



I Wish I'd Written... The Eclipse of the Century

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I Wish I'd Written

Byline:

Keith Gray chooses Jan Mark's **The Eclipse of the Century**.

Keith Gray on a novel whose sheer inventiveness is spectacular?<!--break-->

Jan Mark's **The Eclipse of the Century** took me completely by surprise when I first encountered it.

Ultimately this is a fantasy. Our hero does cross from this world into another. Although we follow him into the empty heart of Central Asia, to a forgotten military outpost on the edge of the desert called Qantoum, not to a world of elves or dwarves. This story has more Kalashnikovs and jaded UN fugitives than swords or sorcery.

It's a vision or near-death experience that leads Keith to Qantoum, and it's his intervention that upsets the balance of life there. The town is split between the Sturyats and the Qantoumis, who have been living a forced peace for the past 500 years. When Keith arrives with his talk of 'the black sun at the end of a thousand years' the reader watches mesmerised as that fragile peace is shattered.

The sheer inventiveness of this novel is spectacular, with the richness of Qantoum, its history and its inhabitants, leaping off the page. It is difficult for a writer to say something new, and as the bookshelves get stacked deeper and deeper with 'cross-over' novels, almost impossible for the reader to find something non-derivative. Jan Mark's novel blew me away with its originality.

The Eclipse of the Century by Jan Mark is published by Scholastic (0 439 01482 4, £5.99 pbk).

Keith Gray's latest book is **Malarkey** (Red Fox Definitions, 0 09 943944 1, £4.99 pbk).

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