this when I was a kid and liked it. But reading it now as an adult, I am less than impressed. It's got talking animals so you'd think it was a kids book. But there is drug use and swearing. Not to mention that everyone is so violent that the population of the planet should have gone to nothing centuries before. Somehow the whole thing is supposed to be a political commentary of sorts, but it doesn't have any teeth to speak of. It's supposed to be funny, but I found it amusing at best, painful at worst.

Sina says

Vor mehr als zwei Jahrzehnten habe ich den Bannsänger-Zyklus schon gelesen und regelrecht verschlungen, weil die von Alan Dean Foster geschaffene Welt einfach witzig, farbenfroh und abwechslungsreich ist. Die Idee, einen jungen Jura-Studenten, der Rockmusik liebt, in eine andere Welt zu versetzen und ihn dort Abenteuer bestehen zu lassen, hat mich mitgerissen. Dazu kommt noch ein fesselnder Schreibstil, der zeitweise jedoch von sehr politischen Dialogen unterbrochen wird. Für mich persönlich nicht gerade sehr interessant, doch für den Verlauf der Geschichte vonnöten.

Die Bücher stehen schon ewig in meinem Bücherregal und wurden auch damals oft gelesen (wie man auf obigem Bild vielleicht auch sieht). Als ich nun danach recherchierte, war ich natürlich sehr überrascht, dass es noch einen 7. und 8. Teil der Reihe gibt und so war der Entschluss schnell gefasst, diese Reihe zu meinem Re-read des Jahres zu machen. Dass es noch weitere Teile gibt, hatte ich vor Jahren irgendwie nicht mitbekommen, was aber auch durch die eingeschränkte Nutzung des Internets und etlicher anderer lesenswerter Bücher wohl bei mir untergegangen ist.

Ein bisschen Sorge machte ich mir schon, als ich das erste Buch anfang zu lesen. Würde es mich genauso faszinieren wie damals? Doch meine Sorge war total unbegründet. Innerhalb kürzester Zeit war ich sofort wieder in der Geschichte gefangen. Der mitreißende Schreibstil des Autors hat mir Jon-Tom, den sprechenden Otter Mudge, den merkwürdigen Hexer Clodsahamp, die heißblütige Schönheit Talea und auch all die anderen Figuren wieder so nah gebracht, wie früher.

Alan Dean Foster hat eine faszinierende Parallelwelt erschaffen. Sie ist vergleichbar mit unserer Erde, nur dass es sprechende Tiere gibt. Meist nur mit Fell oder Federn. Reptilien werden eher als Nutztiere oder als Essen angesehen.

Gleich am Anfang lernt man den vorwitzigen Otter Mudge kennen und lieben. Er ist ein Halunke, klagt gerne mal, versucht andere übers Ohr zu hauen und Weibchen egal welcher Rasse schaut er gerne mal hinterher und flirtet auf Teufel komm raus. Aber er hat ein weiches Herz und er und Jon-Tom schließen schnell Freundschaft.

Der Schildkröterich Clodsahamp ist schon ein wenig senil und kann sich manchmal auch nicht an Zaubersprüche erinnern. Das Wirken von Magie kostet ihn Kraft und so ist er - wenn er es auch nicht öffentlich zeigt - froh über seinen Gehilfen Pog, der zwar ziemlich frech ist, wenn es aber Schlag auf Schlag kommt, sofort zur Stelle ist und hilft.

Die rothaarige Talea stößt wenig später auf die Gruppe und bleibt eigentlich nur bei Jon-Tom und Mudge, weil die halbe Diebesgilde hinter ihr her ist. Jon-Tom fühlt sich zu Talea hingezogen, die ihm jedoch ein ums andere Mal eine Abfuhr erteilt.

Im Laufe der Geschichte stoßen noch weitere Gefährten zur Gruppe. So die toughe Flor, die ebenfalls aus Jon-Toms Welt stammt, der gebildete Hase Caz sowie der diskussionsfreudige Drache Falameezar.

Zusammen macht sich die ungleiche Gruppe auf den Weg nach Polastrindu, um dort den Rat zu überzeugen, dass die Gefahr eines Angriffs durch die Gepanzerten, einer Insektenarmee, unmittelbar bevorsteht und man sich mobilisieren muss, um einen Gegenangriff zu starten.

