

SF COMMENTARY 88

January 2015

46th Anniversary Edition

80 pages

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Cover: Ditmar (Dick Jenssen): 'Balloon Reconnaissance'

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12 MICHAEL BISHOP—PHILIP K. DICK

12 Introduction

Philip K. Dick, alternate-world SF, and I
Michael Bishop

15 Philip D. Dick is dead, a lass

A poem by Michael Bishop

17 J. D. ROBB

17 J. D. Robb: Somehow it still works

Patrick L. McGuire

17 1 J. D. Robb: a very readable writer ...

22 2 J. D. Robb's future

3 I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

3 Farewell to Polly (1994–2014)

Bruce Gillespie (with Elaine Cochrane)

6 Hurry-home-drops:

Return to Oakleigh — and 1961

Bruce Gillespie (photos by Robin Mitchell)

10 'Happy birthday, dear Brian'

Murray Moore (and Brian Aldiss)

30 FIRST, THE FEATURE LETTERS ...

30 Stories about stories about people

Leigh Edmonds

33 There's still room for hard SF

Greg Benford

35 Moving among the genres

Doug Barbour

37 Zebrowski, Clute, Russ, and other critics

Steve Jeffery, George Zebrowski, William Breiding,
Martin Morse Wooster, and Jerry Kaufman

45 Ray Bradbury and the pulps

Darrell Schweitzer

46 What makes these books so great?

Patrick L. McGuire

50 The continuing need for a single malt

Mark Plummer

53 World radio

Casey Wolf

55 AND NOW THE LETTERS ...

Jeff Hamill :: Jennifer Bryce :: Tim Stone ::
David Grigg :: Andy Robson :: Robert Elordiata
Fred Lerner :: Jason Burnett :: Milt Stevens ::
Randy Byers :: Peter Simpson :: Mark Ferson
Richard Blair :: Malcolm McHarg :: Yvonne
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Matthew Davis :: Mike Bolden :: Gerald
Murnane :: Steve Sneyd :: Walker Martin
Alex Pierce :: LynC :: Murray Moore
Tom Whalen

78 We also heard from ...

I must be talking to my friends

Farewell to Polly (1994–2014)

by Bruce Gillespie (with Elaine Cochrane as major contributor)

My diary does not record the day in January 1995 when John from the car workshop around the corner rang the front door bell at our place at Keele Street, Collingwood. He said that four kittens had been dumped in the vacant block at the rear of our house. Elaine went round to claim them. I had been snoozing on the settee in the living room and awoke to find four very small kittens

striding across the floor towards me. ('Was I their mummy?' 'Would I feed them?') Two black, one white with grey patches, one grey, all very purposeful, but the runt of the litter walked oddly. She kept rocking her head from side to side to make sure she was going in the right direction.

Elaine put the kittens into a cat box and took them



Polly the commander of Keele Street, Collingwood, 1998. (Photo: Elaine Cochrane)



Baby photos! Polly soon after she first arrived at Keele Street, 1995, with Bruce (l.) and Elaine (r.).



Polly (facing window and cat enclosure) and Sophie, late 2004, soon after we moved to Greensborough. (Photo: Dick Jenssen.)



Polly at Collingwood: killing her feather (mid 1990s) and posing for the camera (1998). (Photos: Elaine Cochrane.)

straight up to our friendly local vet's. Over the next two weeks, he checked them over and vaccinated them. He estimated that they were about five weeks old, and therefore were born in early December. One of Elaine's areas of expertise over the years has been finding homes for stray kittens. Judy and Alan Wilson took two, and LynC and Clive Newell took another one. We could not give the fourth kitten to anyone else, since she was blind in one eye and deaf in one ear.

We were faced with two problems. Would the runty little grey kitten be healthy? And would Sophie, our jealous black cat, try to kill it? Elaine's solution was to hire a large wire cage and place it in the middle of the kitchen floor. On 6 February 1995, Polly came back from the vet's to our place, and she lived in the cage for the next week or so. We called her Polly as short for Polyphemus, the one-eyed monster in the *Odyssey*. We might just as well have named her after Napoleon, master of the world.

Never before or since have we seen a cat performance like Polly's. She spent several days in the cage, and sniffed noses with the other cats. Sophie did not seem too upset, but that could have been camouflage for her true intentions. When we let Polly out of the cage, she deliberately set out to make friends with each of the other cats. She snuggled up to ancient, arthriticky TC, who was top cat. They seemed to fall in love with each other immediately, and Polly was the only cat that TC would allow to share his electric cat mat. Polly did not need to make friends with Oscar. Oscar loved kittens, any kittens. He had welcomed Theodore when, as a kitten, he had marched up the passage from the front door and moved in. Polly never really made friends with Theodore, but Theodore was too nice to stay grumpy at Polly. The challenge remained: how could Polly make friends with Sophie?

Polly was playing with a rolled-up piece of paper. Polly rolled the ball of paper towards Sophie. Sophie took it, and ripped it to shreds. She then pushed it back to Polly, who ripped up what little was still unshredded. Polly and Sophie were sort of friends from then on.

Having established her place in the household, Polly set out to conquer it. She zoomed around, as kittens do, and

climbed trees and the piece of tapa cloth that Elaine had hung in the hall. She did not roam too far from the backyard, but she defended it several times from intruder cats. She loved to help with the gardening, and would often be on mouse watch at the compost bins. One day she gave Elaine a mouse — carefully and deliberately placing the half-dead creature on her foot, then dancing backwards with every expression of delight as she waited for a show of gratitude, and following and watching closely as Elaine returned it to the compost bin.

When TC died in 1996 Polly was distraught, so the vet (John Sandford, who is still working in Collingwood) gave us a large, young, grey desexed female cat he had been caring for at his surgery. We brought her home, called her Violet, and expected no problems. We certainly did not expect that Polly would hate her immediately and totally, and would deploy every possible technique to try to drive her away! Polly was so implacable that we had to keep them separate — on one occasion when we failed to close the door between their parts of the house Polly went on the attack, and Violet needed eight stitches to close the rip along her tail. Poor Violet's life was pretty miserable until we moved to Greensborough, where the layout of the house and the two-part enclosure meant we could offer her more comfort and security, safe from further attacks.

Surprisingly, given such fierceness, there was very little friction when Flicker and Harry moved in with us in 2003.

Polly and Sophie got along fairly well, but when Sophie died in 2006, Polly's Napoleonic side could be seen more clearly. She was now the top cat, by reason of seniority. However, Flicker thought that *he* was top cat, by reason of being bigger, blacker, and (ex)male. This relatively friendly rivalry did not cease until Polly died.

Soon after Sophie died we acquired a sweet fluffy black kitten we called Archie (and Violet dropped dead suddenly the next day). The two lads, Flicker and Harry, liked Archie immediately, and they formed a gang of three. (We also acquired Sampson soon after, but that's another story.) Polly pretended indifference, but when Archie died of kidney failure in 2012 she was very upset.

Polly was always (except where Violet or intruder cats



Polly and her faithful servant Bruce, Keele Street, Collingwood, 2003. (Photo: Yvonne Rousseau.)

were concerned) a cheerful, alert, little busybody, and very affectionate. As she grew older, she seemed to grow chirpier and chirpier, until eventually she was diagnosed with hyperthyroidism. She remained just as chirpy on treatment, but slowed down very slightly as befitted her age. She also began to show signs of arthritis. Then, about the time Archie died, she became picky about her food, then stopped eating altogether and became very thin. Blood tests identified the problem as pancreatitis. She did well on her special low-fat diet for a while, but began to throw up regularly early this year. Casey Wolf from Canada, who had befriended Polly when they met in 2013, suggested a particular medication that might help. Our Greensborough vet agreed to try it, and it did indeed help for a little while. Our sweet Polly was clearly

slowly fading, but she remained her cheerful self, alert and inquisitive. When she started having trouble keeping solid food down, the vet also suggested a special diet that Elaine had to prepare. She had to boil up a chicken breast with rice, add a bit of pumpkin for roughage, puree the lot with a stick blender, then feed the cooled mixture to Polly. She really enjoyed this and even put back a bit of the weight she had lost. The trouble is that every other cat demanded his share, so Elaine found herself having to prepare two lots of the mixture per day.

Polly by this stage had long since lost her hearing, which meant she would bellow to us for attention ('Sit down and be sat on!' 'Feed me!'). As her arthritis became worse she moved little. Some days she stayed almost still in one corner, except to climb on Elaine's lap when it was offered. Other days she roamed a bit, seeking sunshine, or even went outside in the enclosure. A few times

she would skip onto the kitchen bench, then her bad leg would wobble and she would fall to the floor. We should have known that she was suffering, but we were not ready to admit this while she was alert, eating and purring.

We had hoped that Polly would reach her twentieth birthday, which we had told ourselves would have been 1 December 2014 — today, as I write. However, by the morning of Friday, 31 October, she could hardly move any more without toppling over, and all that was keeping her going was her various painkillers. We took her over to the Greensborough Veterinary Hospital. Dr Simon Choi, who had taken on Polly almost as a personal project, gently put her to sleep for the last time.

Polly's great long life was over. In human terms, she had reached 100.

— Bruce Gillespie and Elaine Cochrane,
1 December 2014

Hurry-home-drops: Return to Oakleigh — and 1961

2014 was the year of losing people and services I valued, and making gains in unexpected directions.

In the middle of the year, I received so much paying indexing work, in addition to the small government age pension, that I maintained my self-delusion that my life could continue much as it has done for many years. I bought too many CDs and Blu-rays, and published two issues of *SF Commentary* and two of *Treasure*. For the last two months I have received little paying work. Suddenly I can no longer afford to print or post my fanzines. Airmail postage rates rose again. For the time being, *SFCs* 88, 89, and 90 will appear only as PDF files on efanzines.com. I will try to meet my print-copy obliga-

tions to subscribers when I can.

The extraordinarily unpleasant Liberal-National (rabidly conservative) Party government in Canberra does its best to deprive us of what I consider essentials, such as vital ABC broadcasts. But the citizens of Victoria last weekend threw out a government of the same stripe, although its policies had become almost congenial compared with those of Tony Abbott's maniacs in Canberra. The fate of neither the Abbott Government nor the new Andrews Labor Government in Victoria is at all clear. Both depend on assorted odd minor parties in the upper houses of each government. Cheerful note: Victoria seems to have a Greens MP in the lower house for the

(Top photo): Our old house in Oakleigh, facing Haughton Road and the main Gippsland railway line. I used to sit on the parapet watching the trains shunting. Little seems changed — except my father's pathway with rose trees that used to stretch from the front door to the front gate.

(Second photo): The half-demolished remains of the old factory across the railway line. In 1958 it was so busy and noisy that my parents decided to move house to Syndal.

(Photos: Robin Mitchell.)



first time, and an Independent in a northern Victorian seat gained a 35 per cent swing to take the seat from the National Party (the old Country Party) for the first time in 47 years.

In the middle of 2014's winter and spring of discontent about life, springlets of cheer appeared. My sister, **Robin Mitchell**, has been living in Melbourne during the year, after returning to Victoria from Queensland for the first time in 23 years. She wanted to see much more of one of her sons and grandchildren, and catch up with Jeanette and me. She had forgotten that Melbourne winters can be cold. As she shivered in her flat on the Mornington Peninsula during June through August, she began planning the return flight north. In the meantime, she visited my other sister, **Jeanette Gillespie**, and her partner **Duncan Brown** in Guildford, near Castlemaine, and called in on Elaine and me quite often. Robin and I also kept up with each other through Facebook.

At the same time, as I wrote in *Treasure* 3, I was Facebook-contacted by Ron Sheldon, with whom I went to school (at Oakleigh High School, in Melbourne's



Eaton Mall, formerly Eaton Street, the centre of Oakleigh, usually filled with people heading for any one of dozens of Greek-style eating places. (Photo: Robin Mitchell.)

south-eastern suburbs) until 1962, and with whom I published my first fanzine (without knowing the term 'fanzine') in 1961 in Form 3 (Year 9). To judge from his emails and Facebook entries, Ron is still a man with a wide range of interests. He sent me copies of his accounts of his school years, filled with activities such as playing guitar in a rock band, dancing, and pursuing girls, which were rather beyond my scope at the time. Ron pointed me to various Facebook groups of which he was a member, including the Oakleigh High School group (although the school itself was closed more than 20 years ago), and one devoted to the history of Oakleigh and district. Many of the members of this group post historical photos and maps of the area. I became so interested in this history that I suggested to my sister Robin that we meet one day in Oakleigh and look the place over for the first time in 40 years.

On Wednesday, 29 October, Robin drove up from Dromana and I took the train from Greensborough to Oakleigh. We met outside the south side of the railway station. The view from the south side of the station is little changed from when our family lived there (until the end of 1958). Everything looks run down, and some of the oldest buildings are being bulldozed.

Would 50 Haughton Road still be there? When we walked home from school every day during the fifties, our house seemed a long way from the school. Now it seems only a short distance from the station. The old Hanover Street overpass, built in the early 1900s, is still there, looking exactly the same as ever.

Robin and I stopped outside our old house. It does not seem to have changed. It has received a recent coat of paint. The old stone and concrete front veranda is still there. Before I went to school, I used to sit on the parapet for hours every day watching the shunting trains 'going train bangs' as they hurled freight wagons back and forth



The old State Savings Bank in Oakleigh, where my father worked for some years. Later the Commonwealth Bank took it over, and now it's just a branch of Chemist Warehouse. (Photo: Robin Mitchell.)

from one end of the yards to another. What was missing? Oh, the old garden, the one in which my father spent so many hours, the one whose lawn I had to cut every Saturday morning before I was given my pocket money



The main building of Oak Towers, which was the Christian Guest Home throughout most of the twentieth century.
(Photo: Robin Mitchell.)

to go to 'the pictures' on Saturday afternoon, at either the Plaza or the Paramount Theatre. The huge old garden had long since been replaced by an extra house at the back.

We did not knock at the door, and we did not stay long. The Fordhams' old house was still there, and the Mackenzies' a little further up Bishop Street. (Our old house is on the corner of Haughton Road and Bishop Street.) Even the Burgesses' old house, next door in Haughton Road, is still there, although looking a bit rundown.

On the other side of the station, in the main area of Oakleigh, we kept running across familiar sights suddenly made unfamiliar. The old Oakleigh branch of the State Savings Bank, where Dad worked for some years, is now a cheapo pharmacy. The vast railway shunting yards, that once stretched from Oakleigh Station up to outside our place in Haughton Road, have disappeared. They have been replaced by a huge shopping plaza. However, this has not swallowed the strip shopping, as the Greensborough Plaza has swallowed most of the worthwhile shops around here. Instead, the centre of Oakleigh buzzes with an energy that it did not have in 1958. Eaton Street is now Eaton Plaza, filled with restaurants and cafes. Most of them are based on Greek food, because the main change that has taken place in Oakleigh since the late 1950s has been the influx of huge number of Greek migrants. Instead of the vast monolith of Chadstone Shopping Centre (only 2 km away) sucking the life out of Oakleigh, as seemed likely in the early sixties, Oakleigh has its own new life. The old Mechanics Insti-

tute is now the Monash Library. Tired old Warawee Park with its old bandstand is now well curated and very green. It invites tourists to wander along its paths. Our old school, Oakleigh State School, is surrounded by new buildings. Most of the playground, though, have disappeared.

For my family, much of our childhood activity centred on the Oakleigh Church of Christ, on the corner of Willesden Road and Warrigal Road, near the railway station. It looks exactly the same as it did in the late 1950s. Not far away, up the Atherton Road hill, was the Christian Guest Home, the old people's home where every true Church of Christ member hoped to finish his (or usually her) days. By the time my Auntie Linda needed to abandon her flat and live there in the late 1990s, it was renamed Oak Towers. Robin and I found that the original old home was unchanged (see photo), but is how surrounded on two sides by huge two-storey buildings greatly extending the home's capacity. Robin told me that the Churches of Christ, still a small Protestant domination in demographic terms, own and manage half of the old people's homes in Queensland.

The food we ate for lunch at the Nikos Tavern was much better than any we can find in Greensborough. Oakleigh boasts a few of Australia's top Greek restaurants. On that spring afternoon, huge numbers of people hurtled around the streets. All the shops seemed full of customers. Shopping in Oakleigh is fun, even exhilarating. I'll be back.

Robin has returned to Queensland, and she still posts wonderful photos on Facebook. And finally Elaine and I met with **Ron Sheldon** and his wife **Chris**. They travelled over from Knox City to Greensborough for dinner at Cafe Spice, our excellent Indian food restaurant. We caught up on a lot of history and reminiscences, but we felt we had hardly started catching up by the time the evening finished. And what was the most important subject for Ron and me after 50 years? The life and works of Roy Orbison, the world's best pop singer. Ron was the person who alerted me in 1961 to the greatness of Roy Orbison. Roy's last album, *Mystery Girl*, which in 1988 went to Number 1 in America the week that Roy died of a heart attack, has recently been reissued in its '25th Anniversary' cover. Twenty-five short years! I was able to give Ron and Chris a copy of the original CD, which they didn't own.

I have no idea how I'll survive 2015 financially, but while our health holds up, we can only stay cheerful. I hope that all *SFC* readers and their families can say the same.

— Bruce Gillespie, 3 December 2014



We knew it as Oakleigh State School. Now it's called Oakleigh Primary School, in Warrigal Road. The school yard has been filled with new buildings, but at least it's still there. (Photo: Robin Mitchell.)

Murray Moore:

‘Happy birthday, dear Brian’

Loncon 3, August 2014. About 9000 people descended on London for the second largest world SF convention. Very few convention reports have appeared yet. However, Murray Moore from Canada wrote for his friends the following report on an event at which Brian Aldiss, 89 years old, appeared. I wish I had been there.

All quotations are from Brian Aldiss.



Brian Aldiss.

On the final day of Loncon 3, 2014, Brian Aldiss, Britain’s greatest living SF writer, had ‘Happy birthday’ sung to him for his eighty-ninth birthday as he stood on the stage of the closing ceremony of the convention.

The day before, Brian had carefully walked to sit behind a table in a small room filled with his fans. Nobody complained that the panel description was not what happened.

Brian Aldiss — 40 Years of Cover Art

A discussion with Brian Aldiss on the digital display of Aldiss book covers from the past 40 years with commentaries. Also a tantalising glimpse of *Whip Donovan*, science fiction stories written and illustrated by Brian as a boy to be published in a facsimile edition later in the year.

With: David Wingrove (M), Brian Aldiss.

The panel was all audio and no visual, i.e. it was Aldiss seated and talking. *Whip Donovan* was men-

tioned, as being extracted from the Aldiss papers stored below the sewers of Swindon. ‘You think I’m joking. The Bodleian has storage there for its less important papers.’

From a large carrier bag Aldiss withdrew and flourished a thick trade paperback edition of his *Trillion Year Spree*, a Chinese edition. ‘Look on my works ye mighty and despair,’ he exclaimed. Later he again picked up the book and asked/stated, ‘It’s pretty posh, isn’t it?’

Aldiss said that a publisher is bringing all of his writing back into print, neither naming the publisher nor stating whether ‘print’ means paper or electrons.

Of his first published story, ‘Poor Little Warrior’ (1953), he said parasites jumping from a brontosaurus shot and killed by a time-travelling hunter and killing that hunter ‘appealed to US readers’.

Living in Oxford, Aldiss, as a writer, took advantage of the proximity of experts: ‘Knock on any cobwebby door and an ancient don will tell you about everything — but sex.’

Aldiss is annoyed that a star system as described in his *Helliconia* novels has been discovered, but named not *Helliconia* but a bland astronomical descriptive.

‘I had to write — and I continue.’ He has kept a journal for decades. ‘They’re all in a big trunk. The Bodleian is desperate for them. I’m turning 90 and they might get them next year; but I’m not going to force the issue.’ Audience laughter.

As a youngster he read the weekly *Modern Boy* and was fixated on *Captain Justice*. ‘I have never met anyone else who read *Modern Boy*.’

His first editor, at Faber & Faber, like Aldiss, was a Second World War Burma vet but, unlike Aldiss, with a bad leg, a war injury. *Brightfount Diaries* was Aldiss’s first novel. What did he want to write for his second novel? Science fiction. ‘Oh, good,’ Aldiss reported his editor responding. That novel became *Non-Stop*.

Report on Probability A, a 1960s, New Wave, *New Worlds*-inspired work, was ‘so obscure that no one

can understand it. It was my favourite novel for years.'

Aldiss accompanied *New Worlds* editor Michael Moorcock to apply for money for the magazine from the then Minister of Culture. The Minister greeted Moorcock and Aldiss by asking 'How much do you want?' The grant money was sufficient until Moorcock overspent, and changed the magazine's format, Aldiss said, leading Moorcock to raise money by, on weekends, writing a fantasy novel and selling it, also giving up his rights to it, to an American publisher ('Lancer,' moderator Wingrove added). Moorcock later bought back his rights to his Elric stories.

Aldiss is firm that Hugo Gernsback did not invent science fiction. *Billion Year Spree*, subsequently *Trillion Year Spree*, is Aldiss's argument, as also is his novel *Frankenstein Unbound*.

On Harry Harrison: 'I was not like him. I was not a born rebel: I just did what I wanted to do.' Audience laughter.

In Oxford Aldiss was friends with Kingsley Amis and Bruce Montgomery, whose pseudonym was Edmund Crispin. Both were SF readers who edited SF anthologies. Amis wrote a fine SF novel *The Alteration*. The difference between the two friends, Aldiss said, was that when he drank with Amis he had to pay for his drink. Montgomery had more money, and Aldiss drank with Montgomery in the posh Randolph Hotel. The Randolph had crates of Canadian Club whisky for Montgomery because Montgomery always drank Canadian Club. And why did Montgomery faithfully drink Canadian whisky? 'He looked at me incredulously. He said, "It's advertised on the back page of every issue of *Astounding*."'

Amis had the gift of being able to perfectly imitate another person's manner and looks and elocution. This was great fun to observe. 'The only trouble was, you didn't want to go out for a pee.'

His *A Cretan Teat* is one of Aldiss's favourite creations: 'I love that book.' In Crete as a tourist, Aldiss explored an obscure church and found therein a portrait that impressed him. But the picture of a woman with her child at her breast must have been painted by a priest, he decided. 'How do I put it delicately? They don't grow there.'

In a nearby eatery he noticed a young woman in her quiet time teaching herself to paint portraits in the Byzantine fashion. Aldiss paid her to paint for him a version of the anatomically incorrect portrait in oil. And he wrote *The Cretan Teat*. The book went into limbo during its editing because its publisher stopped publishing. But the book's editor finished editing it, although she was not being paid.

The finished book was bound and sold off a barrow, just 'like *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. I still read it.' And from his memory he recites lines. 'He

Brian Aldiss accepts
89th birthday
greetings from the
Closing Ceremony
audience, Loncon 3,
2014.

(Photo: Francis
Hamit.)



was a wonderful, wonderful, poet.'

'What happened to the waitress behind the swing door? She used the money I paid her to move to Athens and to paint there fake Renaissance portraits. The editor married and moved to Australia.'

In the 1970s he wrote *The Malacia Tapestry* for Jonathan Cape. He was determined that the cover be art by Tiepolo, an artist about whom he was 'mad'. Tiepolo painted wonderful large pictures but in his old age, 'odd things'. Aldiss wanted Tiepolo's old age art decorating the cover of *The Malacia Tapestry*. Aldiss told his Jonathan Cape editor, 'I need a Tiepolo cover. My editor said, "He's out of date." I showed him the art I meant and I won him over.'

Aldiss makes art, too: abstracts. During Loncon 3 his art was on display in Rutland.

On *A Tupelov Too Far*: 'I prove that Mrs Thatcher was worse than the Russians.'

Two memories from his war experience:

His group marched into a clearing in the jungle. A bullet fired by a Japanese sniper in a tree killed an officer. His purpose in the tree was to kill an officer. The sniper was enclosed in a structure in the tree, an airborne cell from which he could not leave, subsequently destroyed by cannon fire. 'It was horrid, the way that he was treated by his own people.'

Aldiss and other soldiers were on the lowest deck of a transport ship, H deck, with only the hull between them and the Indian Ocean. The lights went out and the engines stopped. Going up was impossible because the decks above also were full of soldiers. If the ship was sinking they were dead men.

In the dark of H deck Aldiss broke the silence: 'Would anyone like to buy a watch?'

— Murray Moore, August 2014

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS (continued on p. 30)

For more than 40 years Michael Bishop has been one of the most distinguished writers of fiction, essays, and poetry in the SF field. His best-known novels include *No Enemy But Time*, *Unicorn Mountain*, and *Brittle Innings*. See the special Michael Bishop section of *SF Commentary* 87 for much more about his life and career.

Michael Bishop

Introduction: Philip K. Dick, alternate-world SF, and I

First published in English in *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, the following article was written for the Polish edition of the first volume of *The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick*, entitled *The Short Happy Life of the Brown Oxford* (at least in English).

Today, I counted the books by Philip K. Dick in our house here in Pine Mountain, Georgia. I did so in my upstairs office and on two bookcases in our den, where I had to climb a ladder to reach the titles lined up on a shelf over a window facing Chipley Street. It did not surprise me to find that we own nearly 50 distinct works of fiction by this extraordinary writer, far more books than I own by *any other* writer of any kind of work at all. In fact, the writer with the most titles after Dick has a surname similar to his, *Dickens*: Charles Dickens.

Almost certainly, Phil would have found this fact, if he were still alive — he died on 2 March 1982 — both ironic and highly amusing. In his introduction to a late collection, *The Golden Man*, published in 1980, he writes forthrightly, with humour as well as rue, about the dismaying lack of status that science-fiction writers endured in the United States in the 1950s and '60s. Although already established as an estimable SF writer, he was also struggling to forge a career as a serious literary novelist and achieving only failure.

Writes Dick of this time: 'SF was so looked down upon that it virtually was not there ... This was not funny, the derision felt toward SF writers. It made our lives wretched ... [Few] publishers published SF ... and really cruel abuse was inflicted on us. To select SF writing as a career was an act of self-destruction; in fact, most *writers* ... could not even conceive of someone considering it. The only non-SF writer who ever treated me with courtesy was Herbert Gold, who I met at a literary party in San Francisco. He autographed a file card to me ... "To a colleague, Philip K. Dick." I kept the card until the ink faded and was gone, and I still feel grateful to him for his charity.'

He also notes that, in the 1950s, he and his second

wife Kleo (in his life, Dick married five times) lived on only \$95 a month and often ate dog food. As a warning to writers hungering to enter the field, he admits that in the mid '70s (the last full decade of his life), he couldn't always pay his rent and that in 1977, just three years earlier, he earned \$9 the month that his fifth wife, Tessa, and their son, Christopher, left him. Typically, however, he advises would-be SF writers to eschew despair and pursue their dreams by quoting Sufi poet Kabir: 'If you have not lived through something, it is not true.' He ends by offering up this hard, but bracing, encouragement: 'So live through it ... [Go] all the way to the end. Only then can it be understood, not along the way.'

Dick went *through* almost every challenge he confronted 'all the way to the end', just as most of his protagonists — in both his novels and the tales in this volume — go *all the way to the end* to achieve their own diversely driven goals — like Omar Conger in 'The Skull', who reaches understanding only at the climax of a weird time-travel experience; like Commander Franks in 'The Defenders', who learns that 'People who work together ... solve their problems on the operational level instead of at a conference table'; like Thomas Cole, the variable man of the story of that title, who helps lead two warring societies toward peace and greater democracy; like E. J. Elwood in 'The Builder', who fathoms his obsessive work on a boat only after long labour and the advent of the natural event requiring it. I could go on, but my point here is that, in Dick's case, going on to *his* unexpected end — namely, his stroke-precipitated death — robbed him, sadly, of a full understanding of his inventive fiction's impact on our contemporary world.

First, his writings have influenced at least two

generations of other writers, and surely go on influencing new talents even today: Ursula K. Le Guin, John Sladek, Thomas Disch, Jack Dann, K. W. Jeter, Michael Swanwick, Jonathan Lethem, and even R. Crumb, the counterculture commix artist and writer, to list only a few. He certainly influenced *me*, but I'll return to this point later, to underscore with esteem and gratitude the enormousness of my debt to him.

Also, this once ghettoised writer, who sought literary respectability his entire adult life, has seized it spectacularly since his death. In 2007, the Library of America — publisher of canonical titles by Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Willa Cather, Flannery O'Connor, etc. — made Dick the *first SF writer* in its prestigious program by releasing the first of three omnibus volumes of his novels. This act at once enshrined the 13 individual titles constituting these works and virtually guaranteed that they will remain in print or digitally accessible *forever*. Every other American science-fictionist of any stature, including me, salivates with envy. Moreover, all three volumes have sold like clear plastic ponchos during a metropolitan cloudburst.

Equally startling, the impact of Dick's writing has shaken world culture — from its most popular forms (comics, rock music, television, films) to its most high-brow manifestations (opera, theatre, philosophy). All I must do is cite such films as *Blade Runner*, based on the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*; *Total Recall*, based on a story, 'We Can Remember It for You Wholesale'; and Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report*, based on a story called 'The Minority Report'. Moreover, other films based on yet other Dick titles are supposedly in the works even as I write this introduction. Obviously, Dick, once a voice crying in the pulp wilderness, has become an industrial-strength visionary beloved and/or exploited by insatiable multitudes of true believers. (One film reputedly in preparation by Walt Disney Animation Studios has its origins in Dick's early story 'The King of the Elves', included in *The Short Happy Life of the Brown Oxford*.)

Fortunately, Dick did live to see early rushes from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, and he liked the grubby look of its future Los Angeles (i.e., 2019) so much that in a letter to Jeff Walker he wrote that the film's take on his novel '*justified and completed*' his career as an SF writer. But he died four months before the film was released, and as Roger Zelazny says in his introduction to the first English-language edition of this collection, 'It is good now to see that Phil is finally getting some of the attention he deserved, both critically and at the popular level. My main regret is that it comes so late.' I feel much the same. Anyone who cares about Dick or his work could hardly feel differently.

I never met Phil in person, but, in 1977, I wrote a review for *Locus*, the monthly American SF newsletter, of his anti-drug SF novel *A Scanner Darkly*; and one day, out of the blue, a letter came from Phil praising me for writing 'the best' analysis of his work he had ever

read. Later, I found that he often reacted to praise with hyperbolic gratitude, but I treasure that letter anyway. Still later, Ian Watson and I sought a new story from Phil for an anthology called *Changes*, on the theme of metamorphosis, but he was busy at work on his last novels. By the time our collaborative anthology appeared, he had died, a loss that reverberates still. But in an alternate universe of my own envisioning, I did meet Dick in person and eventually received from Radoslaw Kot an email message asking me if I would write this introduction. Of course, I did not have to think very long or hard to agree.

To write it, by the way, I had to order from an on-line seller a used copy of *The Short Happy Life of the Brown Oxford* (because although I own a *lot* of Dick's books, I did not own this one). And in this fat trade paperback, when it arrived, I was happy to find a short but meaty Preface by Dick, excerpted from a letter that he wrote to an unspecified person on 14 May 1981, less than 10 months before his death. That it argues passionately for the idea that all of SF represents a variety of alternate-history strikes me as a serendipitous thing, given that Dick's primary influence on me is that of an inspired alternate-world historian.

In this fervent excerpt, Dick states his definition of science fiction, asserting both that it creates 'a fictitious world ... a society that does not in fact exist, but is predicated on our known society' and 'our known society acts as a jumping-off point for it'. It 'advances out of our own in some way, perhaps orthogonally, as with the alternate world story or novel. It is our world *dislocated* [my italics] by some kind of mental effort on the part of the author, our world transformed into that which it is not or not yet.'

Clearly, I'm stealing here, but let me steal even more: '[This] world must differ from the given in at least one way, and this way must be sufficient to give rise to events that could not occur in ... any known society present or past. There must be a coherent idea involved in this dislocation' and 'the dislocation must be a conceptual one, not merely a trivial or bizarre one'. Dick insists that 'this is the essence of science fiction, the conceptual dislocation within the society so that as a result a new society is generated in the author's mind, transferred to paper [or a computer screen], and from the paper [or e-file] it occurs as a convulsive shock in the reader's mind, *the shock of dysrecognition*.' Dick adds that the reader understands that this society is not his or her 'actual world', but still finds the dislocation within it vital, 'intellectually stimulating' — indeed, so much so that it 'unlocks the reader's mind, so that that mind, like the author's, begins to create. Thus,' he concludes, '[SF] is creative, and it inspires creativity.' (The italics in this paragraph are Dick's.)

I rarely write fiction on the basis of a coherent structuring thesis, and I do not think Dick did either. In fact, I believe that in the foregoing passages, Dick describes in thoughtful retrospect what his own SF

does and how it accomplishes what it does, but that, while writing his stories and novels, he worked intuitively to create the effects that they achieve. Still, Dick's definition resonates with me profoundly. And when I saw the word *dislocation* in it, I felt the shock of *recognition*, not *dysrecognition*, a clever but meaningful coinage of Dick's.

In May 2012, I was the only featured American SF writer at Italcon 39, held in the charming coastal town of Bellaria, and to honour that fact, the man who had invited me, Armando Corridore, owner of the Bologna-based publishing firm of Elara, translated my alternate-history novelette 'The Quickening' into Italian. He then offered it at the convention as a handsome pamphlet called *Dislocazione*. A buyer of any other Elara title received it as a kind of bonus, a *lagniappe*.

Apparently, the word *quickenings*, or the kinetic development of an embryo in a woman's womb (or, I assume, that of any mammal), has no precise counterpart in Italian, and so, perceptively, Armando settled on *dislocazione* as an adroit stand-in for the English-language title for my story. You see, 'The Quickening' concerns what I view as an *extremely* nontrivial alteration in human culture, namely, the mysterious overnight redistribution of every person on our planet to another part of the globe. This is not an idea that most readers would regard as science-based. In fact, most would define it as fantastic if not as utterly preposterous, but I developed it with complete seriousness, the kind of dead seriousness that Dick brought to some of his own wildest imaginings. All of the preceding, then, demonstrates that in my writing of alternate-world or -history SF, I intuitively follow the intuitive practice of Philip K. Dick — although I have his work as a guide, and Dick developed his techniques and approaches largely on his own ... for none of us are without influences.

Others of my titles employing Dick's dislocation technique — again, more or less intuitively, but in one case deliberately — include the novels *Unicorn Mountain*, *Count Geiger's Blues*, and *Philip K. Dick Is Dead, Alas* (or *The Secret Ascension*). The main dislocations in this last-named book derive from the four-term presidency of a diabolical Richard Nixon, a US victory in the Vietnam War, and the building of a Moon base during King Richard's extended tenancy of the Oval Office. Dick is also a character in this novel, which pivots on the actions and interactions of 'little people', people without place or authority, just as the real Philip K. Dick's mature novels and stories almost always do.

Incidentally, early on, I did not admire Dick's style, assessing it as workmanlike and journalistic, but it improved (at least in my view) as his career progressed; and when Ursula K. Le Guin — in the late 1960s to the early 1970s, my favourite SF writer —

released *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), a sympathetic take on Dick's methods and themes, she validated for me his aims, and I returned to his Hugo-winning *The Man in the High Castle* and got into it with more sympathy and greater understanding. My early story 'Rogue Tomato' (1975) even features a protagonist, Philip K., who represents an outrageous forerunner of the dislocated characters in 'The Quickening' (1981), just as the story itself perhaps served as a warm-up for the writing of *Philip K. Dick Is Dead, Alas* (1992).

What of these stories? I have already mentioned a few, but I do not plan to synopsis any of them here. Honesty compels me to state that, coming so early in Dick's career, several seem half-formed, for Dick's prose often evinces a flat, cross-footed quality, like a tennis player hitting a shot off-balance.

But their informing ideas — ah, their *ideas*!

Even if somewhat suspect, Dick's ideas catch like burrs and hang on through his exposition and dialogue with a prickly tenacity. With a premature serious boldness, he posits the crazy idea of evolution taking place not in imperceptible steps but in instantaneous bounds. He tells of a spaceship with a human brain, of a machine that preserves music as living creatures, of a Martian city micro-sized to fit within a 'glass globe paperweight', and of a fractious humanity confined underground and guarded by paternalistic machines that it *believes* it controls. And Dick's narrative commitment to such notions often carries the day ... even when his prose style and his story logic sweat like inept sappers to blow the whole jokey charade to smithereens.

Further, the young Dick has caboodles of raw ambition, as well as chutzpah, to bolster him. He has dauntless literary heroes like Jonathan Swift and W. B. Yeats to shore up, however shoddily, his pulp plots (see 'Prize Ship' and 'Out in the Garden'). And he has a brigade of recurring themes to trot out and to vary whenever a writing block sits down in his chair, a visitation that he experienced as seldom in his productive early days as he did applause and big paychecks. These themes touch on the nature of humanity, the familiarity of the alien, the fragility of 'reality', the dubious joys of drug use, the fatuity of war, the ubiquity of planned obsolescence in a capitalist economy, and the enigmas of either Godhood or faith, if not the two at once. Somewhere in *The Short Happy Life of the Brown Oxford*, you will meet these themes, against estranging backdrops and disorienting settings. You will track the narrative events embodying them and thus participate in the evolution, toward greatness, of the most remarkable imagination ever to write its way out of the Silurian muck of the glorious pulps.

— Michael Bishop, 23–28 January 2014



Elaine Cochrane: DJFractal.

Michael Bishop writes: Here, I append a eulogy I wrote to Phil in 1998 and first published in the *1999 Calendar of Days* (Camp Hill, PA: Quality Paperback Book Club; 1998) and subsequently in the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (West Cornwall, CT: Mercury Press; Mar. 1999, pp. 52–3).

Michael Bishop

Philip K. Dick is dead, a lass

with dark hair said. Her tears flowed wholesale, remember? Phil wrote like a relentless dentist, drilling the pocked enamel of reality to expose its beautiful decay. Midway through the wood he popped fish-shaped paranoia pills, chewed the holy fat of messianic redemption, & chased the godly lot with pot after pot of hot black coffee, all of it decanted from percolators whoop-

whoop-whooping their projective derangements. Beer
furred his tongue. Mars floated mauve in his
eyeballs. The smell of ozone-depleting aerosols

wafted from his armpits, ubiquitously. When Anwar
Sadat died, he scarred himself with a can of Orange
Crush in spontaneous homage. He took courage
when Linda Ronstadt sang 'Different Drum' & no
bleak umbrage if a buddy crooned '*Una cosa me da
risa — Pancho Villa sin camisa.*' He was fully sane
in Berkeley, Fullerton, & Santa Ana. He was crazy
in California. Kafka had nothing on either Philip
K. or the latest demented broadcast from Radio Free
Albemuth. (Oh, to be a Blobel!) If he wakes as
a Brobdignagian beefsteak tomato to orbit Papa

an angrily expanding sun, take cover. 'Not 'rekal'
but recall,' the receptionist corrects him. He
readies himself for Papa's apotheosis with a jolt
of Nov(a)cain. He essayed suicide because Elijah
left him. '*There is nothing worse in the world,
no punishment greater, than to have known God
and no longer to know him.*' To eulogize Phil
properly, recall from the post-apocalyptic junkyard
a menagerie of maimed automata — ersatz sheep, a robot
German shepherd, a naggish simulacrum of Secretariat —
and a crew of pertinacious little people, from Lumky

to Isidore to Tagomi, then set them singing until
they entropically abort. As calm as caffeine, Phil
fled aboard a talking taxi to Sri Lanka, suffered
in remainderdom, elbowed Norman Mailer for a side
of macaroni, was rediscovered, restored to print,
cultified, read, reread, & queried. If we want
him to digest it, we'll have to eat his celebrity
for him. The ambulance that hauled him to hospital
babbled beneath its wailing like his long-dead baby
sister while a blue-zillion rusty percolators whooped
in aromatic chorus for the conveyance of his soul.

for Phil, dead on March 2, 1982

Patrick L. McGuire

J. D. Robb: Somehow it still works

1 J. D. Robb: a very readable writer ...

I was induced to try the work of J. D. Robb (the pseudonym used for the ‘... in Death’ series by Eleanor Robertson, the author who otherwise writes genre romances as Nora Roberts) by a recommendation. This came from **Lyn McConchie** in a letter of comment in *Steam Engine Time* 9. (It says something about globalisation that, in a fanzine edited jointly in the states of Victoria, Australia, and Michigan, USA, I read a loccer from New Zealand who caused me to read an author who lives in Maryland, the same state that I do, within 60 miles of me.)

I have now, in rapid succession, read about half of the series, which is currently up to 30 novels plus additional works of shorter lengths. It’s been many years since I discovered an author I enjoyed who already had that much work in print at the time of my discovery. I think even Patrick O’Brian had only completed the fifteenth Aubrey–Maturin novel when I came upon him. (Robb, incidentally, has a detective named Patrick O’Brian in *Promises in Death* (2009), presumably as a tribute to the naval author.) Ideally, the Robb books should be read in order, not only because the series maintains a backburner story arc that builds up over time, but also because each book has a mystery-story plot, and Robb is one of those annoying authors who occasionally reveals the solutions to earlier cases in later books, even in situations where it would have been fairly easy to avoid the spoiler. Although not explicitly so labelled, the list of Robb books on the individual volumes is indeed in correct series order, at least in those US hardcover and paperback editions that I have seen. Series lists are also available in Wikipedia, at jdrobb.com, and at noraroberts.com. In my own case, however, I started with whatever books were available on the shelf in the public library when I happened to visit there, and I can report that out-of-order reading is certainly possible without much loss of enjoyment.

... of police procedurals

Lyn McConchie says the series is a ‘crossover between SF and police procedurals, and reads well as either’ (*SET* 9, p. 50). I beg to differ. In point of fact, the series claims to be neither. In blurbs on different volumes, the publisher variously asserts that it is ‘futuristic romantic sus-



J. D. Robb/Norah Roberts/Eleanor Robertson.

pense’ or just plain ‘futuristic suspense’. Despite the publisher’s label, I will grant Lyn the ‘police procedural’ part. Most of the novels in Robb’s series qualify as genre mystery at least as well as they do as genre suspense: the unwinding of the plot at least approximates adherence to the rules of orthodox mystery ‘fair play’, and the jacket of *Salvation in Death* (2008) carries endorsements from four mystery writers (plus suspense writer Andrew Gross). Additionally, to be sure, we find a romance element in the Robb series, but one laid on not much thicker than in many genre mystery series. Protagonist Eve Dallas’s husband, who goes by the single name Roarke, is indeed a ridiculous paragon of a spouse (handsome, athletic, sexy, megarich, with godlike in-

sight into Dallas's psyche, possessed of hacker skills, having an alluringly shady past but now walking the line for love of Dallas), but in this he is not much more absurd than spouses or significant others in series considered to be straight mystery. (Anthony Boucher's police detective Terry Marshall is married to an intelligent and beautiful former stripper who was genteelly raised before the Depression forced her into burlesque, and who at the time of the stories — circa 1941 — is an exemplary wife and mother; Jane Haddam's detective Gregor Demarkian lives with, and eventually marries, a beautiful former debutante, now a rich and phenomenally successful fantasy writer decades younger than he.) Granted, Robb's repeated scenes of ecstatic married sex are a bit over the top for a mystery, but they do not lack precedent within that genre. Once we have qualified the works as genre mysteries, the step to the subgenre of procedurals is small: Eve Dallas is a police lieutenant working in the context of the institutional structure and regulations of the New York Police and Security Department to solve crimes, mostly homicides. True, Dallas now and then violates regulations and even the law in the pursuit of a higher justice, most frequently by enlisting her husband's hacker skills, but that sort of thing also happens in other acknowledged procedurals.

... set in a fairly plausible future

I also agree with Lyn that the future setting (2058 through 2060 in the books I have read) is generally plausible. Its extrapolations stay, in many aspects, on the conservative side, but that does not make them less credible. Genre SF has a track record of overestimating the rate of technological change. As I write this, we are nine years past 2001. Yes, we finally have flatscreen TVs and a half-hearted excuse for a space station, and various primitive kinds of videophone have attained a degree of market penetration, but what happened to HAL 9000 and the moon shuttles? In the Robb works (aside from a few stutters), the future circa 2060 is skilfully worked out in a proper show-don't-tell fashion, and in such cumulative detail that a full description requires a treatment of its own (see 'J. D. Robb's future'). With the possible exception of low-end space operas like *Captain Future*, I cannot think of a print-medium genre-SF series that examines a comparably short segment of a posited future in such detail. The closest runner-up might be something like Poul Anderson's Flandry series, and even that encompasses a whole interstellar empire and an entire career, not three years on Earth and in near-Earth space. Outside of print, we would have to look to something like the *Buck Rogers* comic strip or one of the individual series of the *Star Trek* franchise, and we would still end up lacking the same tight focus in time and space.

... but who is not writing SF

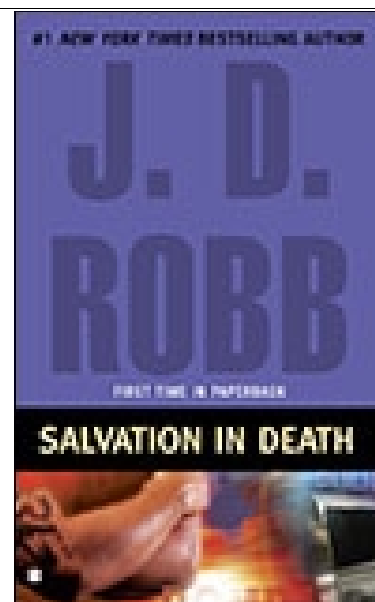
And yet, Robb does not put this future to the uses than an SF author would. As a rule, her plots do not illuminate some changed aspect of technology or society. If we did evaluate them by SF genre standards, we could only

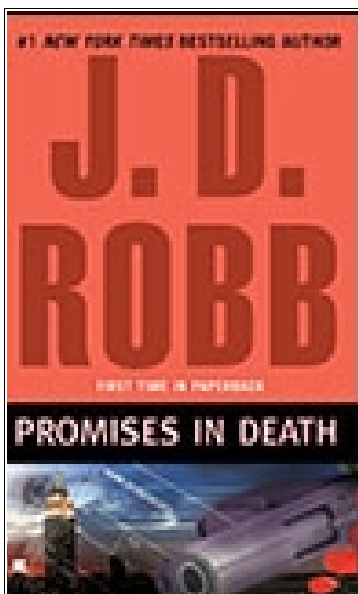
conclude that almost all of them are of that scorned and marginalised type which Damon Knight termed call-a-rabbit-a-merp stories and Horace Gold dubbed Bat Durstons — that is to say, stories where we could easily change a few details and set them in the mainstream past or present.

For instance, the first Robb book I tried, *Salvation in Death* (2008), starts off with a Catholic priest who, while

celebrating mass, is murdered via a poisoned chalice of communion wine. The poison is good old cyanide. It is quickly discovered that the priest, in reality perhaps an unordained pseudo-priest, was living under a false identity. Dallas quickly concludes that in order to find his murderer, she will first have to discover the victim's real identity and the reason for the masquerade. In this article I do not propose to engage in wholesale spoilerism, so you will have to take my word for it without corroborating detail: nothing in the motivations of the murder victim or murderer particularly illuminates science, technology, social trends, or any other characteristically SFnal concern. Nor does the novel even illuminate religious or philosophical questions from a viewpoint unattainable in a contemporary-set work. We do see development in both forensic science and in the counter measures taken by killers, but those are not the focus of the story. Moreover, they remain pretty much constant throughout the series, and so fail to inspire sense of wonder after the first book or two in which they are encountered. In the same way, a genre SF story is not rescued from Bat-Durstion-hood by one more utilisation of established devices such as hyperdrive or force fields. *Salvation's* story could have been translated to a contemporary setting with only trivial changes. Despite that, I found it a good read and I quickly went back to the library for more Robb novels, but at the moment my point is that in the novel Robb's concerns are not those of genre science fiction or, for that matter, of anything that it would be useful to call 'science fiction' at all.

Promises in Death (2009) opens with a detective first stunned, and subsequently killed, with her own weapon, a 'stunner' functionally indistinguishable from a *Star Trek* phaser, and having analogous settings for 'stun' and 'kill'. But for purposes of the murder, this convenient dual weapon is inessential, since in a contemporary-set novel the detective could as well have been first stunned by a blow, or a taser, or a can of mace, and later shot with her own pistol. Another plot strand includes an organised-crime chief who has managed to order hits despite being locked up for life on a maximum-security off-planet prison habitat. The way he manages to communi-





US states and foreign jurisdictions already lack a death penalty.

... save possibly for a few marginal exceptions

The plot of the first novel in the series, *Naked in Death* (1995) does depend, as written, on the posited developments that prostitution has been legalised and regulated in the US, whereas firearms have been almost completely outlawed. The novel could be rewritten to place it in a different setting, for instance in a country that already has legal prostitution and strict gun control, but arguably not without alteration of so many details that the novel's essential nature would be changed. Also, since, if the series is read in order, this book is our first exposure to Robb's projected future, the sense-of-wonder element is higher than when we see the same future again later. Thus it might barely squeak by as science fiction. Since it is well written, I could even see it being bought by an SF editor who was willing to overlook its genre flaws in light of its virtues as general popular fiction.

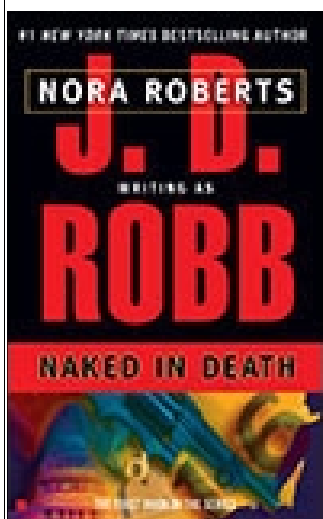
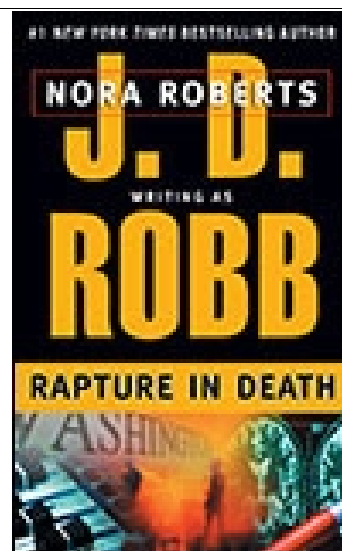
Rapture in Death (1996) opens on a space station still under construction, but so little is Robb interested in the sense-of-wonder potential of an offplanet setting that,

even in its uncompleted state, the station already enjoys something approaching one Earth gravity. Robb presents so little technical description that it is not even clear if the station spins or instead is equipped with artificial gravity. When an employee commits suicide at the start of the book, the author has him do so not in any way related to his exotic location,

but by using the station's homelike gravity to hang himself. (Does Robb instantly head for the nearest McDonald's when she travels overseas?) The novel's action then moves back to Earth, where, granted, the eventual solution to a series of murders does depend on posited future technology, although not in a manner that breaks new SFnal ground. The work does not even represent much of a genre mystery: the reader is not fed enough background information to be able to deduce the cause of the multiple murders up until just before the final revelation, and even then the explanation proves to be technologically incomplete and not especially plausible. This is one of the novels that might indeed be considered more validly a work of genre suspense.

Immortal in Death (1996) depicts a new illegal designer drug that not only induces euphoria but also retards visible signs of ageing; it also evokes addiction and drives the user toward death within five years. The particular effects of the drug, and the fact that some ingredients come from an offplanet habitat, would have to be revised if it were translated to a contemporary setting, but they are not vital. In stepping down to 2010 technology, we might lose a little symbolism on the vanity of risking death to preserve seeming youth, but as a character within the story points out, there is an old precedent even for that: highborn ladies using arsenic to clarify their skin. For that matter, some people in 2010 continue to smoke tobacco not only because of the nicotine hit but also because they fear the likely unsightly weight gain if they stopped. Other plot aspects, including police snitches, high-end fashion models, a struggling fashion designer, and a suspect emerging from a bender who cannot remember for certain where she went or what she did, would transfer to a contemporary setting pretty much as they are.

Visions in Death (2004) concerns a serial killer of young women whose MO includes strangling his victims with craft-shop red ribbon, and then neatly excising their eyes. Again, there is nothing science-fictional about the main plot. A side issue revolves around a psychic who provides minor help to the police and who, more importantly, finds her life profoundly altered by her contact with the serial killer's mind. This subplot is somewhat science-fictional. 'Paranormal' psychic powers are by long convention accepted within the SF genre, notwithstanding the facts that most of what once looked like the evidence for their existence has been refuted and that prolonged efforts to bring them to reliable application have failed. Moreover, Robb handles them in a science-fictional way: psychics, called, as in some Heinlein stories, 'sensitives', are depicted as forming a normal if



minor element of Robb's society. Since characters with reliable psychic powers also crop up in conventional contemporary-set mysteries, even this subplot arguably does not rescue the novel from Durstonhood, but one could respond that those contemporary-set psychic characters themselves represent a bleed-over from SF.

There is at least one more solid exception. *Origin in Death* (2005) has a genuinely science-fictional plot (PARTIAL SPOILER WARNING) in some ways reminiscent of Joss Whedon's television series *Dollhouse* and of some Lois McMaster Bujold novels, with a dash of Heinlein's *Time for the Stars* thrown in. However, since Robb is breaking virtually no new conceptual ground, it takes the investigators much longer than the experienced SF reader will need to realise that illegal human cloning and gene manipulation are going on, and the novel ends in one of those hackneyed scenes, reminiscent of a James Bond flick but alien to the spirit of modern genre SF, where most of the inconvenient and intrusive new technology is removed from the world in a spectacular explosion. Still, like Bujold, Robb deals with the bio-engineered clones themselves in an enlightened and humane fashion. This is the most nearly science-fictional Robb book among those I have read so far.

So why are they readable?

Why might a genre-SF reader enjoy a series that violates science fiction's genre rules? For starters, it helps that the publisher never claims that books are SF in the first place: the SF reader is less likely to attempt to judge them by inapplicable criteria. It is also important that, as I already mentioned, even though Robb is using her imagined future for non-SF purposes, as a rule she does not insult an SF reader's intelligence. On the contrary, she designs a generally credible future and lets the picture of it gradually leak out with the show-don't-tell technique generally seen as the major achievement of Golden Age Heinlein. (I have no evidence on what Robb's actual SF-consuming experience may have been, but the two bodies of SF that Robb's work most strongly recalls to me are in fact on the one hand, *Star Trek*, and on the other, Heinlein's Golden Age work plus his juveniles.)

Robb's series offers sympathetic characters, humour, adventure, love interest, sex, violence — in general, most of the same attractions that one would find in a typical successful TV drama series. The nature of Robb's comments on her website, some of which respond to readers' questions, suggest that Robb and most of her readers are less interested in technological, social, or philosophical issues, and more interested in the series characters themselves, than would be typical of genre-SF readers. Another popular-fiction plus is that Robb's books are page-turners, keeping the reader plunging on to find out what happens next. What, on reflection, turn out to be an improbable number of coincidences both facilitate the pace (no need to multiply the number of characters and slow down the story if Dallas finds all the clues herself) and actually slide past the reader's attention because of the very pace that they facilitate. Since I feel myself less competent than multitudes of people lacking any interest in SF to analyse what makes a series in any

medium successful in those 'mundane' respects, I will leave the issue at that.

However, I do feel qualified to point out that Robb novels generally ought to satisfy a traditional mystery reader. The abundant coincidences that I just mentioned constitute a mystery-genre flaw, but not a fatal one in the form that Robb uses them, and they enjoy much precedent in the mystery genre. For me, more questionable is the repeated pattern of having Dallas hunt serial torture-killers who mostly select young women as their victims. Individual volumes with this device are well written, but they get to be repetitive after a while. Still, they do engage the reader's emotions (at least until burnout sets in), and the serial-killer trope proved in the recent past to be an overworked gambit not only in Robb's work, but in mystery fiction in general, so Robb was scarcely the only sinner. Moreover, from listening to panel discussions at mystery conventions, I gather that among women readers (presumably Robb's core target audience), many derive a sort of catharsis through confronting their fears about crazed sexual killers, something that the male reader may find it hard to understand. Fortunately for the male reader, a number of Robb novels do concern less pathological sorts of crime.

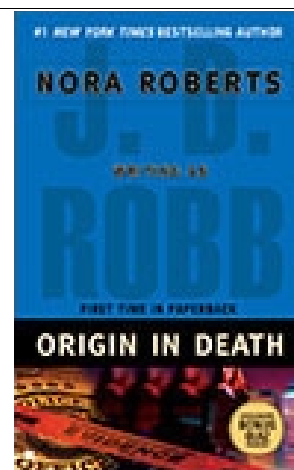
Many, indeed probably most, SF readers enjoy mystery stories. The rational, deductive nature of the fair-play mystery closely allies it with science fiction, and the histories of the two genres overlap significantly. Edgar Allan Poe arguably invented both genres. Arthur Conan Doyle is still remembered for *The Lost World* as well as for Sherlock Holmes. Many more recent SF authors have also tried their hands at writing genre mysteries, and some have mostly switched over to the latter genre. Even the mystery-genre worldcon, Bouchercon, was founded by crossover SF fans, and was named after a writer active in both genres. Thus the fact that most Robb novels are mysteries should help them to appeal to SF readers.

Why set them in the future?

I now move on to the issue that I was trying to answer for myself when I sat down to write this article: what legitimate reasons might there be for setting Robb's series in the future, since hers are not the normal SF reasons?

First, the setting adds picturesqueness, a change of pace, in a way analogous to what might be achieved by setting a story in a foreign country or the historical past. Picturesqueness is related to, but not the same as, the SFnal Sense of Wonder, although I must await further inspiration before elaborating on the differences.

Second, when the reader's picture of the future, as in Robb's work, is built up from numerous Heinlein-style casual references rather than from an infodump, it offers the same put-together-the-puzzle pleasure as, in this



respect, does SF. This pleasure is unaffected, or not much affected, by the facts that Robb, unlike Heinlein, usually does not draw her plot conflicts from the shape of the created world, and that Robb seems only intermittently to be using the background for any sort of social commentary. It may at first seem a bit surprising that this puzzle-solving exercise might be enjoyed by a readership beyond that of SF (and of genre fantasy), but the build-it-up-from-hints process is really not much different from what the reader tries to do in order to solve the crime in a fair-play mystery, or indeed from what the reader of a classic novel of character does in trying to create a mental model of a personality: Is Mr Darcy standoffishly proud, or just shy and sensitive? Deep down, does Raskolnikov see himself as a superman risen above commonplace human morality, or as a wretched sinner?

Third, although Robb is not aiming at social commentary in her work to the degree that would be normal in genre SF, she does seem to have introduced at least an element of it. Some aspects may represent aspirations for Robb and her largely female readership, such as the state salaries paid to 'professional mothers' (mothers who stay home to raise children), or the depicted equal, or even majority, representation of women in professions embodying power or high prestige: the police, attorneys, judges, doctors, journalists, etc. The depicted lifespan extension, which implies that most current readers will still be alive in 2060, may represent another aspiration. Changes in the international order generally look positive, at least to those who see globalisation as a good thing. (See 'J. D. Robb's future' for a few additional details.) The depicted easy immigration from Western Europe to the US, and vice versa, and the absence of any depicted new wave of low-skilled immigrants from impoverished Third World countries may also please Robb's target audience. On the other hand, Robb's imagined future is clearly no utopia. Some of the depicted changes are clearly for the worse (coffee and chocolate are rare and expensive; the struggle against terrorism has given rise to a Frankenstein's monster within the US government). Other changes would individually please liberals, or libertarians, or conservatives, but not all three groups at once. They probably represent pure extrapolation of current trends rather than aspiration. On another tack, Robb may be aiming for humour or mild shock value in her depiction of how far the sexual revolution has gone by 2060. Perhaps readers who would find genre SF to supply an overdose of social speculation may still value the more moderate amount of it provided by Robb.

Fourth, the future setting frees Robb from the necessity of excessive research into current police practice, adherence to which is vital in the classic procedural. She obviously had to perform serious research in order to construct plausible extrapolations from current police procedure and jargon, but small details will be irrelevant 50 years hence. Indeed, beyond saving herself research time, Robb can deliberately introduce changes for artistic reasons, so long as they seem consistent with the posited overall background and with human nature.

Fifth, various posited changes in technology and law allow Robb to keep the story moving quickly, maintaining an exciting reading experience. Dallas's police-issue

unmarked car has limited capability of flight, and thus can jump over obstacles or over short sections of backed-up traffic. Dallas has broader legal powers than the present-day police, and even when search warrants are required, she generally can obtain them in a very streamlined fashion. She carries a 'master' that will unlock any normal residential door. (Evidently it both picks mechanical locks and enters an override signal for electronic ones.) She carries an automated sensor that can accurately determine the time of death of a fresh corpse. Almost all records are stored on the Net, where Dallas can retrieve them herself, or where at least the specialists in the Electronic Detection Division or, *in extremis*, Dallas's hacker husband, can hunt them down, much more quickly than tedious record-checking would require in today's world of paper records, mutually incompatible data bases, and private intranets deliberately kept off the internet.

Keeping your hero on the street

Sixth, the setting solves the problem of keeping a series setting constant despite the motion of the author and the readers in time. The artistic demands of the mystery genre often require that protagonists be held within a fairly narrow window of time when they are physically active and sexually attractive, and when (if in an institutional setting) they can be kept close to the action and not moved to administration or to a mandatory retirement at 20 years' service. Even in the movie-SF genre, the *Star Trek* franchise repeatedly had to come up with reasons why Admiral Kirk would step down from on high to take command of the *Enterprise* yet one more time.

Faced with this difficulty, some mystery writers cheat, by continually assuming a contemporary setting and an unageing protagonist and ignoring the inconsistencies this creates with earlier novels in the series. Others do allow their characters to age, coming up with Admiral-Kirk style rationalisations to permit hands-on investigations by now-senior officials, or having them retire and fight crime as private consultants. A third strategy is to allow what started out as a contemporary setting to morph into one set a few decades in the past. For Arthur Conan Doyle, it is (with a few exceptions) always the 1890s; for Sue Grafton, always the 1980s.

A narrow window

Robb's strategy is a variation on this last one. She has set herself even tighter time constraints than have Doyle or Grafton — Robb has publicly stated that she does not see the series as continuing past the point where Dallas has a baby, since Robb sees Dallas's current workaholic life-style as an essential element of the series. Although life expectancy has risen drastically in Robb's future world, this results mostly from a prolongation of middle and old age, not of youth. Dallas is already in her thirties and her biological clock is ticking. Robb probably realises that Dallas could, like Podkayne's mother, play for time by storing frozen ova or embryos, but I think Robb is unlikely to resort to such a device, since the story arc

requires that Dallas eventually heal into a better-rounded person. Within the story line, the delay in childbearing results not only from what Dallas sees as the centrality of her present work, but also from the need for her to overcome the effects of her abused childhood to the point where she feels herself capable of motherhood. Robb therefore must wedge the whole series into a few years. Fifteen years have passed in the real world since Robb started the series, but only three in Dallas's world.

Deep-draft ships and submerged rocks

Robb, however, evidently did not expect to keep writing the series for quite so long in real time as she has, and trouble is now looming, in the form of events that supposedly happened decades before 2060 but which are alluded to in the stories, and which in some cases form essential background for the described future.

For starters, people born in and shortly after 1940 are still alive in 2060, thanks to lifespan-extension techniques — and not as rare exceptions, but in such numbers that they frequently show up as characters in novels. This might have seemed acceptably plausible in 1995 when the series started, and when that 1940 birth cohort was 55. It looks somewhat dubious in 2010, when the cohort is 70 years old, and, barring an improbable real-world medical breakthrough, it will look even more dubious in 2020 when the cohort is 80. The problem is one with practical implications: Robb herself was born in 1950, and considering how many authors continue to work in their old age, she could easily still be writing in 2020.

A prudent future-building author would have decided, just in case a series did turn out to be a big success,

at least to nudge the initial birth cohort for life-extension up to 1950 or so. It was even less prudent to be so precise about the dating of various historical events that happened decades in the past as seen from 2060. One or two casually mentioned historical events have already failed to happen on schedule (such as a turn-of-the-millennium infrastructure collapse in New York City that forced the abandonment of entire neighbourhoods), and other events are coming up. I doubt that the US Supreme Court will declare the death penalty unconstitutional in 2017, and even more so I doubt that there will be five or more female justices on the Court at the time, as Robb seems to imply (*Glory in Death*, 1995, p. 287). The real obstacle, however, is going to be the Urban Wars (involving, among other things, massive fighting among street gangs in America and Europe, riots, and much destruction of housing). The Wars, repeatedly alluded to, are scheduled to start in the US before 2016 and to break out in Europe circa 2020. Robb really did not have to be so specific about the date and, if she was going to name one, could have made it a decade later without serious impact on her created world. However, once having set the historical timeline, she has stuck to it even in recent novels, meaning that her projected future is probably due soon for a blow to its verisimilitude.

My guess is that Robb will scorn any post-hoc fix-up and will instead follow one of two courses: either she will, before real-world 2016, wind the series up with the birth of Dallas's baby, or, like some recent genre science fiction authors who were similarly imprudent about dates, she will simply ignore the real world altogether and soldier on, pretending, as it were, that the series had been set from the beginning in an alternate timeline.

I intend to keep reading the series and to find out.

Patrick McGuire's note to the reader: The article below started off as paragraphs removed from my main article because they would have unbalanced it if they remained there. If I were writing an academic paper, I would have formatted this second article as an appendix to the first — but it should appear in the same issue as the main article.

2 J. D. Robb's future

This companion article is intended to amplify some points made briefly in my main article, 'J. D. Robb: Somehow it still works.' It is not meant to serve as a complete guide to the future depicted by J. D. Robb, and it is based on my having read only part of the series. It should, however, be sufficient to demonstrate that Robb's future is mostly self-consistent (despite a few glitches) and that it reaches the reader in the form of hints dropped here and there that must be assembled to form a whole. Robb's picture is more richly detailed in describing a single time and place than virtually any depiction in genre SF. As will be shown, Robb fails to think a few aspects through in the way that would be

expected of a contemporary genre-SF writer, and, as noted in the main article, she does make the mistake of being too specific about events happening long before the time of the story and within the time horizon of her own writing career. This last is in some ways a rookie mistake, but it is one that has been made by several respectable genre SF writers.

Below, page references are generally given only the first word of a work's title. See the list at the end for full titles and the editions used. The provision of page references for my statements is a bit inconsistent since I decided to write this article, and take notes from the Robb books, only after some of the novels had already

gone back to the library.

Lifespan extension and other medical developments

In Robb's future society, much is unchanged from today. One reason may be that many or most of us are still around. Expected lifespan has been extended to 120 years, and the treatment (unlike most of those posited in current SF) is effective on people who are already elderly. Both World-War-II babies and Boomers remain on the scene in 2060, probably exerting a conservative influence on the shape of society. Robb makes repeated explicit references to people who are well over 100 years old. *Salvation in Death* opens with the funeral of a man who died in 2060 at 116, and so was born in about 1944. In *Naked in Death*, in 2058, a man dies at 115 (p. 177), which puts his birth circa 1943. One might have expected the higher managerial niches in Robb's world to be dominated by Baby Boomers still determinedly gripping their power, but we see few indications of this — possibly one indication that Robb is not particularly interested in SF-style social extrapolation. (Although 120 is the usually quoted life expectancy, *Rapture in Death*, p. 113, instead puts it at 150. The latter figure may take into account projected future medical advances. *Origin in Death*, p. 203, indicates that one character with exceptionally favourable genes already has an expectation of 150 years, and that this is likely to be extended further with medical progress.)

Unlike the usual depiction in SF, Robb's life extension in itself brings little prolongation of youth, although there exist separate temporary, expensive, and incomplete treatments for retaining youthful appearance. Instead, the basic process extends a healthy middle and senior age. This somewhat resembles the situation in Heinlein's classic *Methuselah's Children*, where, among the Families, heredity grants a long lifespan but where separate cosmetic techniques had to be developed to retain youthful appearance. The techniques seem to be more thoroughly effective in Heinlein's future than in Robb's. In Robb's 2060, people in their fifties and up usually lack grey hair but sometimes choose to let their age show. Men sometimes permit themselves to go bald. It seems largely to be a choice of how much time and money individuals are willing to spend on cosmetic treatments. One woman, at 53, is characterised as 'still young but mature' (*Naked*, p. 189), and has recently embarked upon a career in licensed prostitution. Another woman in the same book is called 'middle-aged' at 60 (p. 123). A 78-year-old man, despite the facts that he has a 31-year-old wife and can expect to live another 40 years or more, has white hair, is called a 'rich old guy', and complains, 'I'm more than seventy. I'm fit, but I need my sleep' (*Imitation*, pp. 31, 78, 79).

Biosculpting and other medical techniques can supply a fit appearance, and evidently even the reality of physical fitness, but most people seem either to exercise the old-fashioned way or to remain in suboptimal shape. The artificial methods evidently are expensive and are distrusted even by many people who could afford them, such as Dallas and Roarke. Genuine exercise also con-

trols stress better. Virtual-reality techniques, which, for the wealthy, range even up to holorooms à la *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, make exercise more interesting by emulating beautiful natural settings or by incorporating motion into games.

Medical science has conquered most diseases widespread in 2010 other than the common cold. (This exception is actually fairly plausible, given the wide variety of viruses that all cause colds.) Deadly new diseases occasionally still crop up from natural or human-caused mutations. Physical trauma also can often be healed fairly quickly, with 2010 spans of months reduced to weeks. A recovering patient still needs physical therapy, but probably less of it than in 2010, since presumably there has been less time for muscle to atrophy. Unlike the situation in some genre SF, no resurrection technology exists. Death is permanent.

Police technology

Information technology has become so pervasive that almost any investigation requires close coordination with the experts in the EDD. In the first book in the series, this abbreviation is expanded as Electronic Detection Division (*Naked*, pp. 4, 229), which still strikes me as the most appropriate-sounding expansion and which indeed is the one used in the glossary at Robb's website. In subsequent books, however, EDD generally becomes the Electronic Detective Division, but sometimes, even within a single novel, also the Electronic Detectives Division, and at least once even the Electronics Detective Division (*Midnight*, p. 36). Robb could use better copy editors.

Police computers come with a program that provides the investigator with a probability estimate, on the basis of evidence so far, that a given person is the perpetrator, that a given item is the murder weapon, etc. Dallas seems to think that these estimates are worthwhile, since she repeatedly queries for them, but, like the various probabilities provided by Spock on *Star Trek* (their likely prototype), in any given Robb story, the outcome generally turns out to be one that the police-computer estimates considered improbable.

American society in 2060 has proven willing to trade privacy for security. Communications devices routinely record all calls, and almost every residence is equipped with security cameras. These generally record images onto discs, but technically savvy murderers routinely remove the discs after a crime. Finally, well into the series, at least some security systems are upgraded to store a backup record that also seems to be located on-site, but in a hardened area so that it is more difficult for criminals to physically remove it. It can still be trashed by viruses. An obvious improvement (obvious to genre SF writers and readers, if not necessarily to Robb and her target audience) would be to store the images off-site on a write-once medium (to prevent remote trashing). It is not clear why this is not done. Granted, a countermeasure would be to cut physical lines or jam radio signals, but that could be made difficult (buried cables, spread-spectrum radio transmission), and a lost signal from a residence could generate an alarm in itself, per-

haps in time to save lives. Robb, unlike genre SF authors, may not be in the habit of thinking through the technological implications of depicted developments. In any case, despite all the technological precautions, there still seem to be a lot of murders in New York City; some are investigated at the precinct level, besides the ones that Dallas and coworkers take on from central headquarters. It is not clear that the privacy tradeoff has turned out to be a wise bargain.

The main legitimate purpose of a spray product called Seal-It seems to be for detectives and technicians to use on themselves to keep from contaminating crime scenes with fingerprints or with skin cells and hairs bearing their DNA. Unfortunately, its sale appears to be unregulated, so that criminals have no trouble obtaining it and avoiding shedding DNA in the first place. Even worse, a thin coating of Seal-It is not easily noticed, so that a potential victim may not even realise a murderer is wearing it. The obvious countermeasures would seem to be to regulate Seal-It's distribution and to mix it with some agent, such as a bright dye, that would warn that someone has a coat of Seal-It on. Unlike Robb, a genre-SF author would be expected to provide an explanation of why this is not done. Does Seal-It have widespread alternative uses for the general public? Is it easy to synthesise illegally? Is it available to the public because of some whimsical court ruling or piece of legislative chicanery?

In the 2060 US, for civilians, firearms firing bullets are legal only for licensed collectors, who are rare. The usual police weapon, generally just called a 'weapon', but sometimes referred to as a 'stunner', is a beam weapon that has the same effects as a *Star Trek* phaser — it can either stun or kill. Early in the series, Robb sometimes misleadingly calls it a 'laser' (e.g., *Naked*, p. 137) but she evidently quickly was informed that a laser could not produce the described effects and she dropped that term (later instead using 'laser' for a different, more plausible, laser weapon). Robb's technology is not quite up to *Trek* levels: the stun setting is much less effective. A hostage-taker credibly claims, 'Even if you stun me, I'll have time to slit his throat' (*Remember When*, p. 431). The stun may not work at all on someone exceptionally large, or jumped-up on certain drugs, or wearing a protective vest. (This last may be an inconsistency, because we do see instances of stunning an extremity, so defence would seem to require a full protective suit.) When a stun setting fails or would be unreliable, it may be necessary to kill an attacker. As in *Star Trek*, switching to the 'kill' setting is generally referred to as putting the weapon 'on full' (e.g., *Remember When*, p. 431). Weak stunners, lacking the 'kill' setting, can be licensed to civilians but do not seem to be particularly common. In contrast to an availability of illegal drugs that seems similar to 2010, firearms and lethal beam weapons ('blasters', 'lasers', full-power stunners) are not easy for criminals to acquire illegally. Edged weapons, clubs, poisons, and homemade bombs generally serve instead.