Jon-Tom nimmt es meiner Meinung nach fast etwas zu gut auf, als er sich in der neuen Welt zurechtfinden muss. Heimweh hat er fast keins, nimmt alles als gegeben hin und stellt meiner Meinung nach zu wenig Fragen. Aber teilweise muss ich auch gestehen, dass er fast keine Chance hat, Antworten auf seine Fragen zu erhalten. Talea und Mudge nehmen Jon-Tom als Freund als gegeben hin, Clodsahamp redet meist in mysteriösen Rätseln und mit Caz und Falameezar kann sich Jon-Tom nur in gepflegte Unterhaltungen ergehen.

Und so bleibt ihm nur Flor, die aber alles als großes Abenteuer ansieht und ihre Hoffnung, wieder in die eigene Welt zurückzukommen, aufgegeben hat, weil sie eh eher die Räubertochter als die Studentin ist. Die Magie, die Jon-Tom wirken kann, ist unausgereift. Er steht am Anfang, muss sich mit seiner Duar, einem gitarrenähnlichen Instrument, auseinandersetzen. Wenn er spielt und dazu singt, kann er zum Beispiel Gegenstände herbeizaubern. Allerdings nichts mechanisches. So versucht er einmal ein Auto als Fortbewegungsmittel zu erschaffen, dies wird jedoch umgewandelt in eine Kutsche, gezogen von Echsen. Dazu muss ihm jedoch der passende Song einfallen. So singt er mal Beatles oder andere bekannte Sänger und Gruppen. Hier muss man jedoch bedenken, dass das Buch im amerikanischen 1983 erschienen ist, also aktuelle Sänger sucht man hier vergeblich. Im Gegenteil, meist werden sogar welche genannt, die ich nicht kenne.

Das Ende ist abrupt, man sollte den zweiten Band griffbereit haben, da die Geschichte nahtlos dort weitergeht.

Fazit:

Die Story ist abgedreht, witzig und vor allem eins: sehr unterhaltsam. Ich bin genauso begeistert, wie beim ersten Mal lesen und freue mich, dass noch weitere Bände vor mir liegen und noch zwei völlig unbekannte auf mich zukommen.

Heather says

Not my thing, although the writing was good and the world was set up well. I just didn't really like any of the characters, and the book just ended. The author set up a huge conflict, but this is clearly just the first volume. Too little happened in too long of a time. Glad it's over and not willing to slog through another book to find out what happens...don't care enough.

Dustin says

That wasn't bad. It takes your standard person from Earth gets pulled to fantasy land, adds a heaping helping of talking animals, sprinkles a touch of absurdity (with a Marxist dragon), and bakes the way that only 80s fantasy can.

Simply Sam ? says

This is one of those books that I read as a teen that I totally forgot about until I saw the title. Then I was like, "SPELLSINGER! I LOVED that book!," although I can't recollect *why* I loved it. It's just the feeling I got when I saw the title. If a book title alone can make me smile 20+ years after reading said book then there must have been something about it worth remembering.

Kenny says

Wow... its been a LONG time since these were published - '83 and '84 (so if you are under 35, these count as "before you were born"!), and I cant believe that it hasn't got a lot more hype around r/Fantasy... These were an awesome read!

This is basically a single story split over two books... so you need to get the pair of them to get the whole story - but damn it is worth it! At first whiff it seems Mr Foster has done the classic fantasy trope of "chosen one" to vanquish the big bad evil, but this whole story is a happy subversion of most fantasy tropes!

Our main PoV character is Jonathan Thomas Meriweather - a pre-law student who is a bit of a stoner and amateur musician... and he finds himself drawn into a strange fantasy world populated by anthropomorphic animals... about to be invaded by the "plated folk" who have a new evil magic brought across from our world...

The setup and antics of the book are quite funny as it is a contrast of a "fantasy world" but the main character (and general tone) is straight up realistic... so the lack of plumbing, technology, social mores etc are played straight... and our poor PoV Jon-Tom has a really hard time of it. Mr Foster plays with the "chosen one" in that the wizard Clothahump was searching out for a magician of our world - an En'giniear - and Jon-Tom as a part time job at the university as a janitor (sanitation engineer...) I love that Jon-Tom is just your average university student... and really has no useful skills for a medieval-style world - in fact he is almost killed numerous time and desperately wants to get home! The only "skill" he finds by accident is that his music acts as a magical focus... he summons magical effects based on the song he sings... given that he only really knows a bunch of rock/jazz from the 60's and 70's - and that the magic tries to interpret the song based on the surroundings - the effects are usually quite different from expectations!