Lie-detector technology has improved but has not been perfected. Truth Tests (capitalised) are uncomfortable but not dangerous (in contrast to, say, Asimov's 'psychic probes'). They seem to be somewhat more reliable than present-day polygraphs, but are still far from completely trustworthy. A defendant cannot be

required to take one, and they are not admissible in court. Defence counsels seem as a rule to advise clients against taking them, but in some situations the tests can serve to convince the police and the prosecution that a suspect is innocent (e.g., *Divided*, p. 143).

Technology in everyday life

The AutoChef is a ubiquitous food-preparation gadget. In well-to-do homes, AutoChefs are placed in multiple rooms, wherever someone might want a meal or a snack. They must be loaded with ingredients, and cannot preserve food indefinitely. Before Dallas's marriage, the downmarket machine in her apartment proves to be stocked with stale bagels (*Glory*, p. 59). In the workplace, AutoChefs seem about as common as 2010 office refrigerators for bag lunches. Full kitchens are not uncommon in homes, since many people enjoy traditional cooking as a hobby. 'AutoChef' really should have been lower-cased ('autochef'), since it almost certainly is a generic designation. No other brand name or generic term is ever used for similar equipment; hence the analogy should be 'coffee maker', not 'Mr Coffee'. An 'autochef' (lower-cased) appears in Heinlein's *Methuselah's Children*. Also compare 'autopilot' or a science-fictional 'autodoc'. In the real world, even brand names turned into generic terms (a declining practice thanks to eagle-eyed trademark enforcement) are lower-cased: aspirin, zipper. (A word pull in Google Book reveals many 'autochefs' in works by SF writers in addition to Heinlein, and even a number of capitalised AutoChefs in genre SF; I have no easy way of determining if those last were depicted brand names, or, as with Robb, odd-looking generics.)

'Droids' are mechanisms made with the external look and feel of humans or animals. Animal droids mostly function as pets. The humanoid ones can serve as domestic servants, hotel desk clerks, waiters, sex partners, etc. High-end droids appear very capable, and can function as security guards, motorcycle couriers, nurses of very sick patients, nannies who can reliably escort children on a short trip, or translators in important business negotiations. Even mid-level droids can freely converse with humans. Yet all droids are said to be non-self-aware and are regarded as mere machines. A comparison might be positronic robots as presented in most of Asimov's stories (Asimov of course displays a different attitude in his later works). An important distinction is that Robb's droids are restrained by nothing approaching the safeguards of Asimov's Three Laws. Criminals seem to have little trouble in hacking around whatever safety measures are built in, so that droids serve as accessories in a number of murders and other crimes (e.g., *Creation*, pp. 313–14). Granted, no droid has actually done the killing in any case I have encountered so far, and a droid will, if interrogated, provide the police with a complete account of its activities, unless the criminal wipes its memory first.

I would find Robb's droids to be more plausibly non-self-aware if they were not entrusted with some of the jobs we see them performing. A genre-SF author might also have raised philosophical questions as to

whether it is psychologically healthy to use as quasi-slaves machines that look and act as if they were self-aware, even if they really are not. In any case, despite the capability of droids, restaurants, even inexpensive ones, often still hire human waitstaff, and some human domestic servants still find jobs. Droids are probably expensive enough to make their economic advantage small, so that it is sometimes outweighed by superior human skills or by the additional prestige of employing humans. Similarly, human Licensed Companions (prostitutes) are common, whereas Robb only occasionally alludes to sex droids.

As with droids, interaction with normal computers is mostly by voice. The procedure is strongly reminiscent of *Star Trek* (one often starts a command with 'Computer', and the machine, once it has started a task, responds, 'Working'), but Robb could plausibly respond that the computer designers have indeed taken *Trek* as their model, just as the real-world launch countdown derives from the early SF movie *Die Frau im Mond*.

Global warming seems not to be a major concern in 2060, although related climate change may be part of the reason for the depicted shortages of some foods. Evidently no serious flooding from sea-level rise has taken place. New York City winters seem to be as cold in 2060 as in 2010. Intriguingly, Roarke Industries is said to have 'a bigger budget than Greenland' (*Divided*, p. 216). Making Greenland a standard of comparison implies that it has become rich indeed by its 2010 standards. (Per the 2008 *World Almanac* citing the US Census Bureau, Greenland's 2007 population was 56,000, and its projected 2050 population was only 57,000.) Perhaps Greenland has profited from global warming one way or another: farming? fishing? exporting fresh water?

Fossil fuel appears not to be much employed. When a dead body is found cremated with gasoline (to delay identification), a detective is surprised at this extravagant use of an expensive substance, but gasoline still powers some equipment on construction sites (*Remember When*, pp. 277, 364).

Transportation

For some reason (perhaps Robb's desire to induce a little cognitive estrangement), in 2060 cars are usually called 'vehicles', 'units', or some other circumlocution, but aside from not using fossil fuel, they are functionally not much changed from 2010 cars. They still mostly drive on surfaces, although parts of New York City, and presumably other large cities, do have multilevel streets. When she has sky above her, Dallas can 'go vertical' with her unmarked police car, raising it far enough to fly over passenger cars, although she still has to manoeuvre horizontally around buses and trucks. Some privately owned vehicles (such as limousines and a hearse in a described funeral procession) can do the same thing, but most private cars cannot. Robb never describes the technology, but it is likely some primitive form of antigravity, since no unfolding of wings or rotors is involved and since flight seems to create no downwash on vehicles only a few feet below Dallas's car. The capability is useful for jumping over obstacles or stalled traffic, but not for

prolonged operation. Street vending carts are called 'glide carts' and apparently utilise a similar technology, and 'glides' have replaced escalators and people-movers (moving sidewalks). Conversely, artificial gravity may also exist, since 'gravity boots' are sometimes used on orbital habitats (*Immortal*, p. 128). Every so often (e.g., *Glory*, p. 14; *Origin*, p. 178), it is indicated that cars can drive themselves on automatic, but in other scenes Dallas asks someone else to drive so that she can make calls, nap, or can work on her computer en route. This is probably an inconsistency, but Robb might respond that even with the car on automatic it is better to have a driver watching the road, ready to override if necessary.

In Robb's future, 'blimps' flying fairly close to the ground are widely employed both for advertising and for sight-seeing. Considering how economically marginal and how weather-dependent lighter-than-air craft are today, one wonders if, despite their name, Robb's craft embody new technology of some sort. 'Shuttles' are used both for point-to-point travel on Earth (somewhat faster than 2010 passenger planes, but still requiring enough travel time that being in another city often serves as a valid alibi) and to reach space habitats, but to date I have encountered no description of how they work. Trans-Atlantic travel seems not much cheaper than today, since two adequately paid New York police officers have to save up money in order to pay a Christmas visit to relatives in Scotland. A couple of novels mention 'planes' as a normal mode of transportation for the rich. The same sort of craft is called a 'jet' in at least one novel (*Kindred*, p. 215). Roarke also has a small helicopter.

Most space habitats seem to be in Earth orbit, but some of these, such as the Omega high-security prison habitat, appear to be built out of relocated asteroids. There are colonies, evidently small, on Mars. Roarke is characterised, flippantly, as owning 'approximately twenty-eight per cent of the world and its satellites', where 'world' means Earth (*Naked*, p. 52). The wording suggests that most human activity is still concentrated on Earth and in Earth orbit.

Confusingly, particularly in early novels, we also encounter references to such things as an 'intergalactic' call (*Immortal*, p. 162) and to the 'Galactic Customs' bureau (*Immortal*, p. 196). In a shorter series, one might have guessed that Robb was deliberately holding a narrow focus for a while, in order to widen it with shock effect later, as with John Varley and the Nine Worlds series or J. K. Rowling and the Harry Potter books, but novels near the end of Robb's series present the same picture of only limited activity beyond Earth orbit, so any future sudden jump in perspective seems unlikely. The more plausible explanation is that Robb started out astronomically clueless and merely understood 'galactic' as a science-fictional word having something to do with outer space. The first book in the series seems to confirm this, since when contacted by 'intergalactic link' (*Naked*, p. 196), Roarke turns out to be on a space station with a clear view of Earth out the viewport. Later in the series Robb does, however, make repeated references to Roarke as an 'interplanetary' entrepreneur, and at least once mentions an 'Interplanetary' police authority of some sort. This seems rather grandiose terminology if human presence off Earth is limited to space habitats

and small Mars colonies. A genre SF author probably would have been clearer both in her own mind and in her exposition.

Nutrition

In Robb's future, the American diet continues the existing trend down the food chain toward the vegetable. A sandwich filling is referred to as 'pretend-it's-turkey', although most Americans can still manage a real turkey for Thanksgiving Day. The vendors with the glide carts routinely serve soy dogs, soy burgers, and even, oddly, soy fries. Stores sell bags of 'soy chips'. The potato is one of the most efficient vegetables to cultivate, so if there is any rationale for soy fries and chips, it would be to combine soy beans, or soy-bean genes, with potatoes to boost the latter's protein content so that the food could serve as a healthy main dish — but instead we see soy fries eaten as a side dish along with soy burgers. Robb may again be failing to think things through the way a genre SF writer would.

The vegetarian new cuisine might be healthier than the 2010 diet, but it seems to be eaten instead mostly because it is cheaper. Dallas and her billionaire husband fairly frequently consume real meat, although he sometimes steers her to healthier fish, and most of Dallas's coworkers are happy to be carnivores when they have the opportunity to visit her home. Chocolate and coffee have been largely replaced by inferior substitutes, supposedly because of the degradation of tropical agriculture. Having married money, Dallas enjoys a steady supply of real coffee, much prized by herself and by her friends and coworkers. In *Innocent in Death*, a young middle-class wife can, barely, afford to add a bit of real chocolate to the packaged synthetic mix when she makes her school-teacher husband's daily drink of hot chocolate, but she conceals this loving extravagance from him, knowing he would disapprove.

Oddly, the coffee substitute is said not merely to taste worse, but to contain 'synthetic caffeine' that does not provide as effective stimulation as does the real caffeine in genuine coffee (e.g., *Ceremony*, p. 18). In actuality, caffeine can be obtained from a variety of plants. Tea, besides being a beverage in itself, serves as a source of caffeine for other applications, and has been grown commercially as far from the tropics as Russia's Krasnodar Kray, a region with a mild climate but at the latitude of Boston. In the US, tea used to be produced commercially in the Carolinas. Scarcity of caffeine would make such environments commercially viable once again. For that matter, it is hard to believe that by 2060 yeast or bacteria could not be gene-engineered to produce real caffeine in quantity. A genre-SF author, in contrast to Robb, would be expected to know such things, or to look them up.

Pepsi, distributed in 'tubes' rather than cans or bottles, shows up so often that I almost wonder if Robb has a product-placement deal with Pepsi-Cola. It would be one thing if it were merely Dallas's favourite soft drink, but it seems to be almost everyone else's as well, although Coke does get mentioned at rare intervals. Dallas consumes regular (sugar-containing) Pepsi for a

boost in alertness and energy. It still contains caffeine in 2060, and if the caffeine is of the 'synthetic' variety, Dallas has not complained of that in anything I have seen. In contrast to the survival of Pepsi and Coke, most 2060 soft drinks bear unfamiliar names. Smithwick, Guinness, and Harp brand beers also survive in 2060 (e.g., *Visions*, p. 195), as do some current brands of hard liquor.

Doughnuts can still be easily obtained in New York, and cops still love them, but they probably are expensive, no longer serving as daily cop fare, since a reporter brings a couple of boxes as gifts to secure a friendly reception whenever she has occasion to visit police headquarters. (She occasionally shifts to other baked goods.) The combination of nutritional tightness combined with uncomplaining making-do reminds me of Heinlein's *Farmer in the Sky* and much other 1950s SF, although rationing in Robb's future is strictly by price, not by ration points.

Money

US dollars are still in existence, and, oddly enough, still seem to have about the same purchasing power as circa 2010, despite 50 years of presumable inflation. The most likely explanation (assuming Robb even saw the problem) is that they are 'new dollars', and that at some point, in a currency reform, 10 or 100 old dollars became one new dollar, much as has happened with French francs and Russian roubles.

Golden Age science-fiction authors typically got around the inflation problem by positing a differently named unit of currency, traditionally the 'credit' (which by now has found its way even into Russian space operas). Robb's future has credits too, but they coexist uncomfortably with US dollars and with foreign currencies, including the 'Euro dollar'. In the glossary at Robb's website, credits are said to be plastic tokens used like coins. Characters often deposit them in vending machines. However, some credit tokens have values of hundreds of dollars, of no obvious vending use unless perhaps in slot machines. This does not, however, mean that dollars and other currency are now just electronic units of accounting, since it is mentioned of several robberies that both 'cash' and 'credits' were stolen, and since the word 'credit' is also used as a monetary unit, as in 'make a few credits on the side' (*Immortal*, p. 285) or 'thousand-credit words' (*Glory*, p. 257). I suspect that Robb made a continuity error at some point, forgetting and using dollars after she had started with credits, and then tried to rationalise her way out of it. I do not think she has really managed to do so. If a genre-SF author had made the same slip, I think she could have explained it away better. For instance, credits could be a new international currency being slowly phased in, or could be a quasi-monetary scrip and accounting unit used by an international consortium of banks, required for some payments but not legally valid for others.

International order

The first series book refers to a World Federation of Nations (*Naked*, p. 282). It seems to have more genuine power than the 2010 United Nations, but nation-states, or perhaps in some cases regional federations, still seem to be the major players. Robb evidently had forgotten about the Federation by the time she wrote *Imitation in Death* (2003), since in that novel the United Nations is back (e.g., pp. 32, 53), and a representation of UN Headquarters even appears on the cover of at least one edition of the novel. World Peace Day is a June holiday that is said to commemorate the end of the Urban Wars almost 40 years earlier (*Kindred*, p. 1), but Peace Day's name may imply that there have been no serious wars between nation-states since then. Terrorism, by contrast, is still a major concern. Dallas sees 'global' as well as 'the feds' as higher jurisdictions that might interfere with her cases. There are some hints of an 'interplanetary' authority higher than 'global', but these are vague and may not be self-consistent. According to *Imitation*, the UN membership includes 'nations throughout the world' plus 'recognized off planet factions' (p. 64). Dallas tries to have as little to do with higher echelons as possible, coordinating as necessary directly with foreign local police without bringing other authorities into it.

In continuation of a current trend, peace and increased global economic integration may have encouraged various localities to believe they can succeed on their own, independent of the nations that they form part of in 2010. Quebec is independent of Canada (*Naked*, p. 181). Northern Ireland evidently is independent of the UK and may, improbably enough, have joined the Republic — at least 'Freedom of the Six Counties Day' is celebrated by a parade in New York City and is regarded by a sentimentally Irish-nationalist Catholic Irish-American detective as a holiday worth celebrating (*Glory*, p. 259). Scotland and/or Wales show up in various lists (e.g., *Creation*, p. 47) otherwise including independent countries (and not involving soccer teams) and I first concluded that they had left the UK, as they have in various works by British science-fiction writers. However, Robb frequently also refers to 'Britain' and the 'British', so I now think it more likely that she is simply being more geographically precise about subdivisions of Britain than about the non-English-speaking world. Robb always uses 'Britain', never the 'UK' or 'United Kingdom'. This could be either stylistic avoidance of a term that sounds a bit bureaucratic to American ears or, more interestingly, a hint at some sort of political reform. Perhaps the Act of Union that created the UK has been amended, and the unitary British state has been replaced by a federation. In any case, secessionist movements have not triumphed everywhere: Barcelona, and hence likely all of Catalonia, is still part of Spain (*Origin*, p. 22).

Oddly enough in the face of globalisation, the 2060 US, outside of scientific contexts, still employs customary units rather than the metric system. This would constitute unusual conservatism in genre SF, where my impression is that most future-set US works have for decades used metric units. I suspect that the customary units constitute more of a concession by Robb to her mostly

American, scientifically ungrounded, core readership than they do a serious extrapolation.

The Urban Wars

The Urban Wars started at an unknown date in the US, but ended in 2016 (*Naked*, p. 267). They then flared up in Europe around 2020. As first described, they featured large-scale battles among street gangs accompanied by rioting, but as recounted in later books they looked more like the civil war in Beirut, with enormous destruction and loss of non-combatant life, and with volunteer medics often killed on the job. Robb gives us no indication of who, beyond street gangs, the contending parties were, what inspired such widespread insurrection in developed countries, or how it was allowed to go on for so long. Robb never mentions a connection to radical Islamism, and indeed her first references to the Urban Wars came at a time when Islamism did not bulk large in American consciousness. New York City emerged from the Wars without a lot of change obvious to a non-New Yorker, although Robb sometimes refers to fortress-like 'post Urban Wars' architecture or to residential front yards protected by 'riot walls'. In recent books, Robb has started to get slightly vaguer about the Urban Wars dates, but allusions still require the US portion of the Urban Wars to be finished before 2020. In 2060, New York still has slums and drug problems, but the police show no sign that they fear further riots or insurrection. On the other hand, an ingrained fear of falling back into chaos may lie behind the increased security measures in place in 2060. The 'Homeland Security Organization', which originated in the fight against terrorism, is by 2060 a law unto itself, more like the KGB in 1985 than like MI5 or anything in the 2010 US (except perhaps in some of Hollywood's most paranoid imaginings).

US cities besides New York

The major city on the West Coast is now New Los Angeles. I have encountered no explanation of what happened to old Los Angeles, but my guess would be the Big One (the anticipated major earthquake), since numerous other large cities are still in place. Characters seem to travel a lot to Chicago in particular. Las Vegas still functions as a popular gambling resort, although it faces competition from offplanet resorts including Vegas II. Philadelphia is still known for cheese steaks.

The capital of the United States is 'East Washington'. It is clear even in the first series novel that East Washington is located about where Washington, DC, presently lies, and that many of the landmarks and streets have the same names. Initially I was pondering a disaster scenario (perhaps a small terrorist nuke), with the government buildings and the public monuments rebuilt to the east in adjacent Prince George's County, Maryland. It finally struck me that the more likely explanation was that the capital district has been raised to statehood, and named 'East Washington' to distinguish it from present-day Washington State on the West Coast. (For the benefit of non-US readers, I will point out that there is already a

movement for statehood among residents of the capital district. Although small in area, the District of Columbia, now coextensive with the city of Washington, has more inhabitants than some US states.)

Social changes

The sexual revolution has moved forward, without much sign of the pendulum swing in the opposite direction that one might have expected after 50 years. However, one early sign of such a swing might be the institutionalisation of formalised, legal cohabitation as a preliminary or alternative to marriage — although formal cohabitation has not completely displaced more informal arrangements. Similarly, prostitution is legalised but licensed and regulated, and arrests for solicitation without a licence seem to be fairly common. There exist 'Licensed Companions' or 'LCs' (prostitutes) who cater to all gender combinations, but by far the most common are female prostitutes catering to men. Attitudes toward prostitutes vary, with some people displaying distaste or disapproval and others acceptance, or even, in the case of the high-end LCs, admiration, a range of attitude similar to that depicted in the Joss Whedon SF TV series *Firefly* (which aired in 2002, so that any influence ran outward from Robb's books). Gay marriage is legal, but Robb shows us relatively few examples of gay married couples.

There are also licensed beggars in New York City (*Divided*, p. 310), another application of the principle of permitting activities and regulating them rather than trying to eliminate them completely.

'Professional mothers' (engaged in full-time care of their own children) receive a salary from the state (suggesting either a perceived need to bolster the birth rate or a belief that home-raised children are much better socialised than day-care kids). 'Professional fathers' (househusbands) also exist (e.g., *Imitation*, p. 119), but are rarer. The parenting salary is not princely, but is high enough to support a middle-class lifestyle, so the practice would seem to lend itself easily to the sort of abuses that led to US welfare-reform requirements for 'workfare' late in the twentieth century. Robb has not much explored this possibility for misuse in anything I have read yet, although she mentions a few highly dysfunctional professional parents. She does depict abuses of the foster-care system, which latter seems not greatly changed from today.

Soft narcotics are legal, and many new over-the-counter drugs have been marketed for recreation or convenience (euphorics, stimulants, safe and improved painkillers and tranquillisers, hangover cures), but a strong market for illegal narcotics remains. These are mostly post-2010 designer drugs that are strongly addictive, harmful to the user's health, and/or injurious to the user's self-control in a way dangerous for the public or for the user. A tobacco smoker can register as an addict, and will receive both a tobacco ration and mandatory anticancer treatments. Alcohol is widely imbibed, and no more regulated than in 2010. There exist medicines to sober up an intoxicated person instantly, but they have unpleasant side effects and are not commonly used.

Demographics

From what we see, some sort of shift in employment demographics has made the New York Police and Security Department rather over half female. (Despite this, a woman cop in one book asserts that the NYPD is in majority male (*Imitation*, p. 131).) Notwithstanding the subtraction from the outside workforce of professional mothers, and of a few women without small children who choose to be homemakers even without a government salary, women also seem to be very well represented in all other professions.

More people of mixed race seem to be around in 2060's New York City than in 2010's, or at least there are more people described as 'mixed race' rather than being shoehorned into another designation. New York City still has slums, and they still seem to be largely inhabited by black people and Hispanics. For these ethnic groups, the situation is certainly no worse than in 2010 (we also see many middle- and upper-class blacks and Hispanics, including some of Dallas's bosses) and may be somewhat better, but social progress has evidently been disappointingly slow. Perhaps it has been retarded by the Urban Wars. No new ethnic groups appear to have arrived in large numbers, although evidently some arrangement for free immigration to the US from at least Western Europe has gone into force. Dallas's billionaire Irish husband could easily have obtained a green card even today, but the parents of one of her detective coworkers are middle-class immigrants from Scotland (who moved back there circa 2055), and we see examples of people from England and Germany who moved to the US on nothing more than a whim and easily found legal jobs. On the other hand, Dallas threatens the proprietor of a maid service with bringing INS inspectors down on them (*Remember When*, p. 270). At least in 2010, INS expands to Immigration and Naturalization Service. If it still does in 2060, the explanation might be that immigration from poor underdeveloped countries is still restricted, in contrast to the situation with Western Europe (and perhaps other advanced countries).

Religions

The Catholic Church is still a powerful institution, and seems not too much changed from today, with a male and celibate clergy. Priests do seem to have somewhat more control than at present over where they will be assigned; if the 2010 priest shortage has persisted or worsened, possibly scarcity offers priests leverage. A change at least of political tactics may be suggested by the fact that the Catholic Church is not mentioned among the forces backing a socially conservative roll-back bill in Congress in *Naked in Death*. Robb, or at least her character Roarke, describes divorces with subsequent remarriage as discouraged by the Church, but permitted through 'dispensations' (*Glory*, p. 62). This could be an imprecise reference to the present-day annulment process, but it likely is not, since the author attended Catholic schools and presumably knows the correct terminology and the doctrine behind it, as presumably would Roarke from growing up in Ireland. It

therefore seems to represent a posited doctrinal change. In an early work (*Glory*, p. 75), Robb says that ‘some time in the last decade’, Catholic ritual reverted to Latin, as in a described funeral mass in New York’s St Patrick’s Cathedral. However, a scene set in a different funeral mass at the start of *Salvation in Death* (2008) quotes extensive sections of the mass in progress in English, a pretty clear inconsistency. In *Naked*, a Catholic bishop is found on the client list of a murdered female Licensed Companion (p. 183). By contrast, a priest first encountered in *Salvation* is mentioned positively in several subsequent novels. Several depicted detectives and police officers are Catholic, among them recurring secondary characters.

An evangelical revivalist preacher in *Salvation in Death* is described in contemporary-for-2010 and fairly stereotyped negative terms, although in a way that affords him some sympathy and recognises the good he is doing despite his faults. This revivalist, besides taking up a free-will offering, charges admission for entry to his revivals, which, as far as I know, is not a current practice.

Dallas’s aide and eventual partner Peabody was raised as a Free Ager, a new religion that seems to have emerged out of aspects of New Age and the hippie movement. Peabody sees herself as mostly lapsed, as evinced by the relish with which she eats meat when she gets the chance and in her general choice of an urban lifestyle and a police job. However, she remains on good terms with her family, since the Free Agers stress individual self-realisation.

Ceremony in Death (1997) centres on Wicca, depicted in a very positive light, and on Satanism (shown as profoundly evil, at least as regards the leaders of the specific depicted cult). Both the Wiccans and the Satanists are largely taken at their words as to the ancientness of their respective traditions. Robb does not delve into the contrary assertion that both were synthesised in the late nineteenth century and afterward out of patchy historical records bulked out by much imagination.

I have not yet noticed any observant Orthodox Christians, Mormons, Moslems, or Hindus in the books, nor even any unambiguous mainline Protestants, although several minor characters are Protestants of some unspecified sort. The medical examiner Li Morris is nominally Buddhist, but seems to be mostly non-practising. One might have expected religiously observant Jewish characters to show up in a series set in New York City (the New York metro area contains something like one-third of the US’s Jewish population), but, except for one glimpse of Hasidic Jews in a street scene, I have not noticed any observant Jews so far, although ethnic Jews do appear repeatedly in significant roles. To be sure, given the general US discomfort with talking casually about religion, special circumstances would have to apply for a character’s religious beliefs to come to light. Absent special dress, as with the Hasidim, for an affiliation to be known, a character would have to be a friend or close coworker of Dallas’s, or a crime would have to have a religious component, or the fact would have to emerge in the course of a serious investigation into a suspect’s background.

An example worth study

In the event that a genre-SF author had decided to concentrate for thirty-plus books on so narrow a section of space-time as has Robb, he or she probably would have gone about it a little differently, and would have handled some aspects of it more adroitly. On the other hand, few SF authors, and not always even the Golden-Age Heinlein, could have done better than Robb in avoiding the infodump and in building up a rich and generally self-consistent picture of society from hints dropped here and there as they become relevant to the plot of each book. For that reason, even if were no other ones, the Robb books, ‘romantic futuristic suspense’ though they are, would repay study by people whose central interest is genre SF.

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- Nora Roberts and J. D. Robb, *Remember When*, Putnam, 2003. (This book, written under both of Robinson’s major pseudonyms, combines a contemporary-set romance involving a diamond theft plus various murders with a future-set part where the last of the loot is recovered and more murders are solved. The future-set section comprises Part Two, pp. 223–440. In 2010 it was published separately as *Big Jack* by J. D. Robb.)

This lists only the Robb works cited in either ‘J. D. Robb: Somehow it still works’ or the present article, and indicates the edition that I actually saw and used for page citations. These are all US editions, but vary in format depending on what I could find available. The Putnams are hardcover, the Berkleys are paperbacks, and the Thorndike Presses are hardcover large-print editions. The titles of all works in the series end in ‘... in Death’, except for the novella that forms part of *Remember When*.

— Patrick McGuire, 2010



Feature letters

[*brg* The 'feature letters' usually appear after the other letters. However, Leigh Edmonds' letter — a mini-essay — demands first place in the column, so of course all the other feature letters should follow it, followed by the regular letters and WAHFs.

Leigh's letter could have appeared in *SFC 86*, but it didn't, because it introduces our correspondence about music that eventually appears in *Treasure 2*. But because it's a letter in response to an *SF Commentary*, it could hardly appear in *Treasure*, could it?*

Leigh Edmonds: Stories about stories about people

LEIGH EDMONDS
Ballarat East VIC 3350

SFC 83:

I'll tell you about what I did yesterday. Valma needed some treatment down in Geelong so we drove down around lunch time and, while she was in getting treated, I went for a walk. We spent a lot of time in Geelong while I was writing the Barwon Water history, but I didn't have the time just to stroll around. The place Valma went to was on Moorabool Street just near the railway line (if you know the area), so I walked all the way down to the river and then back up to the CBD, looking at all the interesting things there are to see. The most interesting is, of course, Cardinia Park, where the Geelong Football Club is based. From the way people talk about it you'd think that it was just the football ground, but there's also a swimming complex with a number of pools and other

ovals and sports grounds. So there's plenty to look at. Still, the football ground dominates the park so I walked round it, noting the way that past stars of the team have grandstands, gates, and rooms named after them. I recognised some of the names, but the only one I've met was 'Polly' Farmer, who came from Western Australia and was doing some work for Main Roads Western Australia while I was there. The highlight of the walk was a window in what they call the 'Premiership Stand'. The name of the stand made me wonder if there was a room in it where they kept their premiership cups, but no, they have them on display behind a window so that anyone who wanders past can see them. I expect that the glass is particularly thick so nobody who comes along can knock them off. This was such an unusual sight that I pulled out my camera to take a photo of it. From behind me comes the voice of a woman, 'Do you want me to take a picture of you standing alongside them', she asks. But I replied



something like 'No thanks, it would spoil the view.' Had I thought for a moment, I would have asked her to take the picture so you could have included it in *SFC* or some suitable publication.

While I was wandering along I was listening to the radio on my headphones. I always like to listen to the radio when I go somewhere, but it seems that Geelong gets Melbourne radio and so I found myself listening to the *Zero G* program on 3RRR, which appeared to be more or less about STF. One segment was about an upcoming OzHorror convention, which a couple of people I've never heard of chatted about. The only name of all those mentioned that I recognised was Lucy Sussex, who is, according to what they said, a big-name horror writer. Listening to that radio program just reminded me about how out of touch with the current scene I am.

Instead of driving back to Ballarat we stayed in Geelong overnight, at a rather flash hotel we used to stay at while working on that Barwon Water book. The only things I took along to fill in the evening were the two issues of *SFC* that you'd recently sent me and the latest issue of *Australian Economic History Review*. When it came to pull something out to read, *SFC* was bigger, so came out first. So I spent the evening munching on grapes, listening to Chopin on my iPod, and reading *SFC* 83. I admit that I didn't read every word, but I looked at every page and read all the bits that looked interesting to me.

Somewhere along the evening I had something of a revelation, it was probably when I was reading Guy Salvadge's contributions on Philip K. Dick. I'm reading along and I'm enjoying the bits where he talks about himself, or about PKD, but not enjoying the bits that recount plot lines, draw connections between Dick's work, or other analytic stuff. I then realised that I was experiencing the same when it came to reading other contributions. For example, I found the personal parts of commentary on Yvonne's comments about Connie Willis's book interesting, but not the commentary and

counter-commentary about the book itself. And as for Franz Rottensteiner's comments about Stanislaw Lem, very yummy gossip indeed.

I drew from this the explanation as to why I've been a fannish (even faaanish) fan and not really a sercon fan. What I enjoy is stories about people, places, and things, not stories about stories. This may also explain why my own writing has taken a turn towards history, which is a form of story telling about people, places, and things, and the reasons for things happening. I've also enjoyed reading science fiction because it is made up of stories, but reading stories about those stories has not attracted me. I wonder why? But it does explain, to my satisfaction at least, why I have preferred fanzines that told stories about fans and their exploits to fanzines that told stories about science fiction. Perhaps this also explains why, when I had the opportunity to go to university, I chose units in history, political science, and sociology, which tells stories about people and what they did and do, in preference to courses in literature, which, I assume, tell stories about stories. I recall that, as we were about to leave Perth, I went to a lecture in a course on science fiction being run at Murdoch Uni. What I found most interesting was that the literature that had been looked down upon only a couple of decades earlier now warranted an entire's semester of discourse at a tertiary institution. I wondered why people were there listening to people talk about sf, rather than reading the literature itself. Still, I can understand how people want to talk to each other about the reading that they enjoy so much, and getting to run university courses on it must be a real bonus for fans of the genre.

Having said that, there were two parts of *SFC* that I feel compelled to comment on. One was the list of 100 favourite novels. Even though I haven't read an sf novel for over a decade I'd still read more than half of those on this list, and agreed with 47 of them. I too am not a McCaffrey fan, but I did like *Barefoot in the Head* more than some of the Aldiss listed here, agree with the Priest inclusions, and wouldn't have put so much Silverberg on my list. Clifford Simak's *Way Station* is also a book that I would have put on my list, had I made one.

The other thing that took my imagination was Murray MacLachlan's discussion of *Star Wars* and the population of the galaxy. For some reason best known to my subconscious, I've found myself pondering about the political structure of Asimov's galactic empire, and this relates to Murray's discussion of how the *Star Wars* galaxy is administered, and how the public understanding of that is managed. So far as I recall there's not much about this in Asimov's books, but I've been wondering about how an ordinary citizen of the galaxy, one among trillions, relates to the system of administration under which he or she lives. Murray assumes, I assume, that ordinary citizens have a direct and personal interest in the governors (for want of a better word) of their section of the galaxy and care to know about the intimate details of their lives. I wonder whether this does make sense, and to what level of interest most citizens would show an interest. I suppose this would also depend on the amount of media management governors or emperors cared to exercise. I'm reminded, from my research into the Australian Tax Office, that for decades most of the tax

officers in state capitals sort of assumed that the person who sat in the wood-panelled office in the wood-panelled corridor on the top floor was the top person in the tax office, little knowing or caring that the people in those offices answered to another person in an office in Canberra. Do you know if anyone has written about galactic empires from this point of view; bottom up rather than top down?

Anyhow, enough of serconism for one email. I will take *SFC* 84 with me on our sea voyage to Tasmania this coming Friday. So far it looks interesting too.

(15 January 2013)

[*brg* I've always said that discussions about fiction in *SF Commentary* can be best described as 'personal journalism' — writing that is as much about the writers and readers of the reviews or criticism as about the fiction itself. But perhaps I'm deluding myself. I do know that whenever I try to publish fanzines such as *Treasure*, which deals with all the things I'm interested in other than SF or fantasy, I don't receive the same response as I get for *SF Commentary*. I do receive as many long articles for *Treasure* as for *SFC*, but not the same numbers of letters of comment or short articles.*]

SFC 87:

Egoscanning *SFC* 87, I see that I prattled on a lot about this history of fandom I have in mind. At the moment I'm working my way through the draft of a massive history of Australian civil aviation that I wrote a decade ago and turning it into something readable, a project that will take me another year or two. When *SFC* 87 arrived I was in the process of using Trove to check up on the origins of gliding in Australia. I entered the phrase 'gliding club' into Trove for a date range from 1929 to 1932 and came up with 16 pages of entries, which tell me that the first modern glider flight occurred in Geelong on 5 August 1929, and has lots of delicious details after that.

With my computer looking at Trove I was distracted and typed in the phrase 'science fiction' to see what was there. There were over 160 pages of entries, and the first one was for 1852, but when I looked closely I saw there was a comma between 'science' and 'fiction' in advertisements for bookshops. I wonder if this was some kind of Freudian slip or precognition before science fiction was completed.

After a while I got bored, so I added 'club' to 'science fiction' and got less than a page of entries. The first one was in the *West Australian*, remarking on the Berkley Elves, Gnomes and Little Men's Science Fiction Club laying claim to 75 miles of the surface of the moon. The final entry was a 1992 entry about a convention held by the Australian National University Science Fiction Club.

After that I got more adventurous. 'Science Fiction Commentary' got no entries, 'Australian Science Fiction Review' got one, 'Science Fiction Convention' got a page or so, beginning with entries about the Berkley club's announcement of its claim, which was apparently made at a science fiction convention. A more fruitful attempt, 'science fiction fan', turned up a few entries about SF movies, and then a lot of entries that used the term in the context of the written word. I then noticed that most

of these entries appeared in *The Canberra Times*, for the obvious reason. Finally I thought I'd look up 'Bruce Gillespie'. It turns out that there was a jockey with that name in the 1920s, and then your name turns up a few times in more recent times, again strangely in *The Canberra Times*.

(25 March 2014)

[*brg * I didn't know about Trove, but will keep it in mind if ever anybody commissions me to do some Australian historical research. Sounds like a great tool.

There would be few entries with my name in *The Age* files, except a little piece by Stuart Sayers that included my photo in 1983, and my review of Brian Aldiss's *Forgotten Life*, the only review I ever scored in *The Age*. That's probably in 1989 or 1990.

I have the cuttings for both buried in a dusty old file somewhere, but now I'm having trouble locating even the dusty old files. There's so much dusty new stuff piled up on top of them. However, I did some cleaning up the other day, and threw out the equivalent of two giant wheelie bins of old paper. This gets me back to ten file copies of everything I've published, if I still have as many copies as that. For most of the fanzines I most value, of course, I have only one copy. They are the Gillespie publications people are most likely to ask after.*]

If only research was as easy as using Google. Sadly, the interweb is really only good for researching things in the past decade or so, before that there are few attempts to write history of what happened earlier, usually written by not-so-gifted amateurs. Trove gives access to hundreds of old Australian newspapers that can be searched by word. We all know how unreliable newspapers can be, but they are all that remains from the past that is of any use.

To test the idea that Google might be useful I typed in 'gliding australia historic' (which is about the best word combination to find out what happened in gliding in Australia in the past) and the best I got was a lot of stuff about the history of hang gliding and several entries about the gliding museum. Not very useful. On the other hand, Trove sent me right to the beginning of gliding in Australia, and although the research will take me a day or so, it should give me a pretty good view of what happened, even though it was filtered through the eyes of journalists and editors. And all this to write only a paragraph or two on the subject.

This kind of research is the drudgery that historians get used to, and I'd best get on with it.

(26 March 2014)

Sadly, *The Age* has yet to be included in Trove, and also nothing yet from *The Australian* or the *Australian Financial Review*. We can only hope that they will be included one of these days.

The delights of throwing out paper! Apart from about ten boxes of letters and a stack of my old fanzines I've managed to get rid of almost all the paper I had. When my previous printer died I went out and bought one that is also a scanner, a double sided scanner at that. All I had

to do was put a stack of papers in the in-tray, push a couple of buttons on the computer and wander off to make a cuppa or some such. When I return the papers have been strewn all over the floor (which reminds me of watching you furiously cranking your duplicator with the pages of the next *SFC* floating, fluttering about like large flakes of snow) and I push a few more buttons on the computer and what was in the in-tray has been converted into a nice PDF file in my computer. The pages on the floor can then be picked up and put in the re-cycling bin with no (well, few) regrets. And what a tidy room I have as a result.

(27 March 2014)

The scanner/printer I bought was an Epson WF-3520, which I bought at Officeworks for something like \$150, maybe a little more. The scanner is quite adequate for my purposes, but it does have the limitation of doing double-sided scanning only in A4. The software is excellent, and allows you to scan in several ways (so you can scan quarto pages manually) and scans up to 600 dpi and more in black and white, greyscale, and colour and, if you are saving as a PDF, to change between formats while scanning so the final PDF can have different page sizes and colour and black and white, etc. I bought this machine mainly for its size and discovered all these other features later, so you might want to do a little research before buying. We bought Valma an A3 scanner and printer for under \$300, which might be better, but I don't know about that since I don't use it.

(28 March 2014)

I do enjoy your lists but I always wonder where you get the time to read all those new books, see new films, etc, etc. I don't read any new fiction or listen to new records and so on, because I don't have the time for them. This means that I am dreadfully behind the times in many areas of culture, but that's life. When it comes to music I do most of my listening to classical music (whatever that means) on the ABC, and I do this mainly because it introduces me to a lot of music that I would otherwise never hear. For example, at the moment the ABC is playing me Bach's *St John Passion*, which I realise I've never heard before.

[*brg* The long discussion between Leigh and me about music, especially ABC Classic FM programs,

can be read in *Treasure 2*, October 2014.*]

The only things that I could ever produce a best-of list for is new scale model plastic kits, because that's about all I buy, and I don't buy many of them these days because I have more than enough to last me for the coming half century. While passing through Melbourne last Wednesday I picked up the new Airfix 1/72 Messerschmitt Bf110C, which has been getting really good reviews in the modelling press and websites and looks excellent, with lots of fine detailing. I already have a Bf110 kit that I could make, but it's a Bf110G, and I have some nice French decals that I want to use on a Bf110, and that has to be a C model. I will probably get rid of the G at a swap and sell or on eBay if I every get around to figuring that out. I'm sure that this kind of thing would not make for interesting lists in *SFC*.

I did enjoy your reprinting of that list of most popular Australian music. As you say, the list must mainly come from a generation later than us. Who are these people anyhow? 'Boys in Town', which is far and away the best thing that the Divinyls ever did, is not on the list. And where are the Jets and the Screaming Jets? How am I supposed to take that list seriously, or do I just have unusual tastes?

Paul Kelly's work would not be on my list even, though his work is very nice and reeks of Melbourne. I do have an EP of Paul Kelly and the Dots that I bought just before we left Melbourne in '79 because 3CR was playing it a lot, but perhaps I've spent too much time out of Melbourne to identify with his work as much as people who live there.

I did enjoy your recounting of the Melbourne SF Club move. It reminded me of the time sometime in the late 1960s when a working bee spent a weekend doing some work to create the passageway on the first floor of Somerset Place so we could walk up the two flights of stairs rather than have to use the hydraulic lift. The main thing I recall is not the work, but that it was dusty, dirty work and the showers at the place I was staying were not working.

Now Bruce, you are a very bad boy. Before your email arrived I was working away on the significance of a 1943 report on the future of civil aviation in Australia, and you've distracted me from it. More self-control, that's what I need.

(18 April 2014)

Greg Benford: There's still room for hard SF

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It's pleasant to see so much of Zebrowski's critical thought because he's always big on fundamentals vs.

fashion. Indeed, wish fulfilment is common in SF and largely rules fantasy (except for horror-and-court intrigue, à la *Game of Thrones*). Given this, it's crucial that wishes should lead us somewhere — a revelation of what they imply, maybe, or realisations of how our desires might gain or lose in the future. In this sense dystopias

are easy; utopias very hard. Even portraying how technologies can extend our reach has the seeds of destruction, when we overreach.

Media SF like *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* et al. have given SF the mass market we once longed for (and whose type we didn't foresee back there in the 1950s), but in the slow evolution of film SF there's surely hope, since 2013 gave us *Her*, *Gravity*, and *Europa Report*, and early 2014 *Under the Skin*, all arguably B+ or better films, and *Her* was surely one of the best of the year.

Luckily, there's room for hard SF still. Fantasy dominates the market by more than 100 times the sales, but I never expected better, after the arrival of mass Tolkien worship.

George Zebrowski's focus on Clarke extracts solid examples. I too think the 'Odyssey' novels show great range, though they decline in quality as Clarke's ability to grasp complex ideas slowly eroded. (On my second and last visit to him in Sri Lanka he could not remember a guest, a friend of mine, who had been there the day before. He was surprised to see his own notes from mere hours ago in his diary.) His deceptively simple style has a lyric beauty paralleling the large ideas. Some dislike this; Silverberg told me he thought Clarke a bad writer generally. (Maybe not enough adverbs?) Still, Clarke is far easier for most readers than Stapledon, who nonetheless grows in stature steadily. They're both unique. (I learned much from both, but never tried to echo their style, even when writing the sequel to *Against the Fall of Night* (possibly still his best work), the novel *Beyond Infinity*.)

He's similarly insightful on Kornbluth, a writer whose intelligence came through crisply, toughened by his own experience.

Your own puzzled summary of Russ's work is well taken. I knew her well (she was not a lesbian), and the easily seen conflicts within her drove her fiction more than nearly any writer I can think of. (Dean Koontz is another.) Her decline was a sad trajectory.

(7 June 2014)

[*brg* At his best, Arthur Clarke was the poet of SF, because he fulfils one of my criteria for poetry: to say as much as possible in as few words as possible. I remember *Rendezvous with Rama* as having a luminous quality — but I haven't reread it since it appeared.

Thanks for the reaction to my Russ article, which is hanging out there waiting to be knocked about by other commentators.*]

I liked Ditmar's little piece on Planck units. His conjecture that the Planck length and time units describe the minimum necessary to compute the universe is germane to the speculations that our universe is a computation. There are problems with the idea. Indeed, I sold a story to the journal *Nature* about this — attached if you want to reprint it.

Nick Bostrom has explored this idea, and there's a detailed article about how a physicist thinks this through: <http://www.npl.washington.edu/AV/altvw168.html>.

John Cramer doubts the idea holds water, as in his *Analog* column. Do we indeed live in such a simulation? It seems

to me that, contrary to Bostrom's arguments, the BDS work in itself rules out that possibility, simply on the basis of the physical size of the computer that would be required. Any lattice simulating our universe would be very large. The whole universe, with a diameter of about 10^{27} m, would have to be represented by the lattice. If the simulation extends only out to the Oort Cloud, a diameter of 10^{16} m would have to be included. Using the largest BDS minimum lattice spacing of about 10^{-23} m, this would mean that the simulation array for the universe would have to need about 10^{50} elements on a side, or 10^{39} elements on a side for the Oort Cloud simulation. Then each point on such a lattice would require the storage of some minimum number of bits, say 20, to represent its state.

How densely could such information be stored in some hypothetical post-human supercomputer? Let's extrapolate that the post-human supercomputer could be made of matter of nuclear density, say collapsed-matter neutronium, with the individual neutrons spaced 1 fm apart, and that each neutron could somehow store 20 bits of information. The universe simulation, even neglecting the time dimension and using a 3D cube rather than a 4D hypercube, would have to be a cube 10^{35} metres (or 6.7×10^{23} light years) on a side. The Oort Cloud simulation would have to be a cube 10^{24} metres (or 6.7×10^{12} light years) on a side. There is not enough matter in the universe to construct such an object, and if constructed it would immediately collapse into a giant black hole.

I conclude that not even Iain M. Banks' Culture could manage such a feat. Unless there is something in the BDS assumptions that that is so wrong that changes the ground rules by 20 or so orders of magnitude, there is no way that our present world could be a computer simulation.

My story asks, what if the simulation is only marginally good, for the reasons John describes?

Patrick McGuire's Strugatsky article, which he mentions here, is now in *NYRSF* and very good. It told me some facts I didn't know. When last in Moscow, I talked to some SF fans, including the most notable Strugatsky fan (whose mother was Gorbechov's personal secretary! — fans come from some high places in the ex-USSR). The odd Russian SF fandom in part comes from a culture in which the Soviet writers like the Strugatskys were unionised state employees. This seems to have suppressed any USA-style fan/prodom culture, and Russian fandom is only now emerging as one something like other countries'.

Must see the *Miss Fisher* series!

I wish I'd known Gian Paolo Cossato lived in Venice; I'd have looked him up when I was there again last year, before sailing to Istanbul. (He might try the drug my company developed for his neuro problems: <http://www.lifecoderx.com/memex100/> It's performing well in our human trials under FDA.)

Steve Sneyd: Phil Dick got 'kipple' from Myriam Knight, Terry Carr's first wife, who used it to describe the debris that stacks up in our homes.

Ridley Scott never read beyond the first chapter of Phil's novel, by the way, so couldn't be following it. Neither did the screen writer, Phil told me.

Steve Jeffery: Dirac was no monster, just terribly shy. I wrote about him in my *Trap Door* piece several years back. He was very polite and careful.

Let me know if *Foundation* magazine gets interesting

again! The UC libraries no longer carry it. Odd, since it was a useful sedative ...

(10 June 2014)

Doug Barbour: Moving among the genres

DOUG BARBOUR

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I don't know how you find time to listen to all those boxed sets. I have a few such, gifts from my classical music-oriented friend, and have managed to listen to quite a bit of them, but I'm talking maybe six to seven CDs, as with another set of Beethoven symphonies (the Eugen Jochum/ London Symphony Orchestra set; very fine large orchestra versions), or *Van Cliburn Plays Great Piano Concertos*, which I certainly enjoy, and Bruno Walter conducting Mahler, also fine. A huge Harmoni Mundi set of sixteenth-to-eighteenth-century music is mixed. He's also given me a whole bunch of the huge output of Artur Schnabel, so I'm getting my fill of Chopin, Brahms, Schubert, etc, all with that flair. I've tended to be happy enough with one good version of a piece (maybe two, except for a very few I seem to have more of), but he also gave me the Beethoven piano concertos by Christian Zacharias. It was interesting to compare his versions of a couple of them with Cliburn's. Both fine, indeed, but I think I prefer the somewhat quieter and more subtle interpretations of Zacharias. At different moments, each will have its appeal.

One of my favourite roots albums of last year was Aoife O'Donovan's *Fossils*, which I highly recommend (more rockish, but great hooks, and that voice). I think I've mentioned *The Allman Brothers SUNY at Stonybrook 71* set, recorded a month before Dwayne Allman died, and one of their finest versions ever of 'Stormy Monday'.

Books: I was surprised that you had not read Dan Simmons's *LoveDeath* before now; it is surely one of his best books (although I have not kept up with his work).

I enjoyed Jennifer Bryce's 'Aide-Mémoire: 2012', as I do that sort of thing with my books now (and wish I had started earlier). I won't manage to read many of the books Elaine talks about in 'The real gosh! wow!', but am glad to know about them: good, helpful, summaries.

I can't help responding to your response to Tim Marion about graphic fiction. The best of it does, I think, have enough words. But some writers do amazing things with the visual-verbal mix. I admit to reading mostly a few of the bigger names in the field associated with comics, and not so much the serious literary versions. But the divide between high and low doesn't always work well here. I remain convinced that Neal Gaiman's *Sandman* is a great work of the past 20 years, and I like a lot of Alan Moore's work, especially *The League of Extraordinary*

Gentlemen as it has moved through the twentieth century into the twenty-first. While Warren Ellis can go almost too far into violence, he's very funny-satirical in *Transmetropolitan*, and *Planetary* is just flat out fantastic (for it alone, I salute him). Recently I came across the work of G. Willow Wilson — her two volumes of *Air* and *Cairo* — in which this US Muslim convert takes on a virtuosic Other vision. Then I read her first novel, *Alif the Unseen*, where she demonstrates great craft, wit, and intelligence in her writing. There's just a lot of interesting material in this realm, as far as I'm concerned.

I like Joseph Nicholas's retort to Benford's dismissal of Gibson and his ideas. As a reader of a lot of those Scottish SF writers, I see his point, although I also like the way they try to think beyond various singularities. Somewhere in a recent SFC someone praises how finely hard-science-fictional Benford's *Timescape* is. I agree, but then he started writing his own far-future galaxy-spanning SF, not as interesting as Banks's or Reynolds's or Stross's. And I remain a fan of Gibson, who, yes, does write about 'fashion', but through what I'd call an SF vision, with terrifically tuned irony. I really like his last trilogy, set in 'the present', but a present made weird (or *ostranenie*) by the perspective of the narration.

Feature letters: Ray Wood does walk his talk. I like Stow, too. Whenever Australians start talking about their poetry, I want to jump in, but I know I'm just an outsider, who happens to like a number of the poets of my generation and younger. Wood is right about the walking in *Pride and Prejudice*, but should remember that Elizabeth is laughed at for her walking all the way to see her sick sister. A little walking, of course, is okay: too much and you're no longer a lady.

[*brg* You are one of the few Canadians very much qualified to talk about Australian poetry, since you've probably met more Australian poets and read more of their work than most Australians.*]

I agree with Ray Wood about *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, but can't understand how he doesn't see the greatness of Borges. I remember reading Borges about the same time as I was reading Delany, and the mis-and-match felt right. But I do move among the genres fairly easily, finding only basic realism, of the most mundane kind, boring. The Sunburst Award in Canada is not specifically for SF or fantasy, but for anything not strictly 'realism'. And over the years, the winners have come from SF, fantasy, horror, and magic realism. I like that.

Mark Plummer looks back to Led Zeppelin with faux nostalgia, as being before his time. When Sharon and I moved out to Edmonton in the summer of 1969, we finally had some money to attend a concert or two, so went first to one by a band that had had a few hits that year, the now well-forgotten Vanilla Fudge (a good name for a band that slowed down to treacle others' hit songs). The opening act was a then unknown band by the name of Led Zeppelin, whose first LP had just come out. Wow. Looking back, I always think with pity of how every night on that tour the members of Vanilla Fudge had to listen to Led Zep's set, burning every venue to ashes, then go out there, knowing they couldn't even touch the hems of their garments (so to speak).

Steve Jeffery is a *fan*. I admit that I'm not; not in that league, anyway. My efforts in fandom have been mostly sercon, which is certainly why I've been in touch with you for so long. My involvement really began way back when with *Vector*, but soon ranged outward, including, for sure, *SFC*.

I do agree with him about Charles Stross, and would say the real horror in the 'Archive' books is the bureaucracy. Is there something in the water in Scotland helping to produce so many highly entertaining yet still scientifically sharp SF writers?

Patrick McGuire obviously has too much time on his hands in retirement. That's not a letter; it's a tome. I do have to say that the more people talk about Connie Willis's *Blackout/All Clear*, the less likely I am to read them. It seems that the editors in Britain could have, but apparently did not, correct Willis's errors. As an editor at a small press, I know one can certainly give advice about things one knows (when the author may not), but it seems clear that many of the larger publishers either no longer hire enough editors to do such work, or else publish big-name authors who have the power to refuse such editing (a huge mistake on their part, but hubris rules). Why bother, when only a few readers, such as Patrick, might be bothered?

Although I sometimes find McGuire's persnickety responses a bit too much, I read them all. Like you, I think, I found that his massively specific coverage of the 'Vorkosiverse' books does not lead me to want to read them (and to read one is to get into the whole epic series). I liked *The Spirit Ring* well enough, but not enough to chase down others of her books. So many books, so little time.

(17 April 2014)

SFC 87:

Despite the typos (of which I make so many when I type that I can't really complain), the interview with John Clute serves as a kind of ironic introduction to a lot of the essays that come later: his take on SF 'in its great years as the most astonishingly incompetent attempt to understand its subject matter that any self-articulated genre has ever managed to present' jars neatly with many of the essays that follow. A neat trick of the editor's, I'd say. I continue to admire Clute's strong stance while, as a reader who enjoys a lot of various kinds of 'escape', I never go quite so far (but then I haven't had to read so many books, so many of which must require a strong stomach to swallow the bad writing, awkward plotting,

cliché visions, etc). He manages to be harsh, tough, usually fair, and fun: not a bad accomplishment for someone who writes so many reviews.

I'm not going to argue with his and Darrell Schweitzer's take on modern poetry, although he comes around a bit more subtly than does his interviewer (and I'm certainly with anyone who recognises that Sturgeon's Law applies in the high literary genres as much as to the so-called lower ones). And I do think some of the writers he only manages to allude to, Delany, Le Guin, Russ (about whom more later), and also his much admired Wolfe, to name but a few, did see what was coming down the pike more clearly than most.

In its way, George Zebrowski's main article takes up a similar argument. I do agree about the need for a 'genuine, fully successful science fiction that deal[s] with the human impact of science and technology, that truly interpret[s] developments and put[s] forward moral, intellectual, and historical visions of possible futures ...' But I also think we have some examples of at least gestures toward that ideal, and perhaps more now, in the autumn of the genre (according to Clute). Of course, just like poetry, SF won't change anything.

Zebrowski is also interesting on Clarke, especially in his elucidation of those laws and of Clarke's scientific know-how. He clearly loves the man's best work — but Clarke too fails on aspects of the challenge Zebrowski throws out. How do privileged white male writers from the First World construct futures that somehow acknowledge the vast multiplicity of the human (in continually technologically advancing worlds)? For the longest time, far futures still were all white, purely heterosexual, and essentially middle class enclaves of the 1950s-to-1970s world those writers lived in. Still, Zebrowski certainly makes me think again about some of Clarke's work.

I'm with Zebrowski even more in his piece on Kornbluth, one of the writers I found most interesting when I started reading SF in the early '50s (along with Bester and Sturgeon). A good biography is superior gossip, among other things, and this one sounds like it. You've published some good pieces on Stapledon before, but it's always good to be reminded of him.

Tara Wayne's short take on Phyllis Gotlieb, which does mention her poetry, reminds me that one of my earliest academic articles was on the connections between her poetry and her SF (for a then new journal on Canadian literature). The connections are many, including the focus on children. (My very first published article was on 'history' in *Lord of the Rings*. Although I taught mainly Canadian literature and creative writing throughout my university career, I was always able to include my 'outside' interests.)

My PhD thesis was on Delany, Le Guin, and Russ. So I found your essay on the latter very interesting. I like the novels a lot more than you do, but then I don't always look for the 'science' in the fiction to be 'true' (not sure if that's quite the right word here, but I hope you know what I mean). I recently wrote the entry on Russ for *Fifty Key Figures in Science Fiction* (Routledge, 2009) (Sheryl Vint, Mark Bould, Andrew Butler, and Adam Roberts). I reread a lot of her work, and still enjoy the novels immensely: the writing is very sharp, sentence by sentence hard to beat. I admit a fine style will steal my heart

every time. I agree that her short stories are masterful (although I also thoroughly enjoyed all the Alyx ones, too). In *Picnic on Paradise*, the part that makes it work for me is that we don't (and can't, because the limited omniscient point of view means we understand what Alyx does) know why she has to take this group across this planet, nor why the war started. That means we, like Alyx, are left to try to comprehend these strange people. Looking at the growing obesity crisis, I think that Russ wasn't prescient enough about the huge size of these future people Alyx confronts with an appalled curiosity: most of them are far too healthy.

I have not thought of Russ as seeking 'adequate images of herself', but that's an intriguing insight. Different readers, different insights, and appreciations: I find her characters fascinating emotional studies, and also find many of the stories profoundly moving. But I

also respond to the formal aspects of her writing, as I do to poetry.

I still look for interesting SF even as I read a lot of fantasy. As Clute says, each feeds different parts of the brain and heart. I do think that there's some really good SF appearing today, which clearly builds upon what went before, but then the best contemporary writers choose their writing mentors carefully (more Delany or Ballard or Russ or Le Guin or Aldiss; less Asimov or Heinlein). There are some new twists on genre expectations, although I do admit that a lot of steampunk may also appeal on the basis of a kind of faux-nostalgia for a world that did not yet know it might be destroying itself at the altar of capitalism: there's another aspect of escapism at work.

(13 June 2014)

Steve Jeffery, George Zebrowski, William Breiding, Martin Morse Wooster, and Jerry Kaufman Zebrowski, Clute, Russ, and other critics

STEVE JEFFERY

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I was reading George Zebrowski's article on Olaf Stapledon in the bath (that is, I was in the bath, reading, not Zebrowski writing about OS's ablutionary habits) and was forced into an abrupt 'now hang on there a minute, pardner' moment when Zebrowski, as late as May 2010, maintains that Stapledon has been hard-served by the major publishers and really only republished by small or academic presses.

Things may have improved since Zebrowski wrote his article, as both Stapledon's classics have been around for a good while in the Gollancz SF Masterworks series:

- *Star Maker* (SF Masterworks, 11 November 1999)
- *Last And First Men* (SF Masterworks, 10 June 1999).

Since Zebrowski's article was written, but in the intervening period before publication in *SFC*, Gollancz has been busy filling in the gaps with:

- *Sirius* (SF Masterworks, 14 April 2011)
- *Odd John* (SF Masterworks, 8 March 2012).

And this from Dover Press:

- *Last Men in London* (30 September 2011)

and from another publisher:

- *Last and First Men: A Story of the Near and Far Future* (Bibliotech Press, 2 February 2012).

More recently, SF Gateway has published the following in Kindle editions, all in matching yellow covers that are very reminiscent — to those of us over a certain age — of the old class Gollancz SF hardbacks:

- *Darkness and the Light* (29 August 2013)
- *Nebula Maker* (30 September 2013)
- *Four Encounters* (29 August 2013)
- *The Flames* (29 August 2013)
- *Last Men in London* (29 March 2013)
- *Sirius* (19 March 2012)
- *Star Maker* (29 September 2011).

Not bad for an apparently little known and 'largely neglected writer' of difficult philosophical science fiction, although perhaps not a cause for total celebration if you are wedded to print editions.

I'm starting to be a fan of e-books, despite my first allegiance being to print, ever since I did a random search in Google and chanced on a Kindle edition of Delany's *The Jewel Hinged Jaw* at such a ridiculously modest price that it was a no-brainer, even if I didn't have a Kindle at the time (but Amazon has a free reader for PCs). I had always considered *Jaw* to be rare and/or prohibitively expensive in only academic press editions. I'm tempted to see what other critical works are available.

I really enjoyed the two articles on Robert Bloch in this issue. I don't think I ever met him at a con (I'll have to check Vikki's authograph book from the 1990s), but he does sound like he was a genuinely nice bloke and a splendid con guest.

I'm still wrestling with the John Clute interview, particularly when he commits such a sentence as, 'Our world is difficult and that difficulty of the world, that problematicness of the world is a body English of the pure ontology of the epistemological unlikelihood that we will ever get it: ever get it tight.' Somebody needs to be shot

for that sentence, which has all the flow and clarity of a spoonful of molasses.

(24 March 2014)

GEORGE ZEBROWSKI New York, USA

Jeffery is right, so to speak; but it's a matter of degrees. Stapledon was for decades neglected by publishers for poor sales. This has improved, but he is still relatively unknown to most readers of any kind, who show surprise when he is mentioned as one of the greats, even among many who know the name. This is aside from the titles that are available, and have been one way or another since the 1950s. But this should not be confused with recognition, a confusion I also suggest in my article. This distinction is unchanged today, and I should have said so more explicitly.

As a Gateway author myself, with my complete backlist, I and a number of others urged Stapledon's inclusion.

In the many talks I have given, very few hands go up when I ask who has ever heard of Stapledon, and even fewer when I ask who has read him.

A favorite question of mine is to ask the audience, even among academics, is whether they think S. Fowler Wright, William Hope Hodgson, or J. Leslie Mitchell were major, or even notable writers. The answers are disappointing.

(25 March 2014)

STEVE JEFFERY (again)

I didn't mean to imply that availability — perhaps especially in e-print editions, which are comparatively cheap to produce and make available though online marketplaces like Amazon — is actually a measure of recognition, although it is hard to be generally well recognised if none of your works is available, or only available in a few specialist and often prohibitively expensive academic press editions.

However, my point was that inclusion of not one but four of Stapledon's works in a relatively high-profile flagship series like Gollancz's 'SF Masterworks' is a sign that, in Britain at least, someone is paying due attention, and is prepared to champion their inclusion on the basis of quality and critical acclaim over popularity and sales figures. That Malcolm Edwards is an SF reader and fan may not be entirely coincidental in the line-up of a lot of the SF Masterworks titles.

But I doubt if Olaf Stapledon will probably ever be a well-recognised or 'popular' author, even within the general SF readership. Stapledon's works (like the SF works of the late Doris Lessing) are not your typical space opera adventures, and are (rightly or wrongly) regarded as challenging, forcing the reader to think rather than sit back and be entertained. The sad truth is that most readers (sadly, even some SF readers) don't like to be challenged or made to think.

That said, I do think that George might underestimate Stapledon's recognition among, at least, British SF fans and critics, and he has had his champions in

publications such as *Vector* and a number of critical anthologies such as Brian Aldiss's *Trillion Year Spree*, David Pringle's *Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction*, Edward James's *Oxford and Cambridge Companions to Science Fiction* — even if Adam Roberts persists in spelling his surname wrong in both *Science Fiction: A New Critical Idiom* and *The Palgrave History of Science Fiction*.

George may be more cheered that by the fact that Stapledon's *Last and First Men* was selected for discussion by astronomer and *Sky at Night* presenter Chris Lintott in Radio 4's *A Good Read* series, first broadcast in March 2012 and still available online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p017ylqr>, and that Mohsin Hamid (author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*) chose Stapledon's *Star Maker* for discussion on BBC Radio 4's *Front Row's Cultural Exchange* in April last year.

(Both these series have a habit of discussing and bringing little-known or neglected authors to wider attention, as in the case of John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*.)

(28 March 2014)

Inspired by the description of your office library in 'Babel' in *SFC87* (inspired in turn by Claire's description of 'the basement we haven't got'), I thought you might like to see what the interior of Jeffery Towers looks like.

(I've always wanted a house with a tower that could be converted to a circular library-cum-breakfast room, ever since I lived in Ealing, where there were a number of these in the posher parts.)

Office 1 and 2 shows the two shelved walls in the upstairs office (which would be the front bedroom for a normal family). These house my SF hardbacks (Office 1) and merge into the anthologies and SF criticism (Office 2).

Library 1 and 2 house mostly Vikki's fantasy collection in the upstairs box room. Not quite visible is a central free-standing shelf that runs down the length of the room between the two shelved walls, which has paperbacks: my SF on one side, Vikki's fantasy on the other.

One photo shows the entrance hall/porch that first greets visitors. This is mostly a collection of weird and esoteric stuff, from Beachcomber to Hermetic philosophy and maths and science to music and biography.

I keep meaning to catalogue it, and now that I've just discovered that my tablet has a barcode scanner app that can look up publication details, I may actually get round to it one day.

You describe yourself as 'an old Churches of Christ bloke' at the top of page 4. You know, in all the time I've been reading your fanzines, I don't remember you ever mentioning your beliefs, or if you did I glossed it.

(7 April 2014)

[*brg* I didn't say that I own the library I mentioned — it's just an image in my mind. Two libraries that extend infinitely in all directions are the one in Borges' story 'The Library of Babel' and the one in the 'Book of the New Sun' (Gene Wolfe).

My most treasured possessions are my sets of the first run of *Australian SF Review* (John Bangsund, editor) and my complete run of *SF Commentary*. But in a fire emergency, the first call



At the home of Steve Jeffery and Vikki Lee France: a part of Steve's office library (above) and porch (right); and Vikki's library (bottom left and right).



would be to make sure that Elaine and the cats were okay.

One item from your letter worries me, because I had given an impression not intended. When I said I was an 'old Churches of Christ bloke', I meant it. My religious beliefs disappeared in my early twenties, and have never returned. But the Churches of Christ, a small evangelical denomination closest in beliefs to the Baptists, was the main social group in which I grew up. When I got into fandom I was astonished to find other lurking ex-C. of C. people, especially John Bangsund, who came very close to being made a C. of C. minister, but dropped out. I always say that C. of C. people (lower middle class people — not much money but a lot of dignity) are my kind of people, except for the fact I no longer share their beliefs. I've entered congregations of the Churches of Christ only for funerals and weddings since the 1970s, but there have been a lot of funerals.

I would love to have photos of the inside of Dave Langford's house/library; likewise that of Mark and Claire. So doubly thanks for your photos. It's

difficult to take photos of a library in such a way as to show why it is unique.

CD buying is a foul and vicious habit, which has left me with a mere survival income, not the sort of savings that would have assured me of a financially safe old age. But there are very few CDs I regret buying. I'm pretty much off classical box sets now, because they are proving disappointing or exhausting. I had hoped that they would include remastered copies of many of my favourite LPs by various masters, both conductors and instrumentalists, but the choice of material offered by the record companies is usually mediocre, with a few highlights. Most of the CDs in the two big Decca boxes, however, have been remastered satisfactorily. The Vladimir Ashkenazy set, however, has lots of versions of pieces by Rachmaninov, one of my least favoured composers.*]

Perhaps I should have read 'former' rather than 'old'. But I know what you mean. I have no current religious affiliation, or belief, other than a sort of watery-wavery and not very committed agnosticism, but have several

friends in the local Methodist church, largely because we used to help with their annual book sales and still see them when I drop in on jumble, book, and cake sales in the hall (it's almost exactly midway between our house and the library and shops) or see them around the village.

(10 April 2014)

Thanks to your article on Joanna Russ in *SFC* 86 I'm now working back through *The Country You Have Never Seen*, starting (naturally) with 'The Wearing Out of Genre Materials', but taking in the other essays (equally provocative and astute) and currently dipping in and out of the reviews.

Russ is surprisingly sharp on the failings of *The Disposessed*, where Le Guin seems to say one thing (about gender roles, child-rearing, work) but show another, more stereotyped set of behaviours in her characters. As if she has the ideal of how things should be, but fumbles in its depiction in practice.

Was Russ measuring Le Guin, as an artist, to a higher standard than most? She seems to imply as much — it will be interesting to compare Russ's review with Delany's 'To Read *The Disposessed*'.

She is also brilliantly and hilariously rude about the *Cliff Notes to Science Fiction*.

(10 April 2014)

I said previously that the book that I regard as probably the most personally valuable in my collection would be Robert Holdstock's *Lavondyss*, but that leads to an additional question: which one of them?

I have at least two (and possibly three) copies of this book, in different editions, all signed by Rob at one point or another.

The reason I would pick this particular work is as much for the work itself as for what it recalls — memories of sitting with Rob and other authors in the Café Munchen around from Forbidden Planet in New Oxford Street, or the beer garden of the Angel in St Giles; that it inspired me to create probably my first cover art illustration (of the shaman girl, Ash, surrounded by the twelve masks of seeing) which I think fronted an issue of the BSFA's *Matrix* or *Focus* magazines.

Mark Plummer writes, à propos of Graham Joyce's *The Year of the Ladybird*, 'In 1976 I was 12 years old.' I feel old already. In 1976 I was graduating from university and getting my first permanent job, and spending weekends going to punk gigs or hanging around with a bunch of anarcho-hippy bands in Meanwhile Gardens, in London's Westbourne Grove, including various and constantly changing line-ups of Here Now, Alternative TV, The Androids of Mu and, on several occasions, ex-Hawkwind members Nik Turner and Robert Calvert. Good days.

[*brg* Let's have an Ancientness Contest. In 1976 I was 29, had a sort of career as a freelance editor that ran to a dead stop at the end of that year, at the same time as I had to move from my Carlton flat, which I dearly loved. I published some of the best issues of *SF Commentary*. I was desperately in love with someone who was desperately in love

with somebody else. I drank too much that year, partied too much, and was frequently in despair, but I remember that year more clearly than many that followed. Just as the year turned, I was offered a place in the upstairs flat at Johnston Street, Collingwood, and landed a badly paid assistant editor's job that tided me over until my freelance career returned in 1978.*]

There seems to be something of a murder mystery meme in *SFC* 87's letter column. We watched the second episode of the young Morse 'prequel' *Endeavour* recently, but unlike DJ Frederick Moe, I found it a bit disconnected and unsatisfying, plus I was constantly reminded of a number of similar haunted house plot elements (dusty abandoned attic rooms, music boxes, sinister automata, and stuffed animals, photographs with faces scratched out) from *The Woman in Black*, a Victorian horror film starring Daniel Radcliffe, that we had watched a couple of days before.

Several of your respondents mention the current vogue for 'Nordic Noir' series, particularly *The Bridge*. I have been converted to subtitled European and Scandi dramas, starting with *The Killing* and *Spiral*, then *The Bridge*, and now *Mammon*, since we got a TV large and clear enough to read the subtitles comfortably. (Which was difficult on a 19-inch set on the other side of the room.)

Otherwise, I mainly watch documentaries (mostly music, science, or history) and quizzes, and the occasional offering on Film 4, but the rest of what currently passes for light entertainment (sitcoms, talent shows, endless food programs) passes me by. BBC's latest idea is a prime time program teaching us how to sew. Isn't that what YouTube is for?

Scratch a fan and you'll probably find a quiz addict in there somewhere, and we are no exception, so slots are reserved for *University Challenge*, *Mastermind*, and *Only Connect*, partly because they sometimes feature people we know from the pub team. (One of the pub team's 'ringers' is a former *Mastermind* champion, which explains their dominant position in the local league.) A rather surprising entrant is Dara O'Briain's *School of Hard Sums*, relegated to late nights on one of the FreeView channels, which proves I have forgotten nearly all of my basic maths and trigonometry.

As for music documentaries, I suspect, Bruce, that you'll have liked the one on Neil Young, *Heart of Gold* (dir. Jonathan Demme, 2006) if you haven't already seen it, and also perhaps the one on Jeff Lynne, parts of which featured footage of his fellow Travelin' Wilburys (who always strike me that they were having the best time they could possibly imagine, whether recording in the studio or on stage).

[*brg* I haven't been able to track down the Jeff Lynne documentary, but I saw the Jonathan Demme/Neil Young *Heart of Gold* when it was shown at the Nova Cinema a few years ago. I also have it on DVD.*]

In your rundown of popular box sets for 2013, you also mention the late great Duane Allman in connection

with the Muscle Shoals Studio, the latter being the subject of another of those BBC4 music documentaries about a month back. I hadn't realised the connection with the Allmans went that far back (DA plays on more records than you might expect, apart from his celebrated spot on 'Layla'). As for the Allmans themselves, the standout track for me is probably the extended live version 'In Memory of Elizabeth Reed' from *Live at the Fillmore East*, although as one critic remarked, if you can listen to Duane's slide guitar opening to 'Statesboro Blues' without breaking into a huge grin you ought to have your pulse checked.

Similarly, another staple of my MP3 player is the Mahavishnu Orchestra's *Birds of Fire*, ripped from the five-CD box set, where McLaughlin's distorted wavering arpeggio on the opening track never fails to thrill. It's a timeless album, never bettered as a statement of intent. As one reviewer allegedly put it, 'This isn't jazz; it's a declaration of war.' Though it's by no means all-out sonic assault: 'Open Country Joy' is charming and always makes me smile.

Tim Marion, responding to Mark Plummer, contests Mark's assertion that album bands like Deep Purple or Jethro Tull 'rarely if ever troubled the Top Forty' (by which I assume he means the singles charts). I find myself in agreement with Tim on this one, and distinctly remember (and can still see on archive clip shows) Top Of The Pops performances of 'Black Night' by Deep Purple and 'The Witches Promise' and 'Living in the Past' by Tull.

Led Zeppelin, though, famously insisted (with the scary figure of manager Peter Grant to back them up) 'no singles', although I believe 'Whole Lotta Love' was released in the US [and Australia], but the version that made the UK Top Forty hit was actually a cover by Alexis Korner's jazz rock band CCS, and which became the signature theme tune to *TOTP* for years during its heyday.