I loved his attempt to summon riding water-salamanders by singing "yellow submarine" by the Beatles... his companions get worried by the lyrics - rightfully so when he summons a river-dragon big enough to eat them all whole!

Given that Clothahump the wizard summoned Jon-Tom to counter an evil invasion... and cannot cast such a taxing spell for a long time - Jon-Tom gets dragged along for the ride of going to warn the inhabitants of the capital city... and then on a mad trek to gain allies (of sentient spiders!!!) and infiltrate the Plated folk country to try to stop the evil magics from our world... a military computer ala war-games

This reminds me of Discworld actually - using a fantasy world to comment on and satirize many real-world issues.

Definitely get this book and read it!

Justin says

A light easy to read fantasy adventure. With sentient animals, groovy magic, and college students this book an enjoyable ride.

Joseph says

I have to admit I avoided this book because I tend to dislike "cutesy" books, and I thought it looked kind of silly. For this reason, for quite a while I avoided Alan Dean Foster completely, partly because of this, and partly because of all the tie-in novels. I ended up reading one of his science fiction novels ("The Man Who Used the Universe") which I really enjoyed, reminding me of the best space opera by Mike Resnick and Steve Perry, both of whom I really enjoy. So I started picking up his sci-fi, though I haven't read many yet. Then I started picking up some of his tie-in novels, and I ended up with the first two Spellsinger books, and I recently thought, what the heck, and I gave the first one a try.

I was pleasantly surprised. The plot is more or less a generic epic fantasy trope, the hero is called, refuses the call, finally accepts the call, etc. but the writing is enjoyable, and the book is a lot more earthy than I expected. Characters swear, think about sex, there is some mild drug use, etc. There are some clever turns, though the first book doesn't stand on its own as a complete story really, it is the set up for the series, and the first few steps in the quest and the first fumbling attempts of the main character, JonTom becoming a true Spellsinger (sort of a magical troubadour more or less).

The world itself consists of largely anthropomorphic characters, with a sprinkling of humans, about to be attacked by a coalition of Insects and Lizards, who are the bad guys in this world. Lizards being largely the main source of protein, and lacking in any intelligence, the Insects having intelligence and the desire to wipe out all the mammals, and having failed in this endeavour for thousands of years. This time, however, they have formulated a plan that should see them succeed, and the turtle wizard Clothathump attempts to call forth a wizard from our world (also potentially at risk) and instead ends up with JonTom.

The characters are interesting, and the plot, while generic, moves the story forward and the writing is genial and inviting. There are some truly fun touches, such as a Marxist river dragon, that make it rise above the average. I am more than willing to follow these characters into another book.

Rob Richards says

The following summary was taken from the TV Tropes Wiki entry on the Spellsinger series, and slightly modified.

"The Spellsinger series is a fantasy series written by Alan Dean Foster, which has been described on this wiki's This Is Your Premise On Drugs page as "Narnia on an unholy combination of pot and Viagra".

In the first book, Spellsinger, the hero Jonathan Thomas Meriweather, also known as Jon-Tom, is a prelaw student with pretensions to rock stardom, who is innocently smoking pot when he's abruptly transported from the University of California at Los Angeles to a weird world in which animals talk, wear clothing, and live alongside humans by the tortoise wizard Clothahump, who was searching for a great wizardly "En'geeniar" (meaning an engineer, as he was under the impression that this is the name our world gives to wizards). Unfortunately, he caught Jon-Tom, who works part-time as a janitor and on his pay stubs is called a "sanitation engineer".

It all works out for the best, though, as Jon-Tom soon discovers that in the magical world he has the power of a spellsinger; a wizard who can make powerful magic through music."

The first two books in the series: "Spellsinger" and "Hour of the Gate" deal with the crisis Clothahump summoned Jon-Tom to help him with. The remaining six books chronicle other random adventures of Jon-Tom and his larcenous sidekick Mudge the otter (who speaks with either a cockney or Austrailian accent). The second to last book in the series deals with their gangsta rapping children and is just as messed up as it sounds.