Gillian Polack remarks on Le Guin's *Lavinia*, and finds the narrative problematic in how it deals with the titular character's elision from history, but underlines those same causes (Lavinia's apparent ignorance and lack of authority) but this time from a female rather than a male perspective. This echoes historian Mary Beard's *London Review of Books* 2014 Winter lecture on and how men (and some women) both conspire to silence the public voice of women, recently broadcast by the BBC as *Oh Do Shut Up Dear! Mary Beard on the Public Voice of Women*. In fact the ammunition and arguments laid out by Beard (denial, refusal, misattribution, escalating at times to threats, and in extreme cases physical violence) in turn echo many of the arguments and examples in Joanna Russ in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*.

Thank you for sending me back to revisit Russ's essay 'The Wearing Out of Genre Materials' from her critical collection *The Country You Have Never Seen*. However, I do wonder about her statement that in the desire for a certain kind of fantasy, people (readers and presumably writers as well) are driven to higher and higher forms of literary work, echoing Auden's statement that readers go from bad to good literature looking for the same thing. I would have thought it was the opposite, like addicts who build an increasing tolerance and are therefore forced

to seek out ever stronger, and often cruder, doses of their drug, with the fictional analogy being a move from the more refined/literary form of the fantasy (myth, fairy tale) to the more direct and cruder (pulp and pornography). Or can anyone else explain the sudden explosion of the soft-porn phenomenon *Fifty Shades of Grey* and its countless sequels, spin-offs (and, indeed parodies, such as *50 Sheds of Grey*) across the shelves of bookstores and (in remarkably short order) remainder and charity shops? Or, for that matter, the equally explosive success of Rowling's 'Harry Potter' series when better quality works of a similar ilk (as by Diana Wynne Jones) already existed?

One might argue that this is less the fault of readers (and perhaps writers) than of publishers and marketing executives who are more interested in ever shorter and increased turnover and profits than (as used to be the case) in nurturing and sustaining talent.

Which brings us, loosely and somewhat tangentially, to Murray Moore's description of the Gillespie fanzines themselves as a rich and nurturing (as opposed, perhaps to sheltering) ecosystem: one that sustains a diverse but like-minded roster of writers, critics, artists, and readers. I can't think of anything quite similar in the breadth, openness, and scope of topics and interests, although perhaps *Journey Planet* and *Banana Wings* — with and between which there is a fair amount of overlap (and also maybe *Trap Door*, which I've not seen) — come closest.

Giampaolo Cossato mentions the comics serial adaptation of classics, such as Shakespeare's *Othello* in the pages of *Look and Learn*, which is where I probably first caught the SF 'sensawonder' bug at a tender and formative age, reading *The Trigan Empire*.

Steve Stiles also comments on comics. While, like you, I have little interest in muscled and costumed (or in the case of female protagonists, barely costumed) superheroes, there are some well-written and illustrated comics and graphic novels. Gaiman's *Sandman*, for example, or the Hernandez Brothers' *Love and Rockets* — or, at the other end of the spectrum, Jeff Smith's delightful and charming *Bone* or Dave Simms' *Cerebus*.

Steve also refers in passing to space opera of the *Three Fought Against the Galaxy* variety. In fact, little can make me re-shelf an SF title more quickly than reading a tag line such as 'The fate of the Universe rests in one man's [or occasionally, woman's] hands.' It does not usually bode well for deep-thinky SF (although I'm prepared to grant Greg Egan's 'Orthogonal' series as an exception, in which the skiffy adventure plot is embedded in some mind-bendingly tortuous alternate physics).

(11 April 2014)

When I sent you a bunch of pictures of our office and library shelves, I suggested that if we weren't careful it could start a meme. Well, apparently it already exists. There's an article in the *Metro* free paper from Friday with pictures of crammed shelves and tottering piles of books that people are posting on Twitter under the hashtag #shelfie. (I just Googled it. It does appear that a high proportion of book lovers are also cat lovers, to judge from the pictures with cats in front of, or sitting inside, the shelves. Obviously they haven't got enough books if there is still space for a cat to curl up.) Not only

books: there are all sort of collections, from CDs and DVDs to cuddly animals. (Vikki herself has a shelf of Pegasus and unicorn figurines.)

(5 May 2014)

WILLIAM BREIDING

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USA**

The pure heart of *SFC* 86, around which everything revolves, was, of course, George Zebrowski. You did a great job of dancing the material around him, highlighting, echoing, or contrasting the basic tenets of his beliefs. It is hard not to like George Zebrowski. There is such a strong mixture of heart and mind, supported by sound ideology, written in supple, unadorned, yet complex prose. I was won over completely to his side of the net up.

The contrast here is John Clute. I've long admired John Clute's abilities while harbouring a dismissive attitude towards much of his criticism in SF. Too frequently Clute's facile abilities with language get the better of him. While he's dazzling with odd sentence structure, weird words, and the circuitous byways by which he came to his conclusions, and juggling his mental acuity for all to see, the book under discussion has almost been lost to his narcissism. Then I come to find that I frequently disagree with John Clute. For all his dizzying wonky pyrotechnics, John Clute ends up being far too lenient on the book at hand, somehow alchemizing into gold what I see as a soulless action-adventure novel.

I read your own overview of Joanna Russ with relief. I only discovered Russ's work a few years ago. I came away from my reading with a question mark hovering over my head. I accused myself of being an obtuse reader, unable to see what she was getting at, because the only thing I took away from Russ's work is that the human heart is a pit of darkness and only in this aspect could there ever be gender equality. Thank you for affirming that I am not the complete clueless dunderhead I assumed I was.

My brother Sutton is a huge Phyllis Gotlieb fan. He has all of her books prominently displayed on the shelf. Taral Wayne's brief overview has convinced me it is time to start borrowing them. I'll have to see if *The Works* is among them.

I was interested in Fred Lerner's take on Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife*. It seems to be a book that everyone can embrace, and I suspect this has to do with the clear prose, the focused plot, and, of course, the undying romance.

John Litchen's rereading of Clarke, Bradbury, and Ballard is beautifully levered between the then and now, and the life lived in between.

(5 April 2014)

I haven't read any of Joanna Russ' short fiction. I did find a copy of *(Extra)Ordinary People* recently, and intend to include it on my Real Soon Now list. I will take note of your 'two Joannas' when I do. I am currently embarking on a novella and novelette reading program, both mainstream and SF. It's been fun.

Michael Bishop turned me on to Steven Utley. I had

been aware of him in the 1980s or earlier as a collaborator with Howard Waldrop, but that was all I knew about him. I have a smattering of Dozois' *Year's Best* and located four of Utley's stories, three of which are part of the Silurian Stories. Bishop is right. These are very engaging human stories. 'The Real World' is hardly SF at all, but a story about perception. Utley was a plain writer, but very solid. I liked his world view considerably.

(20 April 2014)

Paul Di Filippo's overview of Michael Bishop's fantasy novels is nicely pointed. I appreciated that when he does not like a book he is frank about it. I've not read Bishop's fantasies. I have several of his SF novels on the shelf, but have read only *Stolen Faces*, which I recall liking, and the short story collection, *Blooded on Arachne*, which I found colourful and exciting.

Like Tim Marion, I also am interested in the Michael Waite tributes. I corresponded with Michael through the late 1990s, and then we lost touch. He sent a number of issues of *Trial and Air* when he joined FAPA, but I was in one of my mum phases (all too frequent!), so lost touch entirely when he stopped sending them.

I used to think that Neil Finn was New Zealand's greatest export (aside from film director Vincent Ward) until my friend Ken sent me an MP3 file of all 104 songs in the Bats' catalogue. This was an extraordinary band. The Bats did not write one bad song. They started as the Clear, then morphed into the Bats. Their sound is sort of folk rock edging into power pop. It's smart and emotional, beautifully played, with great arrangements, and well produced.

I loved seeing the list of Top 40 Australian songs, and agree that it must be a generational gap that led to the absence of the Easybeats, one of the best bands of the sixties, period.

I saw Paul Kelly solo on the 1990s. He's quite good. Just reading the lyrics to 'To Her Door' in your editorial had me sniffing!

Steve Stiles' latest works (covers to *SFCs* 85 and 87) are gorgeous. 'Night Flight' is very moody and mysterious. His flyers are lying down. 'Lovecraft's Fever Dream' seems very Indian to me, rather than Frank R. Paul, as Cy suggests.

I agree with Murray Moore. I was floored when I found out you'd spent time with Ed Cagle. Ed was one of the first fans I met through the mail when I was a rank neo of 16 or so. Imagining the two of you together is a wild thing indeed. What alternate universe is this?

(9 April 2014)

[*brg* Ed Cagle and I were very different people, even in our approach to fanzine publishing, but he insisted on putting me up for a week when I was travelling in USA in 1973, and we even tried publishing a joint issue of his *Kwalhioqua* and my *SF Commentary*. (I have the only copy, as Ed did not post the copies we printed.) It was amazing to visit Ed and Sue and their family in the heart of Kansas. They were generous, funny people, with a great appetite for life. *Kwalhioqua* reflected Ed's humour and love of life, but this included a love for alcohol. Or perhaps everybody in Kansas liked a good drink

on cold nights in front of the fire. Whatever ... Ed was dead of a heart attack, at the age of 40, only a few years after I met him. I read somewhere that Sue died much later than Ed, but there is a musician Cagle who gets mentioned on the covers of alt.country CDs, so maybe he is one of the sons. I like to think so.*]

That Ry Cooder concert I saw was at a very small club. John Hiatt opened for him, then joined as second guitarist and co-vocalist when Ry played. This was during the period when Ry was using those incredible black guys, whose names I'm not remembering right now, as back-up vocalists, in the early 1980s. The person I attended the concert with, Dan Maxim (may he rest in peace), said the band was like a well-oiled machine. Yes, Ry was diffident, but man was he amazing!

(26 April 2014)

You should dig out that manuscript of that article you wrote about Cordwainer Smith in 1968 and reprint it. I would love to read it, and doubt I'll find the issue of *The Mentor* in which Ron Clarke published it.

I'm extremely shy (as you might have noticed at the last Corflu we both attended in San Francisco), so conventions are difficult for me. But I have been doing well at this current Corflu. Andy Hooper spoke to me after I thought he might avoid me — wouldn't make eye contact — and I suddenly realised he may be shy as well!

I will extend your greetings to everyone at the banquet tomorrow (Sunday) if I don't have a panic attack!

When is Melbourne bidding on a Corflu? (haha)

(4 May 2014)

I recently girded my loins, closed my eyes, and ordered *Chained to the Alien*, *Skiffy and Mimesis*, and *Warriors of Tao*, as well as *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec*. I searched for *Dean Spanley*, but couldn't find it at a price I was willing to pay. I liked *Adèle Blanc-Sec*. I'm a fan of Luc Besson, so I was predisposed to it.

The Damien Broderick-edited books are a feast. I've only just begun to read them. I was surprised there was only one piece by you, though.

(2 August 2014)

[*brg* Damien Broderick can sometimes be a snuffy kind of guy about my articles, as my articles seem to be not academic enough for him. I've received review copies of Damien's recent collections because of the George Turner articles. As far as the world is concerned, officially I am George Turner these days. I've very glad to have George's articles continually reprinted. Thanks for purchasing those books. They give a good idea of what Australian reviewers and critics were doing in the seventies and eighties.*]

I ordered the Broderick and Di Filippo *101 Best SF Novels*. It is considerably different than Dave Pringle's original, with far more mixed messages about the books chosen. The inclusion of George Turner's *The Sea and Summer* might as well have put it back on the trash heap of SF. I know you Aussie boys are consistently critical in the face

of Good when it could be Better, but sometimes I wonder, especially about Damien Broderick. Your own prose is right up my alley. I always rejoice when you put out a major piece of writing.

(6 August 2014)

The 101 Best Novels includes books I couldn't finish, such as Karl Schroder's *Ventus*. I totally hated the way that book was written and constructed. But the last 30 years have seen far too many books than any two people can read. And, like you, I agreed much more with with Pringle in his original choice of 100 books; his choices were faultless, or nearly so.

(10 August 2014)

MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER

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[*brg* I've been talking about the fiction of Karen Russell on the Fictionmags e-list for awhile, in preparation for writing the article that begins the next issue of SFC:]

The Week, summarising a profile by Molly Langmuir in *Elle*, says that Karen Russell came up with the idea for her new novella 'Sleep Donation' by getting burned out and frazzled on a book promotion tour. Her sleeplessness then got her thinking about a future where 'people were dying from an insomnia epidemic' and got 'sleep infusions' that included nightmares.

An article by Dave Davies on the NPR website has Russell saying that she decided to publish her novella as an e-book in part because she thinks insomnia is partially caused by people staring at screens late into the night. She thought that if people read on a screen that you shouldn't read on screens late at night, they might actually change their habits. 'I guess that was my secret,' Russell said, 'and now it's not a secret anymore.'

(20 April 2014)

John Clute is a provocative writer with whom I have profound disagreements. One would like to know, for example, what sort of predictive SF about the future he does like (if he likes anything). His notion that the people who wrote 'engineering science fiction' between 1925-75 are frauds because they failed to predict the future is wrong in so many ways that if I started enumerating them I wouldn't have room to comment on anything else.

Let me, however, show one way in which I have surpassed Clute. Clute says he wrote his first review when he was 19. I wrote my first SF review in 1975 when I was 17, when I discovered Don Miller and he invited me to start reviewing for the *SF&F Journal* (formerly the *WSFA Journal*, the clubzine of the Washington Science Fiction Association). I'm pretty sure I was writing book reviews for the local bicycle club newsletter in 1972, when I was 15. Do I get a prize for this?

[*brg* I suspect many readers will have begun writing reviews earlier than age 17, if only for

school magazines and book reports. My first long critical article was a short essay that got away, when I was 16, in Form 4 (Year 10), 1962. I read Nevil Shute's *A Town Like Alice*. In trying to work out why I disliked it, I realised that I disliked Shute's rather careless writing style, but I hadn't yet acquired the critical tools to say why the style did not work. I slogged through Form 6 English Literature and three years of English at Melbourne University; I was trying to learn how to use the tools I needed.*]

George Zebrowski's C. P. Snow Lecture is of course, the high point of both issues. It is impressive, idealistic, and 20 years old. I like the idea that SF writers should have a thorough understanding of the history of science, and that most editors don't know enough about science to distinguish between good and bad uses of science in fiction. But because this piece appeared in 1995 and has not been updated, Zebrowski doesn't explain which SF writers today are turning out the sort of SF he likes. Who are the SF writers under the age of 50 who thoroughly understand science and completely portray the future? *Timescape* is an excellent novel that has lasted, but the book is over 30 years old. I also fear that Zebrowski's estimate that under one per cent of the SF of 1995 is 'above the net' would be far too high today. What, for example, does Zebrowski think of Greg Egan? Or Stephen Baxter? Are there novels published in this century he admires? What are they?

Zebrowski's review of Mark Rich's Kornbluth biography makes a mistake. He describes Algis Budrys as a Futurian, and so he was — but he was not a member of the original Futurians, a group that folded in 1945 when Budrys was 14. There was a second Futurian Society of New York, which started in New York in 1958, and which included Budrys, Larry Shaw, and Robert Shea. This wasn't the group to which Pohl and Kornbluth belonged, but a successor organisation of the same name.

Jennifer Bryce is always worth reading, and I enjoy her lists. The best new play I saw this year was Theresa Rebeck's *Seminar*. Rebeck is a playwright who has also written a lot of TV, including winning Edgars for her work on *NYPD Blue*. She was also the creator of *Smash* and was the showrunner for the series' first season (but not the second). Her play is about how a great but dissolute author/editor (loosely based on Gordon Lish) has several students who pay \$5000 for his wisdom. The play is a psychological thriller, with the tension arising between students competing for the teacher's attention and the teacher conferring his love or hate on the students. You'd think that a play based on the Writing Life would be boring, but in Rebeck's case the play works. Jerry Whiddon played the dissolute writer and did it very well; he's a regular at the Round House Theater in Bethesda, Maryland, where this play was staged, and I previously saw him in an adaptation of James M. Cain's *The Postman Only Knocks Twice* that Round House produced a few years ago.

I finally saw Manhattan Transfer live at the Birchmere in Arlington, Virginia in April. They've been singing since 1972, and their act hasn't changed very much. In fact, the 'best of' CD they sell at their concerts is a

repackaged version of a CD originally issued in 1987, and includes 'Twilight Zone', a dated piece of 1980s kitsch. But they are still very good at what they do, and still have great harmonies. The group nearly sold out a 1500-seat hall at \$60 a ticket.

The second series of *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* is currently being shown on our local public television station, and I agree that these episodes are weaker than the first series. But I very much enjoyed the one about the rivalry between two Melbourne football clubs. It brought back pleasant memories of the trip made by Aussiecon fans in 1985 to what was probably the Hawthorn ground, where the fans were evenly divided between foreigners who wanted to see the Australian game and locals who wanted to get their footy fix. I don't remember much about the game itself, but I do remember standing because the ground had no seats in our section. I also remember the hideous fatty yellow egg rolls we were warned not to eat right before everyone devoured them. (Is it still true that in your country it's proper form to condemn meat pies and argue at length about what sort of mystery 'meat' is in them before you eat them?)

[*brg* I'm told that the main activity at League football games is complaining about the price of meat pies. Not that I've ever attended one; but at least in 1985 I could have afforded the occasional footy match, and a pie and sauce at half time. I'm told that today's ticket prices are nearly as high as those for rock concerts.

What's really enjoyable about the *Miss Fisher* series has been the light each episode sheds on some important part of Australia's cultural history. I suspect the viewpoint is still too twenty-first century. It would be hard to exaggerate the wowserism (extreme public puritanism) of Melbourne in the 1950s, let alone the 1930s, when *Miss Fisher* is supposed to have been cavorting. But football was very important during the Depression in Australia, because it was one of the few entertainments, like the movies, that ordinary people could afford.*]

George Zebrowski's Stapledon review is most interesting, not for what he has to say about Stapledon, but for the review of Stapledon's work by P. Schuyler Miller. One of the clichés of our age is the notion that it's impossible to read serious articles or long books because the internet has wiped out our attention spans. Well, here is Miller discussing how he does his reading 'in fits and snatches, with meals, on the trolley, late at night'. I don't think Miller's problem in 1952 is that much different than what most of us face in 2014. I think people have more time for reading than they think they do, and the people who spend their time texting or playing silly games on their cell phones could just as easily read something more complex if they put their minds to it. I have even heard of people reading *War and Peace* on their cell phones, although this seems as silly to me as the idea that you can write a novel on a BlackBerry. I find that if you set a goal of 50 pages a day, you can get through almost anything — particularly if you spend two hours a

day on the subway, train or bus commuting.
(19 May 2014)

[*brg* Thanks for your responses to George Zebrowski's articles, although I don't think *SFC* readers have really got stuck into his arguments. I would have the same trouble as George in trying to point to SF writers of today who write readable yet

authoritative science fiction.

Thanks for the nice bit of information about the second Futurian club. I did not know about it.

I have a *Best of Manhattan Transfer* on CD, but no longer hear them on the radio. They get played on ABC Classics when they tour Australia, but their most recent tour must be at least 20 years ago.*]

Darrell Schweitzer: Ray Bradbury and the pulps

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I note that some of the articles you are running are reprints; for example the Bishop essay on Utley. I saw that in *NYRSF*, although, of course, since *NYRSF* has only a very limited paper circulation anymore, I am not sure how many people are reading it. I don't get the kind of feedback from my contributions there that I used to. That suggests to me that maybe you might want to reprint something of mine. If so, there is quite a lot available. Next time you do a tribute about somebody, ask, and maybe I have an interview. I also have a lot of essays. There might be something you could use.

[*brg* I always enjoy your articles, Darrell, but I'm not putting in any orders at the moment. As I'm likely to mention several times in this and later issues, when I reached into the files I discovered I had 200 pages of articles already scheduled for three or four issues of *SF Commentary*, although I don't have the cash to print or post copies.*]

We should point out to your readers that my John Clute interview in issue 86 is the full, uncut version. That which went live in Card's *Intergalactic Medicine Show* was substantially cut, mostly in the poetry discussion and the bits about Shakespeare, I think, although I did not do the cutting myself and have not compared the two texts line by line.

I might suggest, in response to George Zebrowski's speech (still relevant as ever, for all it is 19 years old) that the reason you don't see more SF 'with the net up' is that it doesn't sell. It is too demanding of the readers, and therefore publishers prefer easily understood space opera or military SF series, which approximate the condition of a TV miniseries. It may well be that the good stuff is for an elite audience only, and may have to be published either in short forms, or from specialty presses. The problem with this is that specialty presses cannot pay enough for a professional writer to write a novel. The horror field is experiencing a similar problem, with all the real action being in small imprints, but that means either writing only short fiction, or writing

novels for advances that would have caused embarrassment 50 years ago. One counter trend I have noticed in SF is that a certain amount of genuinely good SF is appearing in the mainstream. One book I particularly recommend (it came to my attention when I was a Philip K. Dick Award judge the year before last) is *The Postmortal* by Drew Magary (Penguin). It's like an update of a really good *Galaxy* satire, about what happens when a cure for ageing is discovered. First it is illegal, but available underground, then it becomes legal, then everybody has it, and society falls apart in various picturesque ways. Our hero is a 'specialist' who helps/encourages people who are tired of life to die. There are anti-immortality terrorist groups. This is quite a good book, and apparently a first novel.

Regarding *The Martian Chronicles*, I think the element John Litchen is overlooking is that the imagery of Bradbury's Mars comes right out of the pulp magazines. The Bradbury Mars is the standard pulp magazine Mars, right out of *Captain Future* or the Northwest Smith stories of C. L. Moore. It is derived from the Mars of Perceval Lowell and Edgar Rice Burroughs, but actually less detailed and variable than either. About 1930 or so, particularly in the Clayton *Astounding*, 'standard' versions of the planets began to appear. This was because *Astounding* was the first true pulp magazine of science fiction, as opposed to the amateur science/hobbyist magazines that Gernsback founded. Pulp magazines had standard, generic settings, for quick, mindless reading. Thus there was a standard Old West, South Seas, Yukon, or whatever pulps. So, now that there was to be pulp-formula SF, there had to be a standard Solar System, with one humanoid race per planet (and the standard dying, desert Mars and swampy Venus), plus native races to the various moons, 'jungle asteroids', etc. (The smaller celestial bodies became the equivalent of islands, so a pulp hack could turn a sea story into a space story without any effort.) One of the last surviving fans from that era, Bob Madle, told me how it felt when *Astounding* first began. 'Oh no! They're going to make a *pulp magazine* out of science fiction!' He added, 'It was as if your sister had become a prostitute.' Thus spoke a purist, who was about 11 at the time.

What Bradbury did was write a great book out of this very standard material. Perhaps *The Martian Chronicles* is

a good example of what Zebrowski meant by a dressing up of second-rate material. Certainly the ideas in the book are not cutting edge. But Bradbury did something few others of his time could even attempt. He turned pulp cliché into myth. I think *The Martian Chronicles* will resonate as long as *The War of the Worlds*, for all that it is just as 'obsolete'.

As for the TV series, no. I recall Bradbury making a remark shortly afterwards that his idea of hell was being forced to watch this thing. No, it was not good. I particularly remember the ludicrous Martian sand ships rumbling across the desert. They looked like halves of coconuts on string, a special effect worthy of Ed Wood. Yes, I would agree that someone should remake this, but it would be hard to present it to a movie audience (which you have to assume is illiterate) because, to do it right, the film would have to be deliberately retro, evoking the old-fashioned imagery of the pulp magazine Mars.

One suggestion to Tim Marion (in issue 87) regarding Manly Wade Wellman: while I have no expertise at

all about the accents and folkways of North Carolina, since the only time I was ever in the state was to drive through without stopping, I do believe Manly knew what he was talking about, and the differences in the accents may be generational. If the characters in the 'John the Balladeer' stories don't talk like Tim's relatives, that may be because Manly was reporting the speech patterns of a couple of generations earlier. He had a cabin in the North Carolina hills, and lived there much of the time, and knew the people. But Manly was born in 1903, so his contemporaries were roughly of the generation of Tim's or my grandparents. I remember that Frank Belknap Long (born 1902) had an utterly stereotypical Brooklyn accent, and said 'woik' for 'work' and 'Joisey' for 'Jersey' like some stereotyped character in a World War II movie. (Or think of the Brooklynese character in *Destination Moon*.) You won't hear an accent like that in Brooklyn now, but Long actually talked that way. I suspect he may have been one of the last people who did.

(23 April 2014)

Patrick McGuire: What makes these books so great?

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SFC 87:

In American English one can distinguish the difference between a fixed word combination and a transient one by the stress pattern. In the Flanders and Swann routine about the Corrida de Olivas, which you have probably heard, one encounters the phrase 'a telltale smear of olive OIL'. In YankSpeak that would be 'OLive oil', because that combination is considered a fixed one. Similarly, a YankSpeak 'MOving van' is what in BritSpeak is called a 'removals van', whereas a 'moving VAN' is any van that happens to be in motion. Evidently OzSpeak comes out somewhere in the middle, since in your account of the travails of the Melbourne SF Club, what Americans would call 'movers' are 'removalists', but their vehicle is a 'moving van'. I don't know if Australians make the American stress distinction, or just figure it out from context. Later: after I wrote the above, I listened to a *Splendid Chaps* podcast promoting the showmakers' latest project, 'Night Terrace'. There was a very strong stress on 'night', indicating that it was part of a fixed combination.

In the US, in the more centralised churches, property seems to reside at the level of the bishop or higher, whereas it is congregational in the ones with a more congregational-based organisation. (This is a matter of how the property was set up in the first place, not of special legislation, as it evidently was for the Uniting Church, per the *Age* article. Specific instances have gone to court in the US on several occasions, with the central

church generally winning.) This mostly has come up here lately when a conservative Episcopalian congregation secedes en masse, as a number have done, generally in order to join a different Anglican jurisdiction, or an Orthodox or Catholic one. The congregations have to abandon their property and find new places to meet, unless there is an act of generosity on the part of the local Episcopal bishop, which has sometimes happened. Catholic parishes that have drastically lost membership (largely because of the changes in the ethnic makeup of the surrounding area) have sometimes been closed or required to merge against the wishes of the parishioners. The spectre has occasionally been raised that Catholic parish property might have to be sold in order to pay off diocese-level debt, for instance, from sex-abuse settlements, but I don't believe this has ever actually happened. Diocese-level property has been sold instead, or the money has been raised in other ways. Poorly attended parishes, as well as Catholic schools having mostly non-Catholic students, have sometimes been kept open in view of the community service they provide, which from the newspaper clipping seems to have been the argument that St David's Uniting was making for staying open.

For some reason, on St Patrick's Day I watched *The Quiet Man*, a film I have never particularly liked, which a TV station was showing on that day because it is set in Ireland (specifically, the Republic). Part of the plot resolution has a bunch of Irish Catholics obligingly pretending to be (Anglican) Church of Ireland parishioners, so that the C. of I. bishop will be fooled into thinking the congregation is large enough to justify keeping the local C. of I. church open, allowing its well-liked clergy-

man to stay on in the overwhelmingly Catholic village.

Re your TARDIS-like desk: If the top of your desk is covered in *SFC* projects, do you have a separate desk for your professional editing? I do some things on my laptop, which generally lives downstairs, and on a downstairs table, but for me any serious writing, as well as mundane form-filling-out or cheque-writing, happens on my one desk upstairs. I therefore can't keep indefinite amounts of clutter on my desk, and instead I must stick things in file folders and put them in file drawers or boxes. Said desk is decidedly cluttered at the moment, but I will have to clean up and properly file the surface clutter pretty soon, before I can embark upon any serious writing or even doing my income taxes. And my file drawers could stand a weeding-out, too.

[*brg* I know where everything on my desk is until I tidy up. After the big tidy-up, I lose track of everything.*]

You mention finding many New Zealand songs on a list of 'best Australian' ones. A DC Public Television station has a subchannel called WETA-UK that is supposed to be devoted to British programming. But it is currently showing *Miss Fisher* there. I'm not sure how the programmers rationalised that. The only similar discrepancy I have noticed is that it is also showing *Ballykissangel*. That was at least made in the UK (in Northern Ireland), even though it is set in the Republic.

Michael Bishop's article on Steven Utley previously appeared in *NYRSF* for December 2013. You probably knew that and somehow neglected to follow your usual practice of acknowledging reprints as such, but I mention it because there was a case in the past where you published a short Greg Benford article where you said you were unaware of its reprint status.

Mark Plummer says he is surprised to find that book price is again a factor for him, as it was 25 or 30 years ago. Oddly enough, I recently have been meditating on how book price was *not* a significant factor for me when I was young and poor, but it has now become one. From my teen years on, I could afford all of the new or used mass-market-paperback SF that came my way and that I found to be of interest, and almost everything I wanted was available in pocket format. (Granted, the number of interesting new SF paperbacks published per month was fairly low, and for used books I was mostly dependent on the finite supply at local stores.) I did have to dig deep in the pocket for the occasional alluring reference work of that era, such as the Versins encyclopedia, and for a number of Advent books of SF history and criticism, but there were too few of them available to do my budget much harm. Later, SF publishing moved away from original mass-market paperbacks to hardcovers costing four times as much, or at least to trade paperbacks typically costing twice as much, as mass-market paperbacks. At that point, I cut my purchasing way back, and began relying more heavily on the public library (which fortunately bought a lot of SF). It just somehow seemed offensive to fork that much money over to a publisher, and besides, a hardcover required at least twice as much shelf space (being thicker, and not lending itself to double-shelving). By the time the paperback of a given

book came out (if it did at all), I likely either had read the book already from the library or it had slipped from my attention. To some extent, this trend has been reversed by e-books, but too often those are set at what I regard as unreasonable prices (even though I could afford them), which is to say, at the price of a mass-market paperback or higher. Even a dollar or two lower than the price of the pocket edition does not seem like much of a bargain, since the publisher is supplying only electrons. Perhaps the existence of alternatives (free public-domain books from Gutenberg, for instance) has made me reluctant to pay such prices. But for whatever reasons, I certainly do not scan the store shelves and without further ado buy any book that draws my attention, the way I once did. I may not be a typical customer, but publishers certainly could have made a lot more money off of me in the last 20 years if they had offered more paperback originals and had been quicker about issuing paperback reprints, and they could be making more money from me now if they priced e-books significantly lower than paperbacks.

Regarding my loc in *SFC* 85: My further Vorkosiverse reading indicates that, although lesser folk celebrate their birthdays by Earth years, the Emperor's Birthday is a fixed date in the Barrayaran astronomical year (Midsummer's Day in the case of a past Emperor, but a different date after Gregor came to the throne). This likely could be rationalised (ancient tradition observed for the Emperor even though everyday customs are moving toward Galactic norms), but it seems to me that Bujold should have thought harder about this sort of thing than she did.

Considering all the holes I found in the Vorkosiverse continuity, I thought it ironic that in a recent episode of the *Baen Free Radio Hour* (Baen's promotional podcast), Baen editors were touting the advantages of traditional publishing over self-publishing in avoiding continuity errors. Not that I've noticed! The spelling and grammar are much better than in self-published e-books, however. This applies both to normal commercial publishers and to most small publishers, although some very small publishers are hard to distinguish from self-publishers, and partake of the defects of the latter.

Ray Wood talks about the disappearance of trains, which I take from their former frequency to have been commuter trains, between Bridgewater and Adelaide. Some years ago, for the first time in many decades, I visited the suburb of Chicago where I grew up, and was very surprised to discover that there were many more commuter train departures than in my time. I mentioned this to a Chicago resident, who speculated that what had happened was that the suburbs had spread out even farther from the city, so that there were many trains running through my former home to deliver commuters to and from all these more distant new destinations. Columbia, Maryland, by contrast, has no passenger rail connections at all with Baltimore or Washington or anywhere else. It does have rarely used freight tracks, which perhaps could be converted to a commuter line if there ever was enough demand for it. On the other hand, I understand that these days most commuting is between suburbs, not between suburbs and a large city, and inter-suburban commuting does not lend itself to rail

travel, since people are not going to or from a central point.

SFC 86:

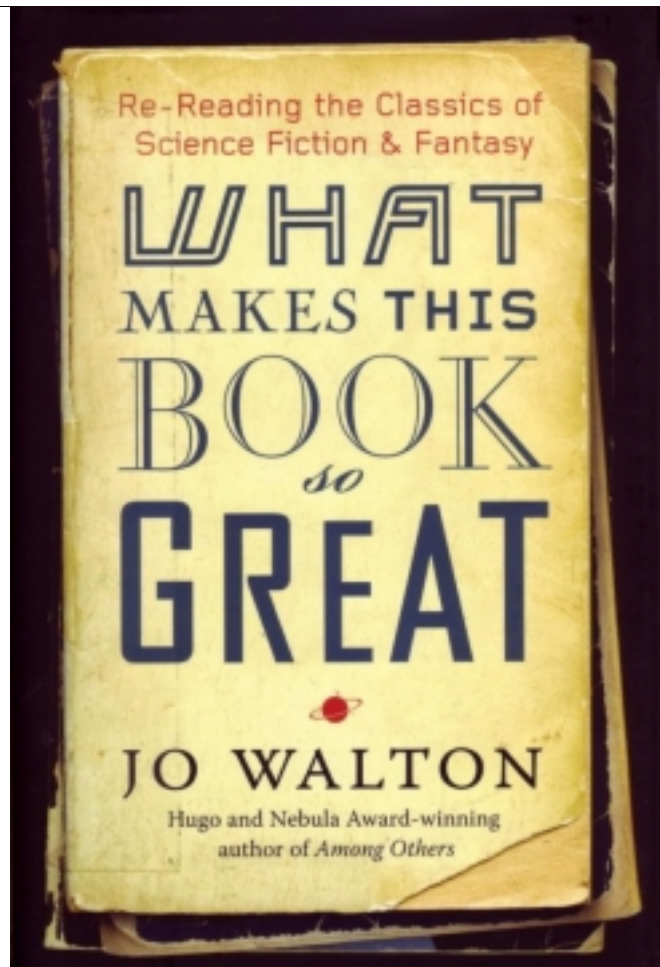
I enjoyed your study of Joanna Russ's fiction. I can say little about its accuracy, since it has been years since I read Russ, and I have no desire to reread her. (As I have probably remarked previously, I often enjoy reading studies of writers whose work I have no desire to read.) I did find it interesting that you singled out the sentence, 'Most students dress down' as being 'telling', because when I read the quoted passage, but before getting to your interpretation, I regarded the detail as being entirely naturalistic for 1970, a time when proletarian chic was the university fashion. (Since this was pretty much the experience of my own entire time in college and grad school, I reacted with some horror to reports that pricey competition in dress — to the considerable social disadvantage of students from low-income backgrounds — had returned to the campus in subsequent decades.) Of course, the mere fact that the detail was realistic would not exclude the possibility that Russ had artistic reasons for deciding to mention it.

I have read few of Russ's critical essays, but I just made a note to look for her collection. However, from the summary in your *SFC* reprint, it sounds to me that her theory of the three stages of SFnal ideas is over-generalised (I mean, come on, it explains not only individual SF ideas but the evolution of film as an art form?) and also oversimplified: in actuality, after a fallow period, or in certain hands, what is old becomes new again. You propose a solution of positing that 'your fellow writer is first and foremost a self-conscious artist, representing a unique viewpoint, and treat[ing] the work as such, not as a work designed to maintain the clunky genre machinery of science fiction'. This seems to overlook (among other things) the fact that SF (or at least traditional SF) is a conversation.

(5 April 2014)

I have been reading back entries in Jo Walton's blog on Tor.com, where she discusses old books she has been rereading. Many of the comments that readers add there are also intelligent (some of the commenters are pros, occasionally even the authors of the works discussed). Earlier I had occasionally looked at her current blog entries, but I just recently started delving into the archived postings. I would strongly recommend them to your attention and to that of *SFC* readers. I think that collectively they are the most interesting discussion of SF (and F) that I have found on the Net (not counting softcopy fanzines, and not that I have looked everywhere possible). Walton has a best-of collection of these posts in (paper) print, *What Makes This Book So Great?* There are advantages to paper (or even to a properly formatted e-book) over a blog posting, but practically all of her posts are worth reading, not just the selected ones, and the book lacks the blog-reader comments.

I had not read any of Walton's posts on Bujold books at the time I wrote my loc that appeared in *SFC*85, where I mentioned the awfulness of the Vorkosiverse covers. Walton herself (I think), and certainly several of the commenters, made the same observation independently



of me, and no commenter leapt in to defend the covers. I wonder if the Baen people have decided that the style they are using, although ugly, sells books (perhaps by being attention-grabbing), or if their aesthetic taste differs, or they have decided that the general reader's taste differs from that of the sf fan.

Walton's discussion of Connie Willis's *Blackout/All Clear*, and that of several of her commenters, independently makes many of the points made by Yvonne Rousseau and myself in *SFC*, and adds other interesting observations. Jo sees parallels to Willis's *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, which I have read but remember only fuzzily. According to Walton, that novel establishes that in the Oxford time travel universe, time travellers can temporarily (in a metatemporal sense) change the past, but that the future will send out 'ripples', perhaps in the form of more time travellers, to reassert the old order. I would have to reread *Dog* carefully to evaluate Jo's theory. I had not interpreted *Blackout/All Clear* this way. My theory has been rather that in *B/AC* the timeline always has had a loop built into it, one that could be viewed as an act of Providence, but that I (in contrast to Yvonne Rousseau) thought was sufficiently ambiguous for anyone so inclined to interpret naturalistically. Many of the flaws in *B/AC* that both Yvonne and I agreed upon also were independently mentioned either in Walton's post or in the comments to it by others. I still think that both Willis's beta readers and her editors let her down badly with this novel.

Walton also discusses *Arslan*. I mentioned in an earlier loc that no critic that I have found seems to share

your (Bruce's) opinion that the work is 'ironic'. However, Jo or a commenter (in retrospect, I should have distinguished better in my notes) does say that there is far more homosexual rape than heterosexual rape in the novel, and that by this means the author may have been trying to make it clearer to men how rape affects women. Although that does not strike me as 'irony'. Perhaps it is getting into that general vicinity.

[*brg* The ironies that spring from reading Arslan spring from the question the reader is forced to ask: 'Whose side are you on?' At first we see events entirely from the point of view the citizens of a small town oppressed when Arslan, the conqueror of the world, sets up his headquarters in their town, inflicting cruelty and near-imprisonment on everybody (and, Khmer Rouge-like, destroying most people who live in large cities throughout the world). Later, Arslan explains his motive, which amounts to 'The only way to save the world is to rid it of humanity'. This is the most extreme end of an environmental message I've often said under my breath after I read about the extent of continuing human destruction of many species of terrestrial life. So when Arslan's lover and closest disciple is the agency of his destruction, is this a triumph for all those human lives saved from Arslan's program, or a signal that extrahuman life on Earth can never be saved?*

In my loc in *SFC* 85, speaking of the film *Hugo*, I said, 'I don't think it was SF or fantasy or horror, meaning (unless the official definition of the category is very strange) that it was Hugo-ineligible and that the Chicon committee never should have allowed it on the ballot.' It's a good thing I put in that qualifier, because it turns out the definition indeed is very strange, much looser than for other categories: 'dramatized science fiction or fantasy or related subjects'. This issue independently came up in the Walton blog with respect to various drama nominations and winners, and again on a recent *Cooder Street Podcast*, for instance, with respect to the eligibility of a docudrama on the early days of the show *Doctor Who*. I don't know the history of the loose wording, but perhaps in the olden days it was felt that there was so little worthwhile dramatised SF/F that the possibility had to be kept open of recruiting outliers.

The *NYRSF* editors and I managed to incorporate the information from Franz Rottensteiner's letter in *SFC* 85 on recent and impending Strugatsky translations into a postscript to the last part of my serialised article on the Strugatskys. I believe they even provide the link to *SFC* 85 at eFanzines.com, so conceivably they introduced some readers to *SFC*. I also have since learned that, in addition to the works listed by Franz, the original translation of *Definitely Maybe* has been reissued by Melville House. Some of Jo Walton's blogs concern the award nominees for past years. Commenting on the 1974 Hugos (for books published in 1973), Rich Horton mentions in passing that the translation of *Hard to Be a God* could have been nominated, and Walton herself men-

tions in passing that *Roadside Picnic* was shortlisted for the Campbell Memorial Award in 1978, but Walton does not discuss either book. Presumably, despite her omnivorous reading and tastes considerably broader than my own, she either has not read them or finds herself unable to comment on them. Even more curiously, none of the commenters to the blogs (some of whom go into tedious detail on even the short-story nominees and possible alternatives to the works actually nominated in all categories) have anything to say about any Strugatsky work (at least in any of the blogs I've read to date). The Strugatskys' star thus seems to have faded considerably in the Anglosphere since the days when they were one of the few translated SF authors that could pull a profit in the US market.

The May/June 2014 issue of *F&SF* has a belated review of Pablo Campaña's *Cordwainer Smith, Lord of the Afternoon*, a 2011 English translation of his *Cordwainer Smith, El señor de la tarde*, which turns out to have been originally published in 1983. At least in the US — and probably more widely, given that the publisher is headquartered in Malta — both versions are available as e-books for considerably less money than the printed edition. I mention this work because I know that you and other *SFC* readers have a special interest in Cordwainer Smith. I haven't yet read even the e-book samples. I will probably buy the e-book, but will have to decide whether to get the translation or if my rusty Spanish is up to the original. (Later: in the Kindle samples, when reading the translation I find I keep stopping and looking at the original. Perhaps that is an argument for the Spanish version, even though it's slower going for me, and will cause me to look into Kindle-friendly Spanish dictionaries.)

The name Pablo Campaña came to me as a blast from the past. I had not imagined he was still alive, although he turns out only to be in his mid seventies (he has an entry in the Spanish *Wikipedia*). I had imagined him to be older. He and I exchanged one letter each way in the late 1960s, after I read his *El sentido de la ciencia ficción* (*The Meaning of Science Fiction*, 1965). He took a certain amount of umbrage over my letter, which latter was in retrospect more enthusiastic than diplomatic. I had written in English, since he had cited English-language sources, but from his reply (in Spanish) I decided that part of the difficulty was that he thought that English 'to ignore', which I used in my letter, meant the same thing as Spanish *ignorar* ('to not know'). I don't now remember what factor I thought he was ignoring, that he thought I was accusing him of ignorance of. Anyway, the correspondence never went any farther. To judge by the *F&SF* review, the Smith book seems to take an approach rather like that used later by Leonid Heller in *De la science-fiction soviétique* (and of course by many Anglophone academics), whereby anything good cannot really be SF, but must have ascended to some higher state of literary being. However, the Campaña work originated with a doctoral dissertation, and perhaps that was the approach he had to adopt to get it accepted.

(28 April 2014)

Mark Plummer:

The continuing need for a single malt

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I had it in mind that I wanted to write to you about *SF Commentary* 85, and so was allowing this idea to gestate in an unhurried and relaxed manner appropriate to a fanzine of *SFC*'s stature and — no offence intended — frequency. A slow-cooked casserole of a letter rather than a hastily assembled sausage in a bun was the effect for which I was aiming.

Plenty of time to find that Proustian trigger, I thought. Last time it had been an early-hours-of-the-morning Led Zeppelin DVD and a glass of scotch. This time? A small flock of parakeets alighting on the bird-feeders? The first line of the seventeenth paragraph of the latest Ted Chiang story? ('I am Jijingi, and my father is Orga of the Shangev clan.' — hmm, perhaps not so much.) A photo gallery in *The Guardian* of the world's ten best car parks?

(Ooh, I thought, I bet they have the Marina City Towers in Chicago. And they do, although the standout is Hoenheim-Nord in Strasbourg, 'a tram/car transport interchange that makes palpable the abstract forces of transport logistics. Its genius is that it does so much with the basic elements of car parking — asphalt, paint, lights, and tones of black, grey, and white. With the simple, but unusual, idea of putting the parking bays on a slight curve, and applying bold swaths of light and dark, it creates what (almost) could be called land art. There is some three-dimensional construction as well, when the flat patterns fold themselves into a zig-zagging portico that is mostly for the benefit of the trams.' I'm still not sure I understand how it works, but how can you not love something that makes palpable the abstract forces of transport logistics?)

Sometimes, though, originality is overrated. I needn't seek a new trigger. I could rather go for the tried and trusted, one of the known knowns. I could even cut to the chase and simply go for the scotch again. I'd certainly be prepared to experiment along those lines — in the interests of science, obviously. At the moment I have a dozen miniatures of single malts lined up at the bottom of the CD storage, a (50th) birthday gift from Claire along with a book of *101 Whiskies to Try Before You Die* — because, Claire tells me, I'm now of an age when I need to think about such things. So the raw materials are to hand.

I could even work my way through various whisky/music DVD combos, I thought, searching for the magic trigger. Last time it had been Johnnie Walker Black Label and Led Zeppelin. Perhaps Talisker and The Rolling Stones. Oban and Patti Smith. Lagavulin and Warren Zevon.

(Although thinking about it, and given his troubles

with alcoholism, perhaps pairing Zevon with anything along those lines is a little tactless. Just the other day I was watching the VH1 (Inside) Out DVD, *Keep Me in Your Heart*, about the recording of Zevon's last album. At one point the man says 'We buy books because we believe we're buying the time to read them', marginally reworking Arthur Schopenhauer from Parerga and Paralipomena: 'Buying books would be a good thing if one could also buy the time to read them in: but as a rule the purchase of books is mistaken for the appropriation of their contents.' I confess I did think about you, Bruce, at least a bit.)

All this slow-cooked rumination has come to nought, though, because of the manifestation of *SF Commentary* 86 on eFanzines.com. Experience has taught me to be careful about saying certain things to you so I need to make clear that *in this respect alone* that was something of a disappointment. Now I really have to just get on with it.

Because I am still thinking about *SFC* 85. I saw something in *Opuntia* the other day in which Dale Speirs suggested that your various best-of-year lists could be ... I was going to say 'relegated' but let's go for a more neutral term and say 'repositioned' as blog posts. Have you no soul, Dale Speirs? Surely the Gillespie List is one of the spiritual hearts of any Gillespie fanzine, alongside Bruce talking to his friends (two hearts: very science fictional) and arguably it's a key facet of the conversation.

I can't remember whether at any point in the last two decades I've asked, or if you've told us, how you compile your lists. In *The Drink Tank* 363 Chris Garcia said 'Sometime around the start of the New Year, I go to Denny's. I go to Denny's a lot, but at that time, I start thinking about what I'm going to nominate for the Hugo, and I start writing the article that you're currently reading.' Somehow I don't quite see that model for you. I can't imagine you sitting in Urban Grooves with a notebook, a large coffee, and a slice of cake. Well, I can, easily — Bruce Gillespie! Urban Groover! — but I think the compilation of the Gillespie lists calls for something different.

Here's how I see it going. Sometime shortly after the start of the New Year, perhaps even on 2 January, you gather up your notes from around the house where they've been tucked under coffee cups, inside record sleeves, under the cat. You make yourself a coffee, you retire to your study, and you close the door. Elaine knows that You Must Not Be Disturbed, except to pass you an hourly coffee refill and the occasional therapeutic cat to be stroked as an aid to cogitation. You do not emerge until The Lists have been compiled.

I mentioned notes, and I'm sure you have them, but I sense your approach is instinctive. I don't see you as a Mike Meara type, with spreadsheets and formulae to calculate how he casts his FAAn Award ballot. Rather the

notes support an intuitive sense of where things fall. You just *know* that a particular story is the seventh best of the year, not the sixth or eighth, without falling back on science to reinforce the belief.

I wonder, do you find the lower places more problematic? Years ago I was on an Arthur C. Clarke Award jury back in the days when, as well as picking a winner, we also announced places. We fairly quickly decided on the winner, and even the second, but ended up having a lengthy debate about which book to put third. A manifestation of Sayre's law, perhaps, that 'In any dispute the intensity of feeling is inversely proportional to the value of the issues at stake'.

I'm rather glad I did a Clarke Award stint when I did; I think now I wouldn't have the confidence to make such judgments. I can just about corral a list of my favourite books of the year or something like that, and might even be prepared to put one title forward as a favourite, but ranking them in the way you do is largely beyond me.

[*brg* The short answer to your major question is: I keep notes throughout the year. Books are recorded on the same quarto sheets of paper on which I have been recording them since January 1962 (although I've actually been listing Books Read in my diary since 1959 or 1960), usually one page per month, but these days one sheet per two or three months. It's very easy to type up the entries at the end of the year, then arrange them in Word to give them order. For most of my life I've been trying to do ordering by hand, which leads to less satisfactory results.

I started on music fairly late. I've been listing CDs Bought only since 1996, and CDs Listened To only in the last few years. Until then I had to reconstruct what I had been listening to from the CDs Bought list, which meant I missed the large number of the previous year's CDs that I listened to in the following year.

For a long time I did lists of SF short stories, which was okay while I was attempting to read all the magazines and as many of the anthologies as possible. But somewhere in the mid '70s I stopped reading the magazines, and found it impossible to track down more than a few of the original fiction anthologies. So I started to list all the short stories of all types read in a year, then went backward through the books lists and reconstructed short stories lists into the early sixties. That was fun. Now it is very difficult, because I cannot remember which title of a particular short story goes with the contents of a particular story when I reach the end of the year. Some years I skip the Short Stories list altogether.

I've been keeping Films lists since 1968 or 1969, in my daily diary entries. That makes it easy to tot up the lists at the end of the year.

I had so much contempt for TV that for many years I did not even list TV shows seen. Last year I began to list when I finished a series of any particular show. It's my recollection that *Sherlock Series 1* and *The Doctor Blake Mysteries* (very much local Victorian) were the best of last year. My great

discovery last year was *New Tricks*. I reached Series 10, at which point nearly all the main actors quit the show. I assume Series 10 is the last.*]

Still, turning to your lists, it strikes me that when you list your favourite books you often include books I like and many books I haven't read, but rarely books I have read and don't like, which makes me wonder whether you're a valuable book barometer for me and I should seek out more of your favourites. Amongst your 2012 books I've read only *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* by Graham Joyce and *Among Others* by Jo Walton, but think quite highly of both. And looking at the list again I see *Human Croquet* by Kate Atkinson, which I haven't read, although on the strength of your enthusiasm in ANZAPA I recently bought *Life after Life*, and crikey, that's good. I can't claim definitively I would have missed it without your positive notice — John Clute wrote about it in his *Strange Horizons* column and three of that journal's reviewers highlighted it in their best-of-the-year feature — but I think you were the primary spur, supplemented by a window when it was reasonably cheap as an e-book.

Digressing slightly — because it's not as if *that* is a mini-theme of this letter — I've rather surprised myself lately by the way that book price has again become a factor for me, much as it was 25 or 30 years ago. That's not to say that we've been rolling in cash, able to purchase gold-plated limited editions, but I suppose for a while now we could by and large buy the books that we wanted in whatever edition they happened to be in. But now, as we increasingly buy e-copies, I find that I baulk at the idea of spending any significant sum and am far more likely to be swayed by a low cover price. Something to do with intangibility of e-books, I imagine, plus Amazon's views on 'ownership' as relates to e-texts.

Oddly, then, I sense I'm a little more up-to-date than I usually am. I read fifteen 2013 novels or collections last year, nine of those in e-copies. There were notably good collections from Nina Allen and Lisa Tuttle, both published by PS, while top novel honours go to Chris Priest's *The Adjacent* and Kate Atkinson's *Life after Life* (although the latter, while being a 2013 book, was a 2014 read for me), with Graham Joyce's *The Year of the Ladybird* just below. The Joyce and Priest were published on the same day, alongside Iain Banks's final novel *The Quarry*. Something of a bumper day for authors I like, although tempered by the depressing knowledge that one had died of cancer while another was having treatment for the same illness.

The Joyce in particular has all sorts of resonances for me around the summer of 1976. I was 12 years old, and was with my parents on a family holiday somewhere in southern England. I didn't read much fiction at that age, and my surrogate for the typical pre-internet enduring fannish quest for sources of the mother literature was seeking out shops that sold wargames figurines. Armed only with an address and perhaps a vague and really-not-at-all-to-scale map of the region I would drag my parents and brother through all manner of unfashionable shopping districts in search of especially unfashionable shops stuffed with model kits, specialist books, and boxes and boxes of 25 and 15 mm tin/lead soldiers. In 1976 I remember finding one of these places in a quint-

essentially English seaside town — Weymouth, I think — and buying a Napoleonic French howitzer and crew plus some great-coated fusiliers. And, god, there really were ladybirds *everywhere* that year, although it's only relatively recently that I learned that it was a broadly recognised phenomenon, a product of the particularly long hot summer, and not just a strong personal memory of something to which everybody else was oblivious.

(I just got briefly excited by seeing that a new Joyce book, *The Ghost in the Electric Blue Suit*, is in the pipeline for this summer. Moreover it seems to be a re-visitation of *The Summer of '76* in which 'David, a college student, takes a summer job at a run-down family resort in a dying English resort town ...' and, hang on. Oh, it's a US retitling of *The Year of the Ladybird*, presumably because the terms lacks a US resonance.)

But that's 2013 books, and I'm sure *SFC* will carry your view on your 2013 reading in due course. Unless you follow Dale's suggestion and put it on a blog. No, don't tell me. I think I can guess how that's going to go.

[*brg* I'll stick to slow blogs, i.e. fanzines.*]

Although of course one never know, do one? I mean, here's Bruce Gillespie writing about *television*. And indeed why not? There was a conversation on one of the fannish e-lists a year or two back when one fan, well-known for his disdain of the medium, made a characteristically dismissive comment. This provoked another fan to an equally characteristic dismissal of the dismissal, arguing that we're truly in a televisual golden age and citing several recent examples to back up his contention. (Vagueness here is at least in part because I can't recall which list it was and whether it's one from which I'm not supposed to quote.)

I think I'm pretty much in the Golden Age Now camp. I only have two overlaps with your list; and as with the books it's simply that I don't know the others. I assume you're aware that season three of *Sherlock* has now been and gone, at least in the UK, to generally favourable notices, although there's been some commentary around the way that show is increasingly pandering to its hard-core fan base. I like it, although not as much as some, especially the repurposing and updating of elements from the Holmes/Watson canon. Sometimes that jars. I wasn't even aware that having mobile phones engraved was a thing but apparently it is, rather alarmingly suggesting I'm more at home with the tropes of nineteenth-century London than the here and now.

We've also been able to watch both seasons of *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*. I was about to assert that it hasn't made it over here, but I thought I'd better check and now I know it has been shown on a subscription channel I've never heard of. Our viewing was thanks to Roman Orszanski.

I like *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* a lot, but I do wonder: is that because of the Australian connection? Would I watch a similar period detective show set in 1920s London? I honestly don't know, although I suspect the Australian setting was rather the trigger to watching

the show in the first place.

At the moment, though, we're most doing the Scandinavians around here. Like you, we watch relatively little broadcast TV, with most of our viewing being DVD box sets. Occasionally, though, we watch something near-live, usually recording a broadcast for watching later, and the recent must-see has been the second season of the Danish/Swedish co-production *The Bridge*. Season 1 starts with a dead body, found on the Øresund Bridge between the two countries, exactly across the border. The resulting investigation is also a Danish/Swedish co-production and an involved plot, with plenty of red herrings and dead ends, plays out across 10 episodes to a conclusion. Season 2 also starts with the eponymous bridge and does more of the same, only probably more so. The show has aired on BBC4, a freeview station, in what's increasing seen as their Saturday night subtitle slot. They also broadcast two episodes back to back, a sound decision, I think, especially with the conclusion of Season 2, which managed several endings in its last two hours and ultimately left me wondering how on earth they were going to do the already promised Season 3. Really, it's the most compulsive show I've seen in years. I can't speak for the remakes, the American version that kept the title or the Anglo-French version *The Tunnel*, but strongly recommend this one.

Other shows we've particularly enjoyed recently include the Danish political drama *Borgen* (rather like a small-scale, domesticated version of *The West Wing*); *Breaking Bad* (to which we've come late, and are only now on the second season); and the prohibition-era *Boardwalk Empire*. And, to demonstrate that we're not entirely dismissing the home-grown product, we rather like *Scott and Bailey*, a two-hander cop show set in Manchester. It's perhaps a more traditional kind of show — two temperamentally different detectives working together — but I think it manages to feel contemporary.

Time to go and make palpable the abstract forces of transport logistics. Or perhaps make another cup of coffee. One or the other.

(16 February 2014)

[*brg* Your letter, Mark, is one of the true highlights of the last couple of months. The other highlight was receiving not only an article from Michael Bishop, but also a poem from him. I have since been told by several people that his article about the Steven Utley collections has already appeared in the *New York Review of Science Fiction*, but the poem is an exclusive to *SFC*.

Thanks for your letter of comment, although (a) I just do not have enough time to loc *Banana Wings* in return; and (b) I had thought you had hardly enough time to blow your nose, let alone write letters of comment.

I had not troubled you because I had visions of you and Claire processing those 5000 membership enquiries for Loncon. So I'm doubly grateful for your *SFC* 85 letter.*]

Casey Wolf: World radio

CASEY WOLF

14-2320 Woodland Drive, Vancouver,
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I am currently enjoying *Cider with Rosie* by Laurie Lee and *The Dreaming Dragons* by Damien Broderick. Obviously you've heard of the second. Have you read the first?

(8 March 2014)

[*brg* *Cider With Rosie* is one of my favourite books, but until recently I could not find a collection with all three Laurie Lee novel-memoirs in it. Now I'm trying to find time to re-read *Rosie* for the first time in 40 years and catch up with the other two.*]

I'm quite out of the loop so I have just today heard about *Mars et Avril*, the first Québécois science fiction film, which came out in 2012. Apparently it is very good. I will try to search it out. Here is a link to the trailer and the Wikipedia page, as well as to the CBC program that tipped me off.

- cbc.ca/player/Radio/C'est+la+vie/Full+Episodes/ID/2391202679/
- [youtube.com/watch?v=0940wODWy4c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0940wODWy4c)
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mars_et_Avril.

It's the 1980 Pocket Book edition of *Dreaming Dragons*. I didn't know that Norstrilia Press had released it — the first edition of the book or a reprint? God, I'd love to have a real Norstrilia Press book, and I do like this one. I wonder if my sister would drag a copy out for me when she comes next fall. I had been thinking of asking her to take back a couple of books for you, but that probably depends on whether she is leaving from Vancouver. She may not want to drag them around.

(9 March 2014)

[*brg* Damien offered *The Dreaming Dragons* to us at Norstrilia Press first. We dragged our feet, so Damien sold it to David Hartwell when he was editorial head of Pocket Books. Carey and Rob became enthusiastic about *Dragons*. In order to publish our hardback edition, we had to buy back Australian rights from Pocket Books. However, we made back our money not only on book sales, but also by selling the Australian paperback rights to Penguin. Since then Damien has rewritten the book and renamed it as *The Dreaming*. It can be bought from Amazon.com.*]

I took out *Weirdstone of Brisingamen* on CD from the library. I wanted the book, but it was out. I hope the CDs aren't scratched, as the reader (Philip Madoc) is excellent. Thanks for reminding me of Alan Garner.

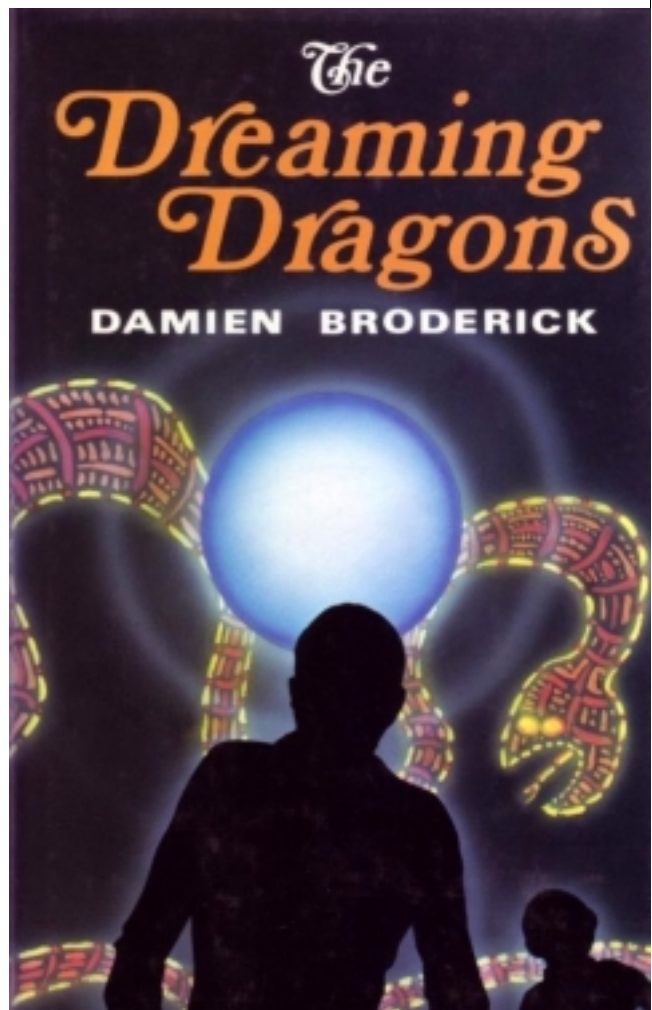
(12 March 2014)

I am feeling the weight of a few things I want to do for others — a good loc for you, a critique of a friend's story and another friend's book, and so on — that I am not getting to because of the length of time my health care is taking, and the poetry I'm writing (putting my writing before others? What the heck?!), and how pooped I am. But I'm happy enough nevertheless.

I had a lovely break between errands yesterday at my favourite — but too far to get to very often — Indian restaurant. I took Seamus Heaney's *The Spirit Level* and my notebook, drank very hot chai, and read a fabulous poem and wrote a not-too-sucky one, which I will redraft today.

I had a lovely manic Skype call with Carole and her two grandsons in Melbourne last night. First time we've managed a chat since I left Melbourne, so I was very gratified that they remembered me with affection and were willing to play. The younger one actually said he missed me!

I picked up a book, published 1908, called *The Ingold-*



by *Legends by Thomas Ingoldsby* (by R. H. Barham). They are amusing spectral tales, mostly in poetic form. I am quite enjoying it.

I miss getting to hang out with you. It was a real highlight of my trip. And I have so many books I want to give you as I finish with them, including this one. And I'm jealous that you have sercon fandom available, with talks and everything. Ours has pretty much disintegrated here.

(17 April 2014)

I hadn't realised the two books *The Getting of Wisdom* and *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (Henry Handel Richardson) are related. I have *Mahony*, but as it is a big book and I have delicate hands. I started with the smaller book of the two. I am also drawn to books about young girls, having been one. I could relate to nearly every twist of the knife in *Getting of Wisdom*. This is why I am such a colander to this day!.

I can watch Aussie DVDs on my laptop. I brought home one — *Kenny* — wanting to show it to my nephew but he refuses to watch it. Now, if he had discovered it on his own ...

(24 May 2015)

[*brg* Here is where Casey was hoping I would reproduce a section of her letter that features some fonts she has been using recently, and a section from e. e. cummings' archy and mehitabel. However, I don't have all her fonts in my system, and her letter is laid out in table columns. I've forgotten how to set up tables in Ventura, so I'll just mention that I received a delightfully designed letter from Casey, and ...*]

It is amazing how many people have never heard of *archy and mehitabel*. There ought to be a law.

I had the opportunity, rare for me, to watch an Australian film a couple of days ago: *The Eye of the Storm*. Wow. It made me wonder. Have you ever watched a Canadian film and thought 'Wow'? I don't think I have. I've enjoyed several, but at the moment the Wow! moments have slipped my mind. My mind is very slippery these years, and I don't see many films. Of those I see, the majority are foreign. It made me wonder if I just don't share the Canadian sensibility, or if my choices have been poor, or if ... well, I don't want to say it out loud.

Other films I have enjoyed recently — *ah!* a Canadian one! *La Donation* is a Québécois film about a Montreal doctor doing a residence in a small ex-mining town where the company doctor stayed on 30 years after the company itself decamped. Very slow, very good. *Yesterday* is a South African film about a rural woman who learns her husband, who with most of the men of the countryside is living in the city where he works as a miner, has infected her with AIDS. Beautiful film. And *Unmistaken Child* is a documentary that follows a Nepalese monk in his search for the young reincarnation of his recently deceased lama. Very moving, funny, and visually delicious.

Guilty pleasures? I have recently rewatched *Kenny*, and found it more hilarious even than the first watching, when I was a bit weary or tired, in the wilds of Tasmania

with my sister.

Books. I have to confess I have read an awful lot of Dick Francis this year. I'm not a thriller reader at all, but my friend Jacqueline, who died less than a year ago of a swift-moving brain cancer, was a huge fan of his. She had over the years urged me to read his books, of which she had every one (around 40). I looked at the covers: a fist with knuckle duster, a bloody knife, etc., and said, 'Mmm, not my thing.'

When she was dying I decided that as a bonding thing I would read one and chat with her about it. What the heck. It was well written, well researched, well paced, with agreeable characters and an interesting story line. I told her I had read it and she said, in a voice now gnarled by tumours, 'A ripping good tale.'

I read another. And another. What I learned was that Richard and Mary Francis wrote reliably good stories with ordinary but stubborn main characters, always kind of the same guy, though his name and job changes, who loves or wishes to love, who doesn't like to be pushed around by bozos (hear! hear!), who will get beaten up once, possibly twice or thrice, who will get the girl and possibly make some improvement in his character along the way. There will be racehorses, of course, and possibly a disabled child or adult, someone who needs to be protected by wits, not fists. Really, they aren't so much thrillers as stories about people and relationships. Strange. Anyway, they are well written and not distressing, and when things are tough or I am exhausted they are just the ticket. So there you go. A convert.

To balance that and attempt a semblance of intelligent readership, I am currently reading and enjoying Iris Murdoch's *An Unofficial Rose* and Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*, as well as intermittently going through Angus MacVicar's *Salt in My Porridge: Confessions of a Minister's Son*. This is interesting for many reasons, but to my delight it turns out the fellow is some sort of a relative. My great-grandmother and his father, both MacVicar's, came from the same small Hebridean island (North Uist), and in the book he talks about his father's life there as a young man as well as their life in nearby communities later on. Very cool to be able to get some glimpse into my ancestors through the back door, as it were — though I don't think black houses had back doors.

One thing I do partake of pretty regularly is the glory of the audio podcast. With the rapid erosion of the CBC (RIP) because of continuing attacks on funding by our right-wing federal government, many excellent shows are gone and others cinched in and repeated until I know them off by heart — truly, several are now on twice a day! The same show! — I turn more and more to the offerings of the world to replace it.

I listen to a variety of shows presenting topics worth thinking about, from several science shows (including ABC's *The Science Show* and five or six from the various BBCs — a highlight is the *Infinite Monkey Cage* with physicist Brian Cox and comedian Robin Ince on BBC4 — and of course CBC's *Quirks and Quarks*), to a handful of religious affairs (and related) shows, such as CBC's *Tapestry* (though the current host irritates me a little, it's still a good show), BBC Wales's *All Things Considered* and BBC4's *Sunday* (religious news).

I think my favourite at the moment — it's gradually

been growing on me — is the BBC4 ideas discussion program called, perplexingly, *In Our Time*. (Almost none of it seems to be about things taking place in our time. Lots of ancient history, astronomy, etc.) Host Melvyn Bragg invites three expert guests to discuss everything from the Phoenicians to Plato's *Symposium* to Cosmic Rays to Complexity. After giving up in annoyance on *Mrs Dalloway* I was interested to hear the impressions of people who actually got through the book, and several times by the sounds of it. (I still didn't want to read it, though.)

Another interesting podcast is by the curator of the British Museum (again from BBC4) called *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. A clunky name, but it gives a fascinating tour through one perspective on the evolution of civilisation. I am also grateful for *C'est la Vie*, about life in French Canada. The two solitudes really do still exist, and I know so little of Franco-Canada. This show helps bridge the gap.

It's really nice to be able to listen to thought-provoking radio whenever I want, instead of being forced to listen to drivel because it's all that's on. Though honestly I am keeping the noise off most of the time now, since I realise that I am a much calmer person if I'm more parsimonious with the old aural stimulation.

I finally buried my old pal Fintan. He died in January, and I kept the poor dear on ice for months because I wanted to take him up to the Yalakom Valley near Lillooet in the dry interior of this province, to bury him with Fluffy on a friend's land. Fluffy is there because he visited the area with me a couple of times and absolutely adored it. It pulled him out of a growing malaise brought on by his advancing muscle disease when he was a pretty young cat. Once he could no longer pull his weight up a tree or leap reliably (or rather, land reliably), he stopped playing much at all, though he still loved cuddling and so on. But up there he found tall stirring grasses and fluttering insects and he burst with life again. It was very sweet.

Anyway, I wanted Fintan with Fluffy, but even once

the ground thawed enough to dig a grave, Sparky was too ill to leave. Sparky seems fine, but he doesn't eat unless someone actually offers him the food, and if he doesn't eat enough he gets very very ill (because of his pancreatitis and irritable bowel disease) and slouches quickly toward Bethlehem. Or wherever it is cats go when they die.

Finally, Susan needed her freezer for berries, it being that time of year, so I had to gather an army of cat-sitters and steel myself to drive nearly six hours in each direction over a period of about 36 hours. (Moan ...) I did it, and it was a beautiful drive through the mountains, and so wonderful to be on that hot, Ponderosa Pine-sprinkled hillside, visiting my friends and finally at last putting Fintan to rest.

I have been writing fiction again, though where it is going I have no idea. It is just so good to be plunking on the keys with regularity, and enjoying, usually, the process and the result. Since the cancer thing I have only written letters, tweets, blog posts, and poetry, though I did revise a few stories and send them out. (One — 'Posture of the Infinite' — is coming out in September in an anthology called *Canadian Tales of the Fantastic*. The others languish in publishers' computers. Damn their eyes. What a pain to have a story lie neglected for half a year and more only to have to send it out again. No wonder people just put their stuff online themselves.)

Oh, I lie. I have also written a bunch of reviews of books about the Irish goddess and saint, Brigit. When I first became interested in her there was almost nothing around. Now, yeesh! I stopped trying to cover them all or I would never have finished.

Hmmm. I turned this computer on to write a loc but all I've written is a letter and now I have to run.

(29 July 2014)

[*brg* See page 6 for thanks from Elaine and me for your advice that helped Polly survive several months longer than expected.*]

JEFF HAMILL
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I just started reading Iain M. Banks's *The Hydrogen Sonata*. I should have a bit more free time in the next few months, so I hope to get some reading done. Maybe writing, too, but I promise nothing.

(2 February 2014)

I am planning to write you an actual letter, but that may have to wait for a couple of weeks. In early April, I was driving across the Bay Bridge (from Oakland to San Francisco — this was the last leg of a driving trip from Seattle to Tucson, Arizona, and back) when I was caught in a four-car collision. I'm fine, but our old VW van was badly smashed up. Most of the problems were bodywork,

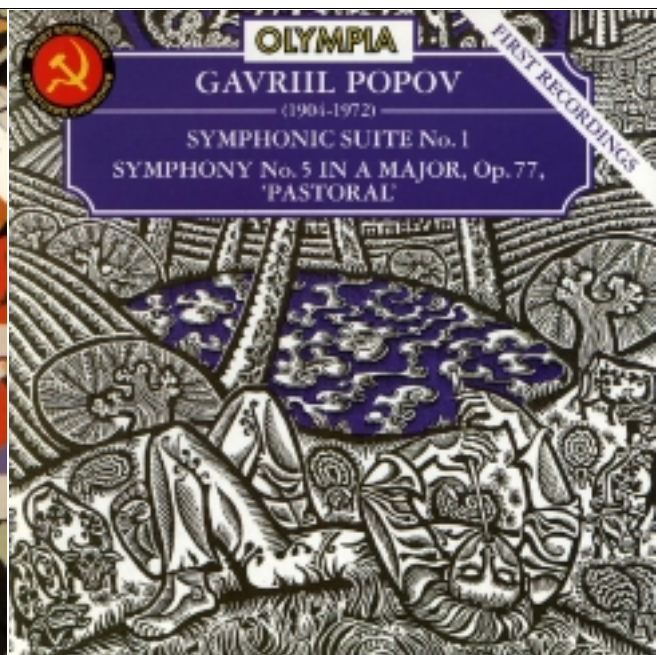
which our insurance paid for (sort of), and some mechanical issues, but overall the van survived structurally intact. I had to leave the van in Berkeley and fly back to Seattle while repairs were being done. (We were lucky in one respect — I found two excellent shops to do the work.)

Anyhow, the van is finally ready, and Monday I will be flying back to California to pick it up. Once back in Seattle, I will write the actual letter.

Two specific things that prompted this e-mail:

- (a) Please don't feel obliged to send me a printed copy of *SFC* any longer. I downloaded all the PDFs of recent issues (Nos. 81–87) to my iPad, and I am reading and re-reading them all that way.
- (b) I sent you CDs of Gavriil Popov's music. Unlike the DVD, you should be able to play them in a regular CD player.

(5 July 2014)



Enclosed is a general donation for your SF work; it's not money for a subscription to anything in particular. As I've mentioned before, having a PDF of your fanzines is all I need.

[*brg* Thanks for the CDs and the contribution to the Gillespie Rapidly Sinking Fund — which makes you one of the few people who can demand a print copy even as I go all-PDF.*]

I do hope to re-read *SFCs* 81–87, one end to the other, instead of randomly opening them up and jumping around so much. Much of my reading these days seems to consist of modern Russian poets (Mayakovsky, Yevtushenko, and others), in both the original Russian and English. This sounds very grand, perhaps, but my Russian was sort of okay 20 years ago and has suffered a lot from disuse. I have to look up practically every other word now. Not that I have any intentions of translating poetry; it's just good practice for me.