There is some inconsistency in later volumes of the series (for example, in Book One Clothahump tells Jon-Tom that cloven-footed mammals did not become sapient, yet in book three and on this is totally disregarded, also Jon-Tom's tells his son that you can only spellings with a duar even though this "fact" is contradicted twice. It would appear that any instrument will do). I wouldn't take it too seriously, though. This series is best read for fun and relaxation. Brain candy at its finest with a slight amount of nutritional value.

Oh, while we're on the subject of TV Tropes... the Spellsinger entry can be found here:

<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php...>

Yes, I'm a trope whore.

Anthony Ryan says

Or 'The movie Jim Henson never made but should have.' Anthropomorphic fantasy fun from the masterly pen of Alan Dean Foster. The Marxist dragon alone is worth the price of admission.

Mitticus says

Narnia meet Ted's Excellent Adventure. Sort of.

I'd make a lousy lawyer, he thought. And if I can't help thinking about power and mastery, well hell, I'm only human.

Maybe if I work real hard, he told himself, I can manage to overcome that.

I think we all know that wise turtles have a unique sense of humor and the concept of a suitable hero.

So, when Clothahump searches the universe between clouds of cof open minded concoctions looking for a powerful magical engineer, Jonathan-Thomas Meriweather -who until then was trying to relax about his thesis smoking pot- ends in a forest in front of a giant otter dressed as Disney's Robin Hood reject ... what a bad trip.

But wait, Jon-Tom is not a wizard, not a engineer, and don't want to be there to help some crazy turtle with a indentured bat assistant to avoid a... 'great evil'.

Mudge, the scoundrel otter, is put in charge of helping him to adjust to this world with talking animals, lizard transportation, everyday magic, proud birds, thieves logias, and medieval violence. He is not happy.

The vision of Jon-Tom shifts when he discover his talen as Spellsinger (he can invoke things playing some

kind of guitar and singing Earth songs)

The world is not different (furs, claws and feathers aside) from the all-human world. Prejudices and well known vices are around.

"Rare is the man, wizard, warrior, or worker, who can always think with his brains instead of his balls.

Because he don't forget the good stuff in there.

Tiene muchas alusiones al gobierno, prejuicio de clases, abundantes chistes de doble sentido, alusiones sexuales (y no olviden que la mayoría son animales), además de un dragón comunista . Lo que viene a ser bastante original en el mundo lleno de dragones acumuladores de riquezas, dejenme decirlo ;)

(note: this is not a stand alone book, ends without resolution and follow in the next book)

Josh says

Read this book when I was in middle school and absolutely loved it. Having re-read it recently, however, I've noticed several inconsistencies which really detract from the enjoyment of the book (for instance, in the first book horses are non-sentient, but can talk in later books.) I still enjoyed the books my second time through, but I really wish that Foster had spent more time proofing/editing his books.

Rachel says

Cheesy. Very strange pacing, and characters who are just a tetch too much (the Latina cheerleader "cursed with extreme beauty"? Are you kidding?)

But on the other hand, there are a few gems thrown in here--I laughed out loud when Falameezar made his appearance. And the bugs, or Plated Ones or whatever, are done very well, if only because I adore when people use the word "chitin."

I may read the rest of this series or I may skim it. I'm not sure yet. It was an interesting read and a great diversion on a long bus trip.

Thom says

A ripping good fantasy, complete with dimensionally displaced human, wise turtle, wisecracking otter and Marxist dragon. Also a fair bit of testosterone, with the two female characters described as fiery beauties. The biggest problem with the book it stops well short of the end of the story, which continues in the next book. Not satisfying.

First read this book and it's sequel when they were written, back in the early 80s. I don't remember how the

second book ended, but I'm fairly sure the third wasn't available at the time, and I read no further. The first six books were published over three years, so Alan Dean Foster was really cranking them out. He published two more in the early 90s.