There are couple of Russian SF authors whose work I would like to see translated, and no one seems to be in an hurry to do so, so I guess that I will have to do it myself. Another long-term project for me! My two favourites (of the mostly untranslated ones — the Strugatsky brothers have been pretty well served) are Ilya Varshavsky and Vladimir Savchenko.

Varshavsky had some stories appear scattered throughout the collections of Soviet SF published in 1968–70 — in two collections edited by Mirra Ginsburg (*The Ultimate Threshold* and *Last Door to AIYA*), as well as Darko Suvin's *Other Worlds*, *Other Seas*; also *Path into the Unknown* (Judith Merrill contributed an introduction, but no editor is listed). I can forgive Darko Suvin for almost anything for that book; it remains one of my favorite collections.

Savchenko I only know from his novel *Self-Discovery*, published by Macmillan as part of their 'Best of Soviet SF' series, and a short story, 'Success Algorithm', in the Macmillan collection called *New Soviet Science Fiction*, which also has four Varshavsky stories.

Both of these authors have a sharp sense of humour, which I love. I suspect that the two are pretty obscure today, even among Russians.

(22 September 2014)

JENNIFER BRYCE
PO Box 1215, Elwood VIC 3184

I have been dragged kicking and screaming into the world of blogging and yesterday set up a putative blog. I submitted because everyone says it's a good idea for a writer to have a blog, so I enrolled in a two-day workshop at Writers' Victoria called something like 'How to Create a Blog'. I assumed from the title that we would start from scratch. I was horrified when, last week, the workshop organiser contacted me and asked for a link to my blog. Of course, I didn't have one! I now do: littlesmackerel.wordpress.com.

The workshop is next weekend (8 and 9 February) so I expect my blog will be greatly improved after that. I hope it's okay if from time to time I put up excerpts of stuff of mine you've published. I'd never use a whole piece — too long for a blog.

(2 February 2014)

TIM STONE
Seaforth NSW 2092

Attached [next page] are some of Graham Stone's old photos that I recently had digitised, including these of Sydney fans mobbing Robert Heinlein in 1954, which I thought you might enjoy.

(3 February 2014)

DAVID GRIGG
Mill Park VIC 3082

[*brg* In the years since 1985, when David Grigg almost disappeared from fandom, I've hoped that he would return to writing pieces for fanzines. Elaine



Two of the four photos sent to me by Tim Stone, taken by his father, the late Graham Stone, at the 1954 convention to welcome Robert Heinlein, visiting from USA. Heinlein, in coat and tie, can be seen clearly in both photos, but I cannot identify other people. In the top photo, is it possible the young woman standing in the background is Norma Hemming?

and I caught up with him and Sue socially from time to time. He did return to ANZAPA for some years, then handed over the editorship to me in 2005. But he had always said he would write no more fiction after the very enjoyable books and short stories he published in the seventies. Suddenly last year I heard that he had won a short story competition, asked him for details, and received the following astonishing information:*

I started writing (or trying to write!) fiction again in November 2011, spurred by an on-line flash-fiction challenge. In a sudden burst of pent-up creativity, I managed to write 30 pieces of short fiction in a month, one every

day. Since then, I've been trying to write steadily, though more slowly, and so far have completed a total of 78 stories and made a couple of failed attempts at writing to novel-length. The stories have been in a variety of genres.

I have had some modest successes, with a handful of these stories being accepted for publication so far.

Here's a list of my stories that have been published by others:

- 'Note of Triumph': published in *The Rusty Nail* magazine, December 2012
- 'Rear View': published in *eFiction* magazine, October 2012
- 'The Bronze King': published in *eFantasy* magazine, December 2012
- 'The Great Circus Robbery': published in *eSteampunk* magazine, February 2013
- 'Faces': published by *The Story Shack* (website) in August 2013
- 'Into the Night': published by *eSteampunk* magazine, April 2013
- 'We, the Dead': published in the anthology *The Day I Died*, January 2014.

Because some of these publications only demand exclusive rights for a short period, several of the above stories can be read now at The Narratorium website I run <http://narratorium.com>.

rium.com.

I have also had three more stories accepted but not published as yet.

The highlight of my refurbished writing career was late last year when one of my stories won a prize in the 'Write Now!' short story competition run annually by the Yarra Plenty Regional Library Service.

The results were announced in November last year, and I won second prize in the Open section (there were other sections for younger writers) for my story 'Coffee Spoons'. The competition was judged by none other than Paul Collins, who published one of my short stories way back in the 1970s. Paul presented me with the award, and we had a brief but pleasant chat afterwards. The winning stories were published in a small paperback edition by the library service, but I haven't seen them for sale anywhere else (not even in other libraries).

You can read 'Coffee Spoons' on The Narratorium. Be warned — it's straight non-genre fiction with no SF or fantasy elements.

So, some modest successes in the short fiction area.

However, I'm finding that tackling anything longer is much more challenging. For the last several months I have been concentrating (struggling, I might say more accurately) on a novel called *The Outer Darkness*, which has a science-fictional premise, but concentrates more on the interactions of the characters (possibly too much so!). I'm hoping to have a draft finished by the middle of this year.

My story 'A Song Before Sunset', first published by Lee Harding in *Beyond Tomorrow* in 1976, was picked up and reprinted in the anthology *Wastelands* (2008), edited by John Joseph Adams, alongside stories by such luminaries as Stephen King, George R. R. Martin, Orson Scott Card, and Gene Wolfe (!).

The anthology seems to have done very well; certainly I've earned more in royalties from this story (the first one I ever had published) than anything else I've ever written.

(2 February 2014)

ANDY ROBSON

63 Dixon Lane,
Leeds LS12 4RR, England

SF Commentary 85 came as a bit of a surprise, as I thought you'd stopped producing print versions. It is quite a glossy job. I suppose you could save money by doing a straightforward printout in monochrome if necessary. Not that I'm complaining.

Your music choices for 2012 seemed to be decidedly laid back. Personally, I'd have put Bob Dylan's *Tempest* higher in the ratings. Yes, it's a bit much to devour in one gulp, but the music and lyrics suit his old-geezer voice (as opposed to, say, Leonard Cohen or even Mick Jagger), and it did help me keep up with my correspondence at the time, unlike my present inertia.

Dylan's remastered *Self Portrait* is the only remaster that has ever improved anything. So maybe I'm a Dylan fan — or not — because he has done a lot of rubbish over the years as well.

I'm glad you found *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines* again. It showed on TV here in 2012, but in a stupidly censored version, so the continuity suffered. It's still good (even better complete).

2001: A Space Odyssey does need a movie screen, though, as the sailing-through-the-stars scenes lost a lot on TV.

I liked the Woody Allen documentary too, but as with his films, it was a later showing on TV, and I didn't see the whole thing. (Though do I need to see the end of a Woody Allen movie? Maybe not.)

I worry that some of Elaine's 'Gosh! Wow!' physics books might have been a bit heavy going, but I realised that it was mostly the more contentious ones. I had a flashback to when I found *Scientific American* an interesting read — but always too expensive to buy (and still is).

(5 February 2014)

[*brg* Thanks, Andy, for recent issues of *Krax* and *Krax Reviews* ... and two accompanying \$20 notes.]

I used to like Mahler, but haven't listened to him for

many years, as he no longer fits my lifestyle. I just wish I had that extra 30 minutes a day to accommodate the ups and downs of his tunes.

Re-watching old films is strange for me. I can watch old 1950s stuff, such as *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, even though it's a kiddies black-and-white movie, and accept it for all the predictable froth and bubble — but the 1960s movies irritate me with their dated moody acting and five-minute breaks of irrelevant music and scenery. Movies like *The Graduate* were strictly for teenagers, but time has treated them badly. Even films I thought I would have liked seeing again leave me wandering off to write letters like this one. I do still like *Monterey, 2001: A Space Odyssey*, and *The Apartment*, but few others.

The mention of *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* reminds me that I watched some of the old TV shows over Christmas. They made me recall something A. L. Kennedy said about the problems that women have writing unemotive cold-hearted male villains, and likewise the problems that men have with creating calculating female murderers. Those who use stereotypes such as Agatha Christie did seem to be the most successful, maybe because good actors can do these convincingly.

C. M. Kornbluth (p. 46) is an elusive character. I've read several Kornbluth and Pohl novels, but only ever come across biographies of Frederik Pohl, who was seemingly the gung-ho side of the collaboration, reporting on Mr K.'s devious ethics and warped politics underlying the plot. Kornbluth was very readable, but did not offer much in the way of dialogue.

Comics are a fragmented thing to me now. I was brought up on Fleetway war comics, to believe that Japanese people all wore headbands and ran around screaming 'Banzaieee!' I now know this isn't true — only paramedics and media reporters behave like that. I did not read the love story comics — black silhouettes on a bed accompanied by a triangular beam from a bedside lamp. (I yearned for that triangular beam during all my youthful exploits.) The detective comics looked dull, with endless frames of talking heads, and an occasional corpse. They hardly matched the action comics, such as *Superman*.

Contemporary comics have grown into arrogant 'graphic novels', filled with politics and 'issues', or they have become art works that mean nothing, have nihilistic plots, and are drawn badly.

(25 April 2014)

[*brg* Thanks for all the comments on my magazines. We agree most heartily, I suspect, about old movies. I find that 1940s movies are more compelling than those from any later era. The stories are more interesting, the scripts more tightly written, and the actors much more interesting than in movies from most later eras. Discoveries in recent years for me have been the movies of Preston Sturges and the eerie movies produced by Val Lewton. Perhaps best of all have been the films of Billy Wilder during that period. I had meant to watch *Witness for the Prosecution* in two halves recently, but watched it from beginning to end without a pause.

Thanks very much for the little book of poems by

Steve Sneyd. I particularly like his haikus.

As ever, thanks for the poems in *Krax*, and the reviews in your reviewzine. You have a unique way of reviewing fanzines; your comments are for more interesting than the the anodyne comments that pop up elsewhere.*]

ROBERT ELORDIETA
Traralgon VIC 3844

It was sad to hear in the news today that Phillip Seymour Hoffman died of a drug overdose. I've seen a couple of his movies, but not very many. *Charlie Wilson's War* was one of them.

(3 February 2014)

Your package did arrive safely at my parents' place. It was your best idea to send stuff to my parents, as things would go missing at my place.

There are definitely no rejects in the box that you sent me. Thank you.

I'm amazed at the variety of movies that Dick Jenssen and you have. The movies that you have sent to me have been very interesting. I have heard of some of them, but some of them I have not. I love it that you send me a variety of movies, old ones as well as new ones, English-language ones as well as foreign-language ones, black-and-white as well as colour films.

What really matters to me is that the movie has a good storyline and reasonable acting in it.

(22 April 2014)

FRED LERNER
81 Worcester Avenue, White River Junction,
Vermont 05001, USA

I retired from my job as a bibliographer on 11 January 2014, so now I've got time to catch up on some of my reading. This included *SF Commentary* 85, though reading it didn't really put me ahead of the game, for it offered an abundance of suggestions for further reading. One thing I expect to be doing is rereading books that I didn't much like the first time around, but which are favourites of people whose opinions I respect. Thus I'll probably take *The Last Unicorn* off my shelf and see if I can get over my visceral objection to any tale in which a magician is called Schmendrick. (As this is the only thing I remember about the book, you can see what a strong negative impression it made.) I have no such unfortunate memories of Alan Garner's books, but you've made a strong case for me to have another look at them.

The first book that this issue inspired me to read was *The Falling Woman* by Pat Murphy, and I have Mark Plummer to thank for that. I've had the book on my shelves for years, and I don't know why I never read it before. The novel is set among Mayan ruins in the Yucatan, and perhaps one reason I fell into it so easily last week is that my wife and I recently returned from a week-long trip to Costa Rica. This was our first experience of the tropics, and although our focus was on nature we did get to one museum, the Museo de Oro in San Jose. There we saw many examples of pottery and other

artifacts; and while these were from a different culture, they had enough in common with the sort of thing that Liz Butler's expedition uncovered to give me more of an understanding of her motivations and experiences than I might otherwise have been able to feel. ('Whatever happened to Pat Murphy?' you asked. According to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, where she co-authors the 'Science' column with Paul Doherty, she works for 'Klutz, a publisher of how-to books for kids'. Though *F&SF* says that she also writes science fiction, she publishes it in places that I don't see.)

I must mention Jennifer Bryce's comments on the musical performances she attended. I haven't much of an appreciation for music; I'm just not capable of actually listening to it, unless there are words that I can follow. (Perhaps in my retirement I'll find some opportunity to learn how to listen.) Reading Jennifer's reviews gives me some sense of what I'm missing, and makes me wish I could attend a concert with her, or spend an evening having her guide me through some of her favourite recordings. Let me thank her here — and add that I expect to add some of the books she mentions to my reading list as well.

(7 February 2014)

JASON BURNETT
PO Box 18496, Minneapolis,
Minnesota 55418, USA

My condolences to you and to everyone who knew him on the loss of Peter Darling. He sounds like quite a wonderful guy and I'm sure he will be greatly missed. Like Bilbo Baggins, I have a great fondness for maps and family trees, so upon seeing the Foyster name featuring so prominently in these articles, I immediately went to Google to try to figure out the family relationship, if any, between Peter and John Foyster. I'm sure you can imagine my horror when I started typing in 'Elizabeth Foyster' and Google suggested the topic 'Elizabeth Foyster marital violence'. Fortunately, there was a completely benign explanation — there's an Elizabeth Foyster on faculty at Cambridge who's made an extensive study of marital violence in early modern England.

I also found it interesting to read in Miranda's delightful pun-filled evocation of Peter about her training in the Feldenkrais method, as I'd just started reading a book by Anat Baniel, who was a disciple of Feldenkrais. Yet another interesting example of how it's a small world (in this case intellectually, instead of geographically) and how there's no such thing as a hook too small to hang a comment on.

Likewise my condolences on the loss of Graham Stone. There are so few fans remaining from that generation that, besides the personal loss, it's a huge loss from a historical perspective whenever we lose one.

It's too bad that Hollywood either never heard or chose to ignore Robert Bloch's advice at Cinecon. Maybe if they had, their standard response to an excellent movie being made somewhere other than Hollywood would be 'we should license and import that' instead of 'we should remake that with the same couple of dozen people who star in everything, and file off 90 per cent of the local

colour in the process'. I'm hopeful that the transition from DVD and similar physical formats to digital formats will help provide viewers a way around the media companies' control of their viewing habits. (Whether enough viewers will take advantage of this to make a difference, rather than just watching whatever their local media choose to feed them, is another matter altogether.)

(9 February 2014)

MILT STEVENS

6325 Keystone St., Simi Valley,
California 93063, USA

Reading *SF Commentary* 86 was like eating a large holiday dinner. It was good. It was filling. However, I now feel entirely inactive. I suppose I need to do some digesting before this LoC can go forward.

Jay Kay Klein's photo collection is a monument to his work and to the SF field in general. As I recall, it contains something like 60,000 black-and-white images and 25,000 colour slides. I'm glad it finally found a home at UC Riverside. Before the donation, a number of people were talking to Jay Kay about making a will. It didn't matter who he left the collection to as long as he left it to someone. Of course, the spectre of Harry Warner was invoked. All people with assets should have a will. This is particularly true if you have items which may interest future generations.

Bob Bloch was one of the funniest fan writers ever. He was also the best toastmaster we ever had. Being roasted by Bob Bloch was one of the highest honours a fan could receive. The fandom Bloch was describing in this interview sounded awfully familiar even though it is decades in the past. We are so fragmented that it is difficult to figure out exactly how fragmented we are. Our concern isn't that other fandoms engage in human sacrifice. Our concern is that they wouldn't do it right if they did do it.

Even though I have been reading SF for something like 60 years, I've only gotten around to reading Olaf Stapledon in the recent past. *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker* are impressive works. Stapledon not only took on the entire universe, he took the whole thing at once. However, it may be that the SF field couldn't have endured a dozen Olaf Stapledons at once. Our brains can only stand so much at one time. If all SF writers started flooding us with cosmic concepts all the time, our synapses might fry.

I only read Joanna Russ stories when they appeared in anthologies. I feared that her longer works would be more of a treatment than a treat. (The following comment is based on 40-year-old memories.) In one of her essays, she seemed to dismiss myths and archetypes as primitive nonsense. I disagreed with that. I don't think basic human psychology has ever changed or ever will.

J. G. Ballard stories left me with impressions rather than concepts. Vermilion Sands seemed like a fantasy resort for the Lost Generation. If you hadn't been lost before you went there, you would be afterwards. I suppose you might go to Vermilion Sands if you wanted to do nothing, but wanted to do it with a particular style.

I remember the *Martian Chronicles* mini-series. All of

my non-fan acquaintances didn't like the ending. On thinking about it, they may have had a point about 'The Million Year Picnic.' It didn't make a lot of sense.

(8 February 2014)

SF Commentary 87 is a Big Fanzine. Big fanzines can be overwhelming. In paper form, they sit there on the coffee table in the living room and stare at you. They do that much better than smaller fanzines do. Eventually, you have to do something. It's a good thing I didn't receive this issue in paper form. In electronic form, a big fanzine just lurks in the ether and grinds its teeth until you do something. It still can be overwhelming. I notice you also have an overwhelming letter column in this issue. Overwhelming letter columns should be the result of overwhelming issues.

Moving is a traumatic experience for the entire fanish species. The last time I moved I felt like Jacob Marley dragging a huge chain attached to an indefinite number of book boxes. The wages of sin may be death, but book collecting can get you a hernia. When a club moves, the problem is even bigger. The LASFS moved to a larger clubhouse in 2011. Before that, I knew the library had many volumes. That's using the 1-2-3-many numbering system. In the process of moving, we discovered a more exact number for many. It was 23,000 volumes. That makes a very large pile of boxes. One person, Gavin Claypool, was largely responsible for re-shelving all those books. He went to the clubhouse every evening for a month and shelved books. Things shouldn't work that way in clubs, but they frequently do.

One wonders how a church could manage to lose \$56 million. Bad bookkeeping can cost you a bunch, but to lose that much you almost have to be working at it. Chaucer made fun of venial churchmen, and they have been with us from that era to the present. I'm not religious personally (although I have some opinions), but I think it would be nice if churches were something more than money-making machines. Maybe a few of them are.

[*brg* The Uniting Church lost all that money *not* on a single congregation or a set of churches but on a private school that it operated. Most of the private schools in Australia are owned by religious organisations. Nobody has yet explained how \$56 million can disappear into such an organisation before the loss is discovered. No doubt there is still scandal to be uncovered.*]

All this talk of lists reminded me of a list my father had. When we moved into our longtime family home my father made a list of things around the house that he wanted to do. Twenty years later, he had more items on the list than he had in the first place. He threw out the list.

These days, my lists are usually derived from lists compiled by other people. For the Hugos, I use the NESFA list and the *Locus* List for ideas on what to read for my own list of nominees. I've never been to a race track or met a race track tout. However, around Hugo time, I feel like talking out of the side of my mouth and advising people on various Hugo races. (2 April 2014)

RANDY BYERS
1013 North 36th, Seattle,
Washington 98103, USA

Re your piece on Joanna Russ: I can't really agree that she was a better short story writer than a novelist. Her short stories are great, mind you, but so are her novels. Your judgment of her novels seemed a bit bizarre to me. Obviously they didn't work for you (other than *The Female Man*). You got bogged down in things that struck you as implausible while failing to engage with what Russ was trying to do. You seem to have missed, for example, that *We Are About To ...* is a critique of the hubristic Campbellian notion that humankind can solve every problem through gumption and knowledge. It's about the denial of mortality (thus the elision of the word 'die' from the title). You also seem to have missed that *The Two of Them* is about the failures of liberalism to solve the problem of oppression. Which isn't to say that either novel is successful (although I think they both are), but that maybe Russ is grappling with issues that don't interest you and thus leave you picking at flaws. (I was very pleased to see in *Flag 13* that Yvonne Rousseau was able to source the quote from Randall Jarrell about a novel being 'a prose narrative of some length that has something wrong with it.' Truly all knowledge is contained in fanzines!)

You seemed more sympathetic to the short stories (and the one novel) that are more overtly autobiographical, although on that front your aversion to 'The Second Inquisition' is puzzling, since it's very autobiographical. In any event, you might want to give Russ's short novel *On Strike Against God* a try at some point, as it's about a university professor who gradually realizes that she's a lesbian. It's also savagely funny and poignant, as most Russ is.

[*brg* When I published it, I did point out that the Russ article was written a long time ago, and put on hold because of my own doubts about my conclusions. When I read it for the first time in over 10 years, I found that the bits with which I agreed most were my comments from the early 1970s about the short stories, which are quoted within the main article. I'm still puzzled by many of the novels, but agree with you that *On Strike Against God* is perhaps her best novel. I read that only a few years ago.

In publishing the Russ article so many years after writing it, I was hoping that a retaliatory flash of blinding revelation would appear from a writer such as you, Randy.*]

In *SFC* 87 I was very pleased to see *The Best Offer* in your list of favourite films seen for the first time in 2013. I just saw it this year (2014) myself, and liked it so much that I went back and saw it a second time. I'd never seen anything else by Giuseppe Tornatore, so I watched several more on Netflix: *A Pure Formality*, *The Legend of 1900*, and *Malena*. All were interesting and visually arresting, but none of them really captivated me the way *The Best Offer* did. A terrific role for Geoffrey Rush, as you say, and a wonderfully feverish, atmospheric story. I suppose

I could relate to his character to some extent.

You also listed Tarsem Singh's *Mirror, Mirror*, which was one of my favorite movies of 2012 (second only to Wes Anderson's beautiful *Moonrise Kingdom*). It was great to see Tarsem doing something more light-hearted after the brutal *Immortals*. If you haven't seen *The Fall*, I highly recommend it. To my mind it's one of the greatest fantasies of the Aughts — 'Julie Taymor does *The Princess Bride*!' A beautiful movie about the relationship between the story-teller and the audience.

[*brg* *The Fall* is one of those breathtakingly beautiful films that Dick Jenssen kept trying to show to people, attracting an low level of enthusiasm from various friends, even those who usually know a good film when they see one. The title sequence alone is enough to elevate *The Fall* into the ranks of the few great films of the last 15 years.*]

I love *The Seventh Victim*, too. It's probably the darkest, most despairing film that Val Lewton ever made. The quotes from Donne are used to devastating effect.

(19 May 2014)

It seems unlikely that there will be another fanzine like *SF Commentary* in the future. More likely this kind of serious, informed discussion of science fiction will take place online, don't you think? For example, Liz Bourke — who is nominated for the Best Fan Writer Hugo this year — did a series of posts on Joanna Russ's books for *tor.com* in the recent past. It was pretty good, too. Maybe that was the big article on Russ you were looking for.

Glad to hear that you've read *On Strike Against God*. It seemed like one you might like, based on what you said in your article.

It's true I haven't participated in online forums much in the past couple of years. I guess Facebook has taken up the natter niche for me. I also seem to have less time than I used to. Where did it all go? But I've had a few requests for contributions this year, and I've written a short (800-word) piece about *Ubik* for Pete Young, as well as sending a longer personal reminiscence about Lucius Shepard to John Purcell for *Askance*. I'm currently working on something for *Trap Door*, as well as trying to finish up an issue of *Chunga*. Somewhere I've got to find time to paint another side of the house! Meanwhile, I need a vacation ...

(20 May 2014)

PETER SIMPSON
16 Dale Green Road, New Southgate,
London N11 1DL, England

I didn't know that Graham Stone had died. I met him a couple of times, and had a desultory correspondence with him in the 1970s. I can't remember ever meeting Peter Darling, but knew of him. 2013 was quite a depressing year for deaths wasn't it? Ray Harryhausen, Doris Lessing, Richard Matheson, Frederik Pohl, Jack Vance, Paul Williams among others. I didn't die (at least I don't think so) but I did reach the grand old age of 65, which

makes me an officially an old age pensioner. Over here, the state begins paying you the retirement pension at that age.

Sadly I haven't come into a fortune, despite 'investing' in numerous lottery tickets. I retired from a lifetime's hard graft (you have to say that, don't you) with the British Medical Association in 2007. Since when I have been gently declining into old age — and of course have now officially reached it.

One of the advantages of living in London — one might say the only one — is that there is always plenty to do, and we go to the cinema and theatre quite a lot. 'We' by the way, is me and my wife (of 32 years) Sara. We tend not to go to recent films, as we find they are mostly crap, although we did see the Coen Brothers' *Inside Llewyn Davis* this week, which was pretty good. Similarly we mostly avoid commercial theatre, as it is dominated by trashy musicals, but go to 'fringe' venues. This week we will be going to see Aristophanes' *The Wasps* in ancient Greek! I think that may be too fringey for me. Otherwise I try to stop the house falling down and keep the garden at bay in what is laughingly called here the 'summer'. In the winter I stare at the rain and wind and moan about the heating bill.

Anyway, as I hate e-books and similar items, I'd like to continue receiving *SFC* in hard copy, so I've sent you a cheque for \$100 as I'm sure my previous contribution must be expired by now (and of course I can afford it with my new retirement pension!).

Thanks, by the way for the last *Steam Engine Time*. Sorry to read of the circumstances that led you to have to give it up. I'd be interested in the index if you ever get round to doing it by the way. I was amazed the other day to discover that Van Ikin is still publishing *Science Fiction*, and that there is a piece by you on John Foyster in the latest issue! I thought Van had packed in publishing, as it is many years since I received a copy. How I admire you publisher/editors!

I wish you a belated happy new year and will try to write at shorter intervals than 31 months in the future. Now I have to write a note to Keith Curtis.

(10 February 2014)

***brg* Thanks for getting in touch again, Peter. The last time I saw you was at a Melbourne convention in the 1970s. I know that you travelled to London, married, and stayed there, and you've always kept up your subscription. You say you will never return to Australia, but might be in Melbourne for a few hours in December.*]**

MARK FERSON

Hon. Secretary, Book Collectors Society of Australia, 4 Sofala Ave, Riverview NSW 2066

It's great to hear what bookish labours people like you have been working on over many years. As another example, a friend and I founded the New Australian Bookplate Society a few years ago, and we have 70–80 members, issue a newsletter, and have a website that I don't have time to keep up to date; see bookplate-society.org.au.

I can understand that Richard did not jump at the offer of receiving copies of *SF Commentary* for the Society, because there is no real mechanism to do anything with physical copies of material — the Society does not have a library — but if you wish to send me a paper copy from time to time I can display them at the Sydney BCSA meetings at least (as we do with the few hard-copy book-sellers' catalogues we still receive).

On the other hand, I would imagine that a note would go especially well in the 'Notes & queries' section of *Bibliobooks*, which would bring your activities to the attention of all *Bibliobooks* readers.

The Victorian Branch of the BCSA also holds regular Melbourne meetings.

(8 March 2014)

RICHARD BLAIR

Sydney NSW

I'm pleased that *Bibliobooks* reached you OK and that it has some appeal. I'd certainly welcome you to join the society if you wish. The Victorian branch of the society, which I believe meets monthly at Monash, is actually much more active than we are in Sydney, where we only meet quarterly. This is largely because dealers are more involved down there, so have a vested interest no doubt.

I probably have more of an interest in the phenomenon and history of science fiction literature than the works *per se*, and enjoyed reading some of the material available online in *SF Commentary* 76. I'd certainly be interested in reading your eulogy on Graham Stone. You obviously knew him quite well and over an extended period of time.

[*brg* I met him only once, but Chris Nelson, who wrote the short obituary of Graham, knew him better. I'm hoping that Chris will be able to publish a much longer appreciation of Graham Stone's work in a future issue of his own fanzine *Mumblings from Munchkinland*.*]

My father (J. B. Blair or Jim/James Blair) was a journalist with *The Bulletin* (1934–60) and wrote quite a few short stories. In 2007, my brother David amalgamated about 60 of these into a book titled *Blown to Blazes and Other Works by J. B. Blair*.

Perhaps when I've got time later in the year I (or my brother David) could send you an article about these stories. Alternatively if you're interested in purchasing a copy of the book I can organise that as well (\$35 plus p&h). It's also available at Bookhome for \$40.

(7 February 2014)

It's good to know your publication can be downloaded, but do you find that the ability for bods to do that might discourage them from becoming members of your group?

[*brg* I've confused you with my account of moving the Melbourne SF Club library. I'm a Life Member of the club, and an interested observer, but not its magazine editor. The club's magazine is

Ethel the Aardvark, which is available only to members. See the club's website melbsclub@yahoo.com.au. My magazines are published and paid for by me and a small band of subscribers, and the main cost has always been the printing and postage of each issue. If I could persuade everybody to download issues from <http://efanzines.com>, each issue would cost me no more than my time.*]

You're most welcome to post any info about my father. There's a webpage jimblairfiction.com. Dad wrote usually under the name J. B. Blair which stood for James Beaton Blair, although he also had a children's novel published (*The Secret of the Reef*, 1963), using Jim Blair. He had about 60 known short stories published, mostly in *The Bulletin*, between 1933 and 1960.

The following appears in the introduction to *Blown to Blazes*, which was edited by my brother David Blair in 2007.

The Rumpelmayer stories (8 items) feature Eddie Rumpelmayer, a friend of the fictional author, who is an inventor way ahead of his time. An invention that features repeatedly is the Reacher-Outer-Bringer-Backer, nicknamed 'Robbie', which can reach out into space and put you in touch with conversations from the distant past. Comedy results when Eddie and his team seek to recall significant moments in history but come across unexpected truths. Good examples are 'In Search of Truth' and 'Reaching Out for Romance'.

In 'The Reacher-Outer-Bringer-Backer', for example, the participants attempt to bring back Nelson's words at the Battle of Trafalgar, believed to be 'Kiss Me, Hardy'. 'How Heroes Are Made' centres on the dispute between two families over which of two men was the hero of the Battle of San Gesto. In 'Music Means Mathematics', the invention is different: the 'perfect sound' is to be produced by calculating the 'exact curve' for the wiggles on a gramophone record.

The Rumpelmayer stories, appearing originally in *The Bulletin*, were later gathered and published in the book, *Pardon My Intrusion* (1954).

Science fiction also occurs in 'Blown to Blazes', whilst in 'Oblivion for a Guinea' the reader is asked to cast aside normal canons of science and logic in the process of grasping the central idea.

(29 July 2014)

MALCOLM McHARG
85 Ridge Road, Kilaben Bay, NSW 2283

Helen and I had a pleasant Sunday when, as McLeish wine partners, we assisted with picking (Merlot grapes). I've probably mentioned Bob and Maryanne McLeish, and their daughter Jessica, in previous emails. Jessica, who was a kid when we first met the family at the Binnaway Show (out Dubbo way) 17 or so years ago, now has her degree in oenology, has spent a year exposed to

wine-making in France, and serves as the marketing manager for this family-owned business. Wine partners (some said there were up to 200 present) picked grapes for about two hours, then retired to be fed, drink some excellent wine, and generally enjoy the good company of the McLeish clan and participating partners. I'm such an admirer of the family and their entrepreneurial endeavour, and their wines, that I would willingly provide my labour without the added inducements of food and wine. McLeish semillon is a consistent gold medal winner at the Royal Easter Show. Jancis Robinson, no less, ranks semillon from the Hunter Valley among the world's greatest wines. In 2012, one of their Royal Easter Show winners, a 2007 Semillon, also won 'The Best International Semillon at the International Wine Challenge' (London). The family and winemaker, accordingly, were appropriately feted. Bob (we share a common interest in rugby) was telling me that, overall, this has been the best growing season for many years. The 2011 Shiraz that I was drinking during the course of this conversation is considered by the wine-maker to be the best shiraz produced by McLeish Estate.

I had my eyes examined recently by a local optometrist (Nasen Udayan, a graduate from the University of New South Wales; Nasen's wife is also an optometrist). I thought Nasen's previous examination was the best in a lifetime of eye examinations. Nasen's manner is professional but sociable; likewise his well-trained staff. I've always felt, however, that professionally, relatively little had changed in optometry from when I last practised (1971). This examination introduced me to a whole new world. What was different was the \$50,000 or so of investment in new technology (mainly Zeiss). I started to understand the technology behind today's laser surgery and cataract operations. One item of equipment evaluates the power of the eye's optical surfaces (cornea, lens) in relation to the depth of the eye back to the macula, and then sends, by way of Bluetooth, the required correction data to a separate item of equipment, a refractor head. Another piece of technology profiles the thickness of corneal and retinal layers, showing the individual layers within each. All of this can be viewed, in HD, with an explanation of what you are seeing. A third piece of technology maps the visual field and visual efficacy according to precise location within the retina (relevant for those, like me, with a pituitary adenoma but also relevant for mapping possible or actual impairment from other causes, e.g., glaucoma).

(13 February 2014)

[*brg* Thanks for describing the exact process that my eye doctor has used to examine my eyes the last two times I have visited her. She reports that slight signs of macular degeneration developing at the back of one eye have already subsided over six months because of the medication I'm taking.

At first sight, it seems that Yvonne's letter below has nothing to do with anything that has appeared in previous issues of *SF Commentary*. However, I like to run articles about interesting SF and fantasy films, and I will launch into a bit of talk about Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* in the next few

issues. In the meantime, Australia has produced *Predestination* (albeit with American accents) an SF film that I enjoyed even more than *Interstellar*. It is scheduled to open in USA in early January 2015:*

YVONNE ROUSSEAU
GPO Box 3086, Rundle Mall,
Adelaide SA 5000

There's been a good deal of local-pride publicity for *Predestination* in Adelaide newspapers lately: for example, in the *Advertiser's* weekend supplement: 'South Australia's Sarah Snook has scored the lead opposite Ethan Hawke in an Aussie-directed time-travelling thriller'. Local journalists are pleased that the film's directors, the identical twins Michael and Peter Spierig, were raised and continue to work in Queensland, although they were born in Germany. As for the film, it was shot in architecturally appropriate Melbourne (although set in Cleveland, Ohio, and New York) and was worked over in Brisbane before and after shooting.

I went to see *Predestination* yesterday, and agree with one and all that Sarah Snook's performance is amazingly good and memorable. In part of her role, the team she worked with thought she looked uncannily like 'the younger Leonardo DiCaprio'. To me, she looked instead uncannily like Laurie Anderson — but I didn't identify this resemblance until afterwards. Based as it is on Robert A. Heinlein's 1959 short story 'All You Zombies', *Predestination's* plot is the ultimate in having nobody to blame but oneself.

(29 August 2014)

LLOYD PENNEY
1706–24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke,
Ontario M9C 2B2, Canada

I remember a steady diet of Shakespeare in high school, all tragedies, too. It did get a little much after a while, and we asked for comedies, and were turned down — not a part of the curriculum. The way the tragedies were presented was boring, and we got the usual questions about what did S. mean when he wrote this, and we were usually wrong. I don't think a hatred of Shakespeare is a sign of immaturity, but a sign that it wasn't taught properly.

Condolences to all contributors on the loss of Peter Darling and Graham Stone. I think most of us are at that age where we are losing our friends; it's happening to us here and there, and it's easy to get depressed over the whole thing.

I only met Robert Bloch once at a short-lived convention in London, Ontario in 1992 called Rhinocon. He guested there with Lin Carter, who died not long afterwards. I talked with Bloch a little about fanzines, seeing we were both getting the same titles, but mostly, he was there as the Pro GoH, and he signed a couple of shower curtains to auction off for charity. We were raising money for George Alec Effinger, rest his soul, to help pay off his horrendous medical bills.

I picked up several large moving boxes full of books from a friend a couple of years ago, and I am still reading

them, when reading comes to mind. I think she gave us all of her Joanna Russ books, and I think I may be close to having a complete Russ library now. Arthur C. Clarke was someone I had hoped to meet sometime in my SF career, but never did. I know brother Fred had intended to start up a museum for Arthur, but Fred is gone now, too. Yvonne credits *Childhood's End* as the book that got her into SF and fandom.

It is great to see articles like this all through the issue. I am finding myself more and more on the outside looking in when it comes to fandom. There is little I can participate in any more. I can't afford the books, the local library doesn't have them, much of local fandom (at least, those my age) isn't around much any more, and newer fans have different interests, to the point where we're finding our own new interests. And, I am finding I don't have a lot of interest left in SF as a whole. Tough to do when it seems out of reach. What I am able to do, many don't seem to appreciate any more. I feel that gafiation is near sometimes.

(25 February 2014)

JAMES DOIG
36 Tinderry Circuit, Palmerston ACT 2913

The Australian fan who unaccountably gets forgotten, perhaps because he didn't focus on any particular genre, is Graeme Flanagan, who compiled the *Australian Vintage Paperback Guide*. It was published by Gary Lovisi's Gryphon Books back in 1994, and is an astonishingly complete bibliography. Graeme lives about 100 metres from me, and his shed has floor-to-ceiling shelves packed with vintage paperbacks. I met him a few years ago, and we've been collaborating on articles on obscure Australian paperback writers of the 1960s and 1970s for Justin Marriott's British magazine *The Paperback Fanatic* — we've done articles on Ray Slattery (who wrote under the name John Slater), James Holledge, Gene Janes, and the cover artist Frank Benier. We've just submitted another on James Workman.