David Sarkies says

The Chronicles of Narnia for Adults

1 January 2013

The first thing that I probably have to say about this book is that it is effectively the Chronicles of Narnia for adults. While the main character is human, when he is transported to the world of Spell singer, he is transported to a world inhabited by talking animals. Okay, not all of Lewis' characters in Narnia were talking animals, but a lot of them were. However, Narnia was originally written for children (not to say that adults don't enjoy them) while it is very clear, especially from the antics of Mudge the Otter, that this series is not. The book is about how a pre-Law student at UCLA, Jon-Tom, is transported to the other world because the turtle wizard Clothahump is looking for a powerful magic user from our world, and believes that he needs the services of an engineer. Jon-Tom is an engineer, a sanitation engineer (that is a cleaner) however when he arrives in the world, he suddenly discovers that he is much more than a simple cleaner. When he gets his hands on an instrument (he is also in a garage band) it turns out that when he uses it magical things happen. What I mostly enjoyed about this series is the fact that when he played the instrument, he would play familiar rock songs from our world, with the resulting consequences.

Alan Dean Foster is probably more known for his novelisations of a number of movies. Actually, to me he is not, he is known to me for the Spell singer series. These are the only books of his that I have read, and are probably the only books of his that I will read. I have no real interest in reading a novelisation of a film. I find most films that try to base themselves on books to be severely lacking, however I find that novels that are based on films are even more lacking. I generally do not like spin off series either (I do not believe I have ever read a Star Wars book).

This series is quite amusing, and in a way I related to Jon-Tom. There is a mix between him being a pre-Law student at college, working as a janitor so that he may pay his way through (though when I read this series I was still a teenager), but also being a struggling musician that suddenly comes good when he hits his big break, which is not so much in this world, but rather in the world ruled by talking animals.

Apparently there are a few continuity problems with this series, however it has been such a long time since I read them that they really don't stick in my mind. Further, I was enthralled with the character of Jon-Tom, and pretty much read the six books that had been written at the time. Foster has now written another two, however I have moved on from pulp fantasy (which is basically what this series is) so I really have no interest in returning to them.

Pawel says

I can only regret that i didn't read this book when i was 13, back then it would be amazing :) now its just good fantasy with a lot of humor.

There is quite standard setup where hero from our world is teleported into the land of magic, talking animals, and has to save the world etc. Although the world is rather simple it has couple of nice quirks in it. Heroes are likeable, and a plot is quite sound. (big plus for a marxist dragon character).

A good book to read on a rainy afternoon.

Emma Sea says

When I was young and dumb--even dumber than I am now--I spent a summer as a live-in staff member at a prestigious, World's-Top-Hideaways-list-making New Zealand luxury lodge, waiting tables and working housekeeping. For a hundred bucks a week in my pocket. This is one of the numerous downsides to having incredibly shitty parenting; no one to tell you, when you are young and dumb, that it is illegal for employers to pay less than minimum wage, that legally the lodge was allowed to charge me 9% of my gross wage for room and board and not a cent more, and that I was about to be exploited all to hell. Ah, rich people.

Before I arrived I dreamed of long summer evenings, hanging out with the other staff, swimming in the river, finding a cute local summer boyfriend, and having a great growth experience. Reality was slightly different. I was the only staff member living on site, no one hung out together, the lodge was a billion miles from civilisation (duh) and I only had a pushbike, all the male staff were married, and the locals were hostile (again, duh!).

That was the first Christmas Day I spent without seeing another human being. Also without eating anything, because staff meals were in the kitchen, which was (triple duh) closed for the day, because the whole lodge was closed for the day, and this had not occurred to me, literally, until Christmas morning.

Well, thank fuck for Alan Dean Foster's *Spellsinger* series. If I was prepared to turn myself into a sweat-dripping, overheated mess (and I was) I could cycle into the tiny local public library (where I BEGGED to be allowed to join, against all the residency rules: **thank you**, kind librarian), and I read my way through their entire fiction section (it was one wall). I lived for each week's *Spellsinger* volume. What could have been more apt for me than a story about a fish-out-of-water human with hidden magic talents, transported to a strange and hostile land. The hope that I too could be a speshul snowflake kept me from crying more than once a week (maybe twice . . . okay, three times).

I have never tried to re-read the series, because I fear *Spellsinger* isn't actually objectively particularly amazing, but I still have an overstrong affection for the song *Sloop John B*, and call the tiny moving dots in the side of one's field of vision 'gneechees'.

Thanks, ADF.