In terms of academia, John Arnold co-edited the huge multi-volume *Bibliography of Australian Literature*, though it's not great on the popular pulp and paperback writers of the fifties onwards. I contacted him not long ago, and we've collaborated on a bibliography of a British pre-mushroom publisher, the Anglo-Eastern Publishing Co., for an academic bibliography journal. I've blogged about Anglo-Eastern a few times on Wormwoodiana <http://wormwoodiana.blogspot.com.au/2013/08/checklist-of-anglo-eastern-publication.html>.

(27 February 2014)

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER
Marchettigasse 9/17, A-1060 Wien, Austria

It's good that you did receive *Definitely Maybe* (Strugatsky Brothers) so quickly! I hope you enjoy it. *Hard To Be a God* will be out in June from Chicago Review Press, and will also have an English incarnation from Victor Gollancz; and *Monday Starts/Begins on Saturday* should be out from Gollancz in August. (I do not know whether they'll decide for *Starts* or *Begins*; the blurb they have on their

home page refers to the old DAW Books translation, but they are using the much better one by Andrew Bromfield).

I am horrified to hear that having some root canal work done cost you a month's income. Here it would cost most people precisely nothing; and me, since as a freelancer have to pay a 20 per cent share, it would have cost very little. I do not understand why so many Americans are against health insurance, although a really serious illness would mean their bankruptcy. Or their love for weapons, when about 30,000 people are killed every year by guns! Or their fear of terrorists. Without atomic bombs, terrorists would be hard pressed to achieve such a death toll! They are listening to everything, but I doubt that they can make sense of what they hear, and when they get a concrete warning (as from the Russians about the Boston bombers), they are too stupid to do anything about it.

And I am sorry to hear that you still have to work so tirelessly; I am also still working, but I wouldn't have to, and I am only doing things that I enjoy.

(5 March 2014)

SF Commentary arrived just a few moments ago. It looks like an interesting issue. Yes, there are a lot of things that take up much time, and with age they accumulate. I keep moving around a lot. I have to travel to the country every week or so, and I go to a lot of flea markets, which is mostly an exercise in health, although it is still possible, although increasingly more difficult.

Now the weather is getting warm, and I often travel to my country house to work there. But the number of books that I should read, and things that I should do, keeps increasing. In a way it is treadmill, although mostly an enjoyable one.

In general, I think that life is much easier here in Austria than in many other countries, especially for old people who were working when the situation in publishing was much better than it is now, and there were excellent opportunities. I hope that you can go on, and will have no dearth of work.

(15 March 2014)

JOHN HERTZ

**236 South Coronado Street, Apt 409,
Los Angeles, California 90057, USA**

It occurs to me that a copy of my fourth collection, *Neither Complete nor Conclusive*, might be due you under our agreed All for All. It is coming under separate cover. Formally *Neither* is a DUFF fund raiser, given in exchange for a donation of \$US5 of equivalent. As the North American DUFF administrator, I shan't stop you from sending money to Bill Wright anyway.

Ditmar's 'Whoever you are' cover recalls my favourite version of the pseudomenon. I believe Russell and Tarski are credited, or blamed, for recognising that with 'This sentence is false' and its variants, chinks in the mortar were left for quibbling, and for thus arriving at: 'Yields a falsehood when appended to its own quotation' yields a falsehood when appended to its own quotation.

(6 March 2014)



WERNER KOOPMANN

202c Reiherstieg, 21244 Buchholz, Germany

Thank you so much for *SFC* 56. Please spare the expense, as I read the internet versions. The postage is quite high; though the stamps are very nice. Unfortunately I do not collect stamps any longer, having sold my collections some time ago. But I hope to interest my grandsons in the future.

Number three grandson was here a week ago. He is only interested in toy trains at the moment.

(8 March 2014)

I just bought a German book on an introduction to Australian Law: *Einführung in das australische Recht* by Wolfgang Babeck of Bond University Sydney, who is also a professor in Berlin. German and Australian laws do not differ too much from one another it seems.

(24 March 2014)

I was born in 1949, so I will be 65 (regular retirement age) during this year 2014. I was admitted to the bar in 1978. I had 36 years as a lawyer, which surely is enough, having mostly worked for some business or other, even freelancing as a computer teacher (Microsoft Certified Trainer).

My wife is also born in 1949, but as she had worked for some kindergartens for about 45 years, she was able to retire earlier (at 63).

(28 March 2014)

A postcard we sent ourselves on our holiday in Spain on June 13 arrived just yesterday (see next page). Here is a photo of the Sevilla Cathedral. Last time we were there, Ulla went to the top of the Giralda (on the right of the picture).

(15 July 2014)

MICHAEL BISHOP

**PO Box 646, Pine Mountain,
Georgia 31822, USA**

This morning I received two copies of your latest, *SF Commentary* 87, and these are beautiful. I can't tell you how pleased and humbled I am by the presentation that you give to the feature consisting of my essay-review of Steven Utley's *Silurian Tales*, the poem 'The Mocking-

mouse,' and my friend and colleague Paul Di Filippo's essay about my fantasy novels and stories. How could I not be pleased? You've made my day, perhaps my month, perhaps the next two months, and I greatly appreciate your own kind remarks in the introduction to this section of the magazine. You have my wholehearted thanks.

Let me admit, however, that I first saw these items (although I didn't read them then) yesterday in a PDF that Michael Hutchins alerted me to by posting its URL in a notice on Facebook. Is there any chance that you could send me this file as an attachment? And if you can, and if you do, would it be all right for me to forward it to a librarian, Gilbert Head, in the Special Collections Department of the University of Georgia Libraries in Athens, Georgia? Gilbert is one of the people overseeing my literary holdings at that library, and I'd like to make sure that the Michael Bishop collection is complete by providing an e-file of this issue of *SF Commentary*. I'd send them one of my two copies, but I'm keeping one for myself and the other will most likely go to my friend and editor Michael Hutchins, who lives in Duluth, Georgia, not far from Atlanta.

I think Taral's cartoon at the foot of the poem, whose last word is banjo, a stringed instrument, entirely appropriate. Thanks, Taral and Bruce.

I'm now in the process of reading everything else in the issue and finding it all highly entertaining. It makes me realise, again, how much I enjoyed fanzines when first entering the field and how the passion of the persons involved in their writing and production give every matter on the page a patina of urgency and importance that is simultaneously stimulating and, well, true.

(28 March 2014)

I've read Yvonne Rousseau's Feature Letter about Miles Franklin. I had heard of *My Brilliant Career*, of course, although I've never read the book or seen the film of that title, but must confess that I was, until now, totally ignorant of Miles Franklin and would have assumed her a him if I had happened to hear of, well, her. You're right. This is a fascinating piece, and I have to apologise for my total ignorance of the person who wrote under that name and of the Australian literary award that she gave her name to.

(1 April 2014)

[*brg* Two of Australia's most famous women writers of the early 1900s published their books under men's names: Henry Handel Richardson, mentioned by Casey Wolf in her letter, and Miles Franklin. The Miles Franklin Award was enabled by her own bequest. She did not earn much money from her writing, but during her last years saved every penny in order to set up Australia's first, and still major, literary award.*]

**DANIEL KING
Thornlie WA 6108**

Many thanks, Bruce — please let me know if my article produces any response.

One comment: the quotation marks around 'Again

Last Night' make it look as though the title of the recently-discovered story is 'Again Last Night'. What I was actually doing was using a stock Ballard phrase (he opens a number of stories with it) as a bit of a joke.

(1 February 2014)

As I think I said before, I like Ballard, but there's no way I think he's a great writer or deserving of the attention he receives. I'm halfway through *Hello America*, which started quite promisingly but now has become quite silly.

(27 March 2014)

When I was sent the text of the story from the British Library, it was on a CD containing 21 JPG scans (I have the disk open in front of me now). The first four scans are of the handwritten notes, while the rest are of the story. The notes, most of which are on scans 2 and 3, also contain many doodles, presumably by Ballard: there is, for example, this sum:

- PB 5000
- SS 5000 (hard to decipher word — looks like 'factory') 10000
- S.G. 10000
- Stell. 10000
- 40000 (underlined, as if a total).

'PB' presumably means 'Prima Belladonna', 'SS' means 'The Singing Statues', 'SG' means 'The Screen Game', and 'Stell.' means 'The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista'.

It looks as though Ballard was adding up the word length of the VS stories he had so far to see if he had enough words to turn them into a novel. If this is true, though, and if my theory is true that 'The Screen Game' was written later than the labyrinth story as a way of salvaging its material, the notes must have been written quite a long time after the writing of the labyrinth story. Perhaps Ballard wrote notes on the unpublished manuscript as a way of reminding himself that the story could possibly be used to provide more material for his proposed novel.

(29 March 2014)

**DAVID PRINGLE
47 Forest Road, Selkirk, Borders TD7 5DA,
Scotland**

I'm interested to hear that Daniel King has requested that I be sent a copy of *SFC* 86. I see it's about the unpublished J. G. Ballard 'Vermilion Sands' story that resides in the British Library's Ballard archive, for which Daniel suggests the title 'Hardoon's Folly'. Not a bad choice of title, but I've already dubbed it 'The Hardoon Labyrinth', and the latter is the title by which it is now known among a small circle of Ballard fans who have seen it. One of them is JGB's French translator Bernard Sigaud, who has in fact translated the story into French (as 'Le Labyrinthe Hardoon') and published it in a new French edition of *Vermilion Sands* (Editions Tristram, 2013).

So it's no longer an unpublished story. However, there are two problems with Bernard's publication of the piece: (a) It's in French! Which means, of course, it's still

an unpublished story in English; and (b) Bernard chose to cut the text by quite a few hundred words before he translated it. So 'Le Labyrinthe Hardoon' is not quite the full thing.

I see that Daniel King dates the story as '1958', which was the British Library cataloguer's guesstimate, which Daniel doesn't question. In fact, having studied the story, I think it's earlier than that. I believe it was written in late 1955 or early 1956 (and that's the time period Bernard assigns it to in the French *Vermilion Sands*).

There are various clues in the text, sundry things mentioned, which caused me to come to the conclusion that it's a very early Ballard story indeed — perhaps the second complete attempt at an SF story he ever wrote. I believe it plugs the gap between 'Passport to Eternity' (written in the spring of 1955, as Ballard told us, but not published until 1962) and 'Prima Belladonna' (written, probably, in the spring or summer of 1956, and published as JGB's supposed debut piece in *Science Fantasy* 20, the issue that came out in November 1956).

But JGB thought it wasn't publishable, or salvageable, and so he kept the untitled manuscript simply to cannibalise various ideas (such as the 'sand-rays') and names (e.g. Emerelda) from it for later stories.

(25 March 2014)

Yes, I've seen D. King's 'The Quarry', sequel to 'Zone of Terror', before, although I didn't receive Daniel's original e-mail. Perhaps it was Simon Sellars in Australia who sent it to me, a year or two back. It's very good in its way, definitely one of the better Ballard pastiches. I have a niggling memory of someone saying they were going to (re-)publish it in a book — was it Rick McGrath in Canada? Rick has already done one book of Ballardian bits and pieces, and he's planning a second for later this year.

(27 March 2014)

PEGGYANN CHEVALIER
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197-5336, USA

I'm so glad the mail came early Saturday, because it rained later and my mailbox gets wet, and I would not have been happy to find your beautiful production a sodden wreck.

I like the equality of your front and back covers (as you also did with *Treasure* 1) — this time one in blue, the other in red, to complement the artwork. Elaine Cochrane's exuberant 'Tiny Dancer' is delightful. I don't even know what DJFractals are,* so I'd better look that up. Ditmar's artful contributions are always wonderful as well. First thing, I read his 'cover story'. I'm fond of Shakespeare too, but mathematics frightened me in my youth; oddly, now that I'm older, I think perhaps it might not as much. Alas, too late now. I've always regretted my lack of understanding of, particularly, mathematics and physics. One can, nevertheless, appreciate what one doesn't fully grasp.

Puns, now ... puns I get. I'm with Dick there — an exalted form of humour, not a lowly one. I love wordplay period. A while back I sent Bill Wright a list of neologisms I'd come up with (see attached). He replied that one of

his own favorites is 'Stalemate: a leading cause of divorce'.

Speaking of Bill, I hope he's recovered from his arduous excursion to the States last year. I haven't seen any write-up of his adventures yet on e-fanzines. Maybe I'm not looking in the right place? I do hope he's well ...

You asked what happened to Michael's fanzine collection. He bequeathed it to me and I promised to send it to Robert Lichtman, who is pretty much delighted to have it. There were boxes and boxes of stuff stored upstairs in Michael's house. I sorted through about half of it and shipped it off. One box never made it, but from the list of contents I'd sent Robert, he said that was the best box to lose if one had to be lost. Still ... I not too long ago also received Robert's *Trap Door*. Much good reading in that too. It's nice to know you think highly of *Trap Door*. Dale Speirs' *Opuntia* I've seen and sent to RL. Also *Banana Wings*. I can't recall Andy Hooper's *Flag*. Darn. You say all of these are print only, right?

We're finally starting to have daytime temperatures above freezing. Hooray! It's been a brutal winter. My neighbour's water pipe froze and he has no water, and apparently The City can't do anything until the ground thaws. Until then, his outdoor spigot is connected to my outdoor spigot by a garden hose like an umbilical cord. The tap must be on continuously or the hose will freeze. This situation makes me a little nervous. He has promised to pay what will be my enormous water bill. I can only hope he'll do so. Besides, my pipe has a roaring sound when he uses the water — feels like I'm invading his privacy!

Well, it's about time for me to sign off and head for bed. We've had our semiannual Changing of the Clocks, so tonight it's an hour later than it was last night at the same time. Such silliness. I'll not sleep immediately but will curl up with some good reading material — I'm especially looking forward to 'The Real Science Fiction', Parts 1–10.

I hope you and yours are well. And busy with paying work, I hope? I'm swamped with work right now. That's okay. Gotta make hay while the sun shines. There'll be lulls.

(10 March 2014)

* DJ = Dick Jenssen. Duh. I should have known that! Yes, I've heard of fractals. *Scientific American* online has had nice illustrations of them. Does Elaine have mathematical leanings too? Writing a computer program is something I'd *still* like to learn to do. Something extremely simple and basic. I should be capable of that! There's a Community College on the bus line (I don't drive) that offers such courses — when one of those lulls in my works comes along. I have a MacBookPro with 15-inch screen. Not very large but the colors are glorious, especially with the screen glowing behind them. I'd love to see Elaine's creations, but hesitate to ask you to send a CD, as I know mail rates betwixt us aren't cheap.

You mentioned letters of comments as being what made fanzines different from any other 'zine. I'm starting to enjoy them in my own right, not only as something Michael Waite was involved in.

(1 April 2014)

Neoeggyannisms

by Peggyann Chevalier

Some *Washington Post* contest winners:

- Abdicate (v). To give up all hope of ever having a flat stomach.
- Balderdash (n). A rapidly receding hairline.
- Circumvent (n). Opening in the front of boxer shorts worn by Jewish men.
- Flabbergasted (adj). Appalled by discovering how much weight one has gained.
- Gargoyle (n). Olive-flavored mouthwash.
- Lymph (v). To walk with a lisp.
- Oyster (n). A person who sprinkles his conversation with Yiddishisms.
- Pokemon (n). A Rastafarian proctologist.
- Rectitude (n). The formal, dignified bearing adopted by proctologists.
- Willy-nilly (adj). Impotent.

A friend, also a word lover, sent me the above and challenged me to create my own. I accepted his challenge and came up with:

- Ability (n). An itty-bitty billy goat.
- Ball bearings (n). Jockstraps.
- Bewilderment (n). Supernatural attack by concrete wildebeests.
- Breath (n). Breast with a lisp.
- Challenge (n). Stonehenge era drinking cup.
- Chrysanthemum (n). Jesus and Mary.
- Circumnavigate (v). What a man does to get through the circumvent.*
- Cloister (n). A too-sweet oyster.
- Coiffe (v). How a quack coughs.
- Construct (n). Scam artist's vehicle.

- Dimwit (n). Comic who performs in the dark.
- Dumbfound (v). Find what can't be found by an intelligent person.
- F'art (contraction). For art, as in 'He's all f'art.'
- Flabbergast (n). Chubby person who ate beans.**
- Fretter (n). Nervous guitar player.
- Frustrated (v). Thwarted eunuch.
- Hoosier (n).*** An owl more owlsh than most.
- Imagination (n). Where you live in your mind.
- Infatuate (v). To become obese from the fat you ate.
- Monster (v). Rastafarian chef's order to sauce maker.
- Penile (n). Egyptian river polluted by men relieving themselves in it.
- Product (v). To poke a water fowl.
- Publish (n). Yummy food down at your local.
- Reveal (n). A cloned calf.
- Sedate (v). (casual, contraction). To accept an appointment.
- Slouch (v). To slide painfully, as a ballplayer into base.
- Surprise (v). To startle a lord with a crowbar.
- Thinking (n). Skinny royalty.
- Writhe (v). To write with a lisp.
- Yogurt (slang). Hello Gertrude, in Brooklyn.
- Zenith (n). Xena the Warrior Princess with a lisp.
- * Circumvent, an opening in the front of boxer shorts worn by Jewish men.
- ** Not to be confused with flabbergasted, i.e., appalled by weight gain.
- *** The friend for whom I was creating these neologisms is an Indiana University alumnus and a great fan of IU's basketball team, the Hoosiers; hence, the double wordplay.

GARY MASON

PO Box 258, Unley SA 5061

Letter of comment/review, from *Crash of the Hard Disk* No 11, p. 20; ANZAPA, April Mailing 2014:

Wednesday 5 March 2014: And today in the mail, what looked like a third instalment of ANZAPA, but was in fact *SF Commentary* 86, arrived. I haven't been a subscriber for years, probably decades, although I perhaps still have my copy of No 1 and other early issues somewhere. I guess I was favoured with No 86 because one of my photos of Peter Darling was in it. Thanks, Bruce!

Bruce has devoted quite a bit of space to obituaries in this issue, in particular to that for Peter Darling. I was delighted in particular by the transcript of Jillian Miranda's speech. Among other things, it reminded me of something I had not thought about for years: one of the things that originally bonded us was our mutual love of puns — or, as I thought of it at the time, our mutual addiction to truly corny humour.

I used to think a really good, or bad, play on words was a very clever thing. Of all the people around me, only Peter agreed. It's been knocked out of me years ago. I

can't fill these paragraphs — or headlines, come to think of it — with puns the way Jillian Miranda seems so effortlessly to have done. (I'm sure she actually put a lot of effort into it, but the essence of it is the appearance of effortlessness.)

Yes, it did bring a tier, er, tear, to my eye.

Here are some more pictures of him as I particularly remember him: Peter being competent.

Peter was always competent at things I was hopeless at — in particular, cars and electronics. In fact, much of what little I know about both I picked up from him. In 1968, near Cootamundra at dawn, when it was 25°F, I certainly had no idea about de-icing a windscreen. In fact, I've never since been in circumstances where it was necessary, so I would probably have to resort to studying this poor photo to do it even now!

He also patiently explained to me the importance of regularly cleaning the tape heads on tape recorders. I reckon I could still manage (just) to operate a reel-to-reel tape deck, but I could never wire up the room as he did to make the whole enterprise work.

I wonder whatever happened to the tapes of Syncon '70 anyway?

That thought was prompted by the transcript in *SF*

More photos from the life of Peter Darling

When *SFC* farewelled **Peter Darling** in No 86, I had very few photos of his life to show you. Since then, not only has **Gary Mason** sent me a sheaf of photos, including those below, but he has also rejoined fandom (by rejoining ANZAPA) after 25 years. He also appears on Facebook.



(Top left): **Peter and Elizabeth Darling**, Kyneton, 1983.

(Top right): **Peter Darling**, Mr Supercompetent (see Gary's letter).

(Bottom left): **The committee who staged Syncon 1** in Sydney, New Year, 1970: *Top: Gary Mason; John Brosnan* (yes, the same John Brosnan who travelled to London by bus in 1970, and stayed); *Bottom: John Ryan; Robin Johnson* (with toupee, which he sacrificed for the Australia in 75 bid film in 1972); **Peter Darling; Ron Clarke**. (John Brosnan, John Ryan, and Peter are no longer alive).

(Bottom right): **Gary Mason and Peter Darling**, Sydney, 1968 or 1969.

Commentary 86 of John Foyster's conversation with Robert Bloch at Cinecon 1981. I don't recall any of the sessions of Syncon '70 ever being transcribed. So many of the participants are no longer with us! But if I don't know what happened to the tapes, Peter was the only other person who might have known.

(5 May 2014)

NED BROOKS

**4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn,
Georgia 30047, USA**

I did not meet Graham Stone, but we corresponded some, and he looked just like I would have imagined ...

Funny interview with Robert Bloch — that humour based on exaggeration reminds me of Dave Barry.

Joanna Russ was too angry for me — I look for a story, not a sermon or a rant. Kurt Vonnegut was much subtler about it! She was just about my age — I was born in 1938 — but apparently much more excitable.

My favorite Arthur C. Clarke book was *The Fountains of Paradise*. I was surprised to see that George Zebrowski liked *Songs of Distant Earth* best, as I found that completely unreadable.

(11 March 2014)

The account of the removal of the library from the projection booth made me wonder if there are no engineers in your group! You are quite right: shifting heavy boxes on such a steep staircase is hazardous — but you could have rigged a rope and/or a slide and avoided that difficulty.

[*brg* But that's what happened. Terenzio Monclova rigged up pulleys so that the filing cabinets would be lowered from the bio box to the ground floor. I wasn't there on the night, and it seems that nobody took photos.*]

I am surprised that Tim Marion would have needed anyone to explain Alan Garner's *Thursbitch*. I never found anything obscure in Garner, though a couple of the books like *Red Shift* just didn't hold my interest.

I remember hearing about George Turner, but owned none of his books until this week. The local Last Chance Thrift Store turned up a nice copy of *The Drowning Towers* (Arbor House/William Morrow 1988).

(28 March 2014)

[*brg* George Turner's best novel. Its original title was *The Sea and Summer*; it was re-released by Gollancz in paperback in 2013.*]

**JAMES ('JOCKO') ALLEN
43 Prendergast Street, Pascoe Vale South
VIC 3044 (note: change of address)**

Thank you for the latest *SF Commentary*, paper edition. I can see why you sent it to me, with the items about the Melbourne SF Club having to move. I was pleased with the nice photo of me and Merv Binns and the comment about club history. I had a lot of good times at West Brunswick MSFC meetings, but in this life change is a constant. We had a great 27 years at St David's, but we had to move on, because of all the business about the church being for sale. Interestingly I have been back to St David's Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday services; it felt a little weird at first, but I am happy the church was still there.

I am sure you will be interested that the church has been inspected by Occupational Health and Safety, and has had to put up a door with a bolt and lock closing off the steep stairs to the bio box. The inspector apparently said, 'You would not be able to build something like those stairs today: too dangerous.' So you and all the other volunteers who brought all the club stuff and filing cabinets down them did really well, coping with a difficult and dangerous environment. (30 April 2014)

**KIM HUETT
PO Box 1443, Woden ACT 2606**

Given what's just happened, it's tempting to wish that sometime in the seventies or early eighties the Melbourne Science Fiction Club had decided to go down the road already travelled by the LASFS. It's possible that if they had started soon enough, and shown sufficient determination, the MSFC might now own its own clubhouse. On the other hand it's possible that by going down that route the MSFC might now be a very different, and possibly less interesting club than it is now. If the MSFC had taken on such a serious project as saving for a clubhouse, the changing focus of the club would quite probably encourage a somewhat different cast to become long-term members, which in turn would surely alter the tone of the club.

In regards to that Triple M list of best Australian songs, you can also tell a lot by considering who or what initiated the voting. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that the Triple M network doesn't play much Cold Chisel for whatever reason, and consequently, when asked, members of the Triple M audience didn't automatically think of Cold Chisel despite almost certainly knowing and liking their material. A lack of airplay to remind the voting audience would also explain the absence of Midnight Oil and a number of other acts you mention.

Where this list gets truly weird is the presence of Men At Work's first single, but not their second. 'Who Can It Be Now' is an okay song but hardly outstanding, whereas 'Down Under' is gloriously over-the-top self-denigration set to a far catchier tune. The same could be said for Darryl Braithwaite's 'The Horses' making it in the chart, while Sherbert's 'Howzat' didn't. Admittedly 'Howzat' is lyrically weak, but nobody listens to 'Howzat' for the lyrics, not when the music is so punchy in such an unusual way.

There is a long tradition in Australia of including New Zealand artists in Australian lists, compilations, and awards. It's as if Australians have decided that keeping the Kiwis separate would be rude or too hard or something.

I much prefer 'How To Make Gravy' to Paul Kelly's 'To Her Door', partly because the subject material is such a different view of love and family, but partly also because of the beautifully understated guitar work at the start, which gives the first minute or so such a pleasingly different (and very appropriate) sound. 'To Her Door' is by no means a bad song, but to me it just doesn't have the uniqueness of 'How To Make Gravy'.

What's missing from this list? Lots obviously. If I had to throw a cat among the pigeons I'd suggest 'The Carnival Is Over' by the Seekers.

(24 March 2014)

[*brg* 'The Carnival Is Over?' A Russian folk tune with lyrics added by an English writer, Tom Springfield? The poll I was discussing included only songs written by Australians — or New Zealanders in some cases.*]

Having survived my late night orgy of beer and cashews with no particular damage, I decided to visit Woden

today for lunch and a little shopping. First order of business was to check my post office box, where I discovered no less than three fanzines waiting for me: *SF Commentary* from Bruce Gillespie, *Banana Wings* 55 from Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, and *Flag* 14 from Andrew Hooper, the best single week's haul I've had in months. From there it was to Cafe Cherry Beans for fish and chips. They beer batter their own fish, which is very nice indeed. The fish they use is a little strong in flavour for my liking. I'm not much of a seafood fancier, but that's easily solved by the judicious use of tartare sauce to tone down the flavour. I also like that they provide ramekins of mayonnaise, tartare, and tomato sauce to allow a little variety. At Cash Converters (Australia's favourite pawnbroking chain) I picked up a five movie DVD collection (*The Apocalypse*, *Sea Ghost*, *Faultline*, *Lockjaw: Rise of the Kulev Serpent*, and *Meteor Apocalypse*) on the basis that at least one of them will prove to be watchable (well, I like those odds) for the princely sum of \$6. I also discovered during my search that John Wayne had starred in *Randy Rides Alone*. Gosh, Randy Byers, I never imagined you being played by John Wayne. I didn't think he was your type. From there it was to Big W for a new pair of boots. Given how much trouble my size 12 Shock Resistant boots have caused me, now I'm working longer shifts, I'm going back to a pair of size 11 Crosbys. I don't know whether it was the size or the brand causing the discomfort, so fixed both possible problems. Add in some grocery shopping and this has been a most productive day.

(30 March 2014)

JOHN LITCHEN

PO Box 3503, Robina Town Centre
QLD 4230

I did manage to read a very good book about an astronaut left to survive alone on Mars when something went wrong on the fifth or sixth day of the expedition. It has a beautiful cover and is called *The Martian*: Andy Weir's much updated version of *Robinson Crusoe on Mars*, which I vaguely remember reading in the late 1960s as well as having seen a film of it, which was made in Death Valley California, also in the late 1960s. I'm tempted to dig up all the books (novels, not short stories) I have where stories are set on Mars and re-read them, maybe even write something about them, as we could actually have a mission to Mars in the near future (within the next 20 years or so) sponsored by private enterprise. I might live long enough to see that happen.

I also got back into Part 9 of my autobiographical 'My Life and Science Fiction', where I go to Mexico. I hope to finish that soon.

(28 March 2014)

[*brg* In recent years there have been only three books that have been recommended to me with words like: 'Bruce, you just gotta read this!' They were Jo Walton's *Among Others* and Anne Leckie's *Ancillary Justice*, which in different years have won most of the top SF and fantasy awards, and Andy Weir's *The Martian*, which will be eligible for next

By KEITH DUNSTAN




Science fiction "weapons" for capturing the 1975 Worldcon for Melbourne are Miss Lesleigh Lutterell (left) and her space-age silver pendant symbolising "Australia 1975"; plus an SF film about Aussie Fan (above), who helps defeat the opposition.

SCIENCE FICTION fans here are fighting to secure the world science fiction convention for Melbourne in 1975.

Apparently this is a difficult and devilishly skilled matter on a par with snaring the Olympic Games.

Whether we blast off or go phut will be decided at the Los Angeles "Worldcon", as they call it, within a few weeks.

Paul Stevens, of the Melbourne SF Club, says they have made a number of moves.

For one thing they started a fund — known as DUFF, the Down Under Fan Fund — to bring out a U.S. SF fan to look us over and give an unbiased report to Worldcon.

The DUFF visitor turned out to be Miss Duff — Lesleigh Lutterell, 21, of Colombia, Missouri, and she arrived in town yesterday.

Lesleigh is a true SF fanatic and back home in Missouri she even runs her own magazine (fanzine in SF talk), called "Starling".

Lesleigh assures us that all the standard space ship stories are utterly old hat. Even ecological SF stories are now dated.

The latest tales are way-out, psychological, dealing with problems of the mind and full of imagery.

"And frankly, some of them are pretty hard to understand," she said.

★

LESLEIGH, plus representatives from here, will appear for us in Los Angeles.

Paul Stevens reports that we are also sending a film done in SF style.

The hero of this film is a digger-hatted, big-jawed, beer-drinking, muscular character called Aussie Fan.

He has to compete with a deadly super-villain called Anti-Fan who tries to kill off members of the Australian bidding committee.

Although nothing is actually spelled out, the suspicion is that Anti-Fan is from San Francisco, which is also bidding for the 1975 Worldcon.

Eventually Anti-Fan gets blown up by his own bomb and Aussie Fan sweeps to victory.

One trusts that it doesn't all turn out to be SF.

The Worldcon would mean an invasion of at least 250 SF fans from the U.S. alone, plus some of the world's top writers.

year's awards. I'd better buy it and read it.
'My Life and Science Fiction', Part 9? I still
haven't had time or money to publish parts 7 and 8
in *Treasure*. Part 6 has just appeared in *Treasure* 3.
You've led much too eventful a life, John.*]

I'm having second thoughts on writing about the Mars
books, having made a tentative list of books or authors I
know are still packed away in boxes in my garage. There
are at least 18 of them, plus some I don't have.

(28 March 2014)

**[*brg* I've left out the rest of this letter, John,
because in it you talk about not having the time or
will to write an article about the Mars novels. Since
then you've written the article: 47,000 words plus
illustrations. Thanks very much.*]**

I finally got a cheap scanner (combined with a printer),
so please find attached [previous page] the copy of the
newspaper cutting of Keith Dunstan's from 1972.

I know you published my story ('What was that film
called?') a long time ago about the Antifan film in
Metaphysical Review, but it didn't include a lot of photos
relating to the film. Perhaps one day we could do a
special issue, including stills from the second film, which
we made in Sydney when the fans there were attempting
a bid for a second Aussiecon. The bid was not successful,
but we did shoot a second film.

The bit of the second Aussiefan film that you saw in
colour many years ago was a five-minute segment that
was shot as if it was an advert for the event. It was
supposed to show quick flashes of everyone involved in
the various bids for the con, as well as some quick street
shots. I also slipped in a shot of a naked woman leaning
out of a window, which was a two-second shot. Maybe no
one noticed it.

Monica and I went up to Canberra to shoot some
scenes with John Bangsund (dressed in some weird cos-
tume) outside the National Library. Robin Johnson was
there at the time, but I can't remember whether he
appeared in this short colour segment. The second film
was shot in black and white because that is all the film
stock I had at the time. It was meant to match the first
film. I do have some colour slides taken under the Sydney
Harbour Bridge, during the segment when the fans tried
desperately to refill the Harbour after Antifan had pulled
the plug and drained it.

The actual underwater scenes of him pulling the plug
were shot at Williamstown near the lifesaving club, where
a large drain empties storm water into the bay.

I have no idea of copyright in this case. I presume
since the film was made for the Australia in 75 Commit-
tee, possibly Robin Johnson arranged all that. Copyright
would have belonged to the committee.

(23 April 2014)

**[*brg* John then brought me up short when he
suggested putting both Antifan films on DVD. Didn't
he realise that the National Film and Sound Archive
had done this about ten years ago, using material
supplied by Mark Loney? I thought I had written in
SFC about this mighty feat — a DVD set of the**

complete video recordings from Aussiecon 1, plus a
DVD of the Antifan bidding films.*]

CY CHAUVIN

Construction Association of Michigan,
43636 Woodward Ave., Bloomfield Hills,
Michigan 48302, USA

Your obit of Peter Darling — and in particular your line
about learning some things about him you did not know
when he was alive — reminded me of the funeral I
attended recently for in Ann Arbor for Larry Tucker, a
local Midwestern fan. (He was not a relative of Bob
Tucker, although he and Bob Tucker, and Larry's
mother, Nancy Tucker, did at times lead me on into
believing they might be related.) Larry had some finan-
cial misfortunes, becoming homeless, and then just as
things were getting better, had a stroke and then died.
He became a ward of the state. But he had been a veteran,
which I never knew, and by some great effort on the part
of Leah Zeldes, it was found that the veterans' association
would pay for his burial. A local funeral home donated
the coffin and the other burial services and transporta-
tion. But it is the burial service itself that was such a
surprise, since there was at least 30 veterans or service-
men at the cemetery (overwhelming the contingent of
fans who attended as mourners), a gun salute, taps on a
bugle, and presentation of the flag, as well as three or
four ministers who said kind words. Someone said that
Larry would have been quite pleased by all the spectacle;
it would have been very suitable for videotaping. (Larry
was quite active in that field, recording many SF conven-
tion events in Michigan and the Midwest.)

(30 March 2014)

RAY WOOD

Box 188, Quorn SA 5433

I enjoyed your description of moving the Melbourne
Science Fiction Club's Library. I'm curious about that
library: does it contain complete collections of *Astound-
ing*/*Analog*, *Unknown*, and *Galaxy*?

(1 April 2014)

**[*brg* No such luck, although I have discovered
that the Ron Graham Collection in the Fisher Library
at Sydney University contains complete sets of
many of the major magazines.**

**Below you mention Collected Works, which is the
last great oldfashioned bookshop, at least as far as
I'm aware. There could be equivalents in Adelaide
and Sydney.**

**Owned by Kris Hemensley and his wife for about
40 years, it has moved all over Melbourne and the
inner suburbs. Nominally a poetry bookshop, it also
features a lot of other literary works that you won't
find on a shelf elsewhere. These days it is the only
retail space offering copies of books by Australia's
main poets — where they are still available from
very small publishers and distributors. Kris is very
friendly; likes to natter. The book shop has a
wonderful olde-worlde look, especially as it is on**

the first floor of one of Melbourne's oldest still-used buildings, the Nicholas Building, just near Flinders Street Station. I hadn't been there for 30 years until the June launch of *The Stars Like Sand*, Tim Jones' and P. S. Cottier's book of Australian speculative poetry.

Treasure upon treasure — if only I had had the money to buy what met my eye! I went back a few weeks ago, but several of the books I had seen in June had been sold.*]

Collected Works sounds a delicious kind of place, one that I'd treasure too. I'll ring them as soon as they're open today and order that book. Thanks for the info.

But would you believe that we have a beautiful old-fashioned bookshop here in this small town of Quorn? Tourists are amazed to find it here. A nurse at the Quorn Hospital runs it, and has it open on weekends. Kind of a hobby for her, I suppose. Her young son, who has chronic fatigue syndrome, opens it one day during the week too, but you never know which day. It is crammed mostly with old and secondhand books, but new books too. They even put a table out on the footpath with books on it in the ooold-fashioned way. When a little old bookshop goes bust in Adelaide she seems to buy all its stock wholesale.

What I miss most about the old bookshops that were around when I was young are the people who ran them, and truly knew books. We had a book shop near Adelaide Uni, the Beck Book Company, run by a bloke called Frank Muir. He had tables of threepenny books, sixpenny books, and shilling books that I used to hover over, and buy books from when I was still at school.

I'm sure that he'd read every book on his shelves, too. Any of his books I'd ask him about, he knew. And most of all, while I majored in English Lit. at Uni there, if there were a question about lit. that my lecturers couldn't answer, I'd pop over to see Frank, certain that he would answer it.

Today bookshops are merely businesses.

At least thank all the gods for ABEBooks.com! Recently I was hunting down a rare book for Suzanne Falkiner's biography of Randolph Stow: a Swedish translation of some of his poetry, *Tystnadens Landskap*. She'd been unable to get a copy anywhere. I found one in a Swedish bookshop called Tomelillabok. The proprietor, Göran Pehrson, sent it to me with an old-fashioned invoice, not asking for payment in advance, which these days is hard to believe.

He had the rather strange idea that the book would reach me in two days, but it took over two weeks. We wondered if he'd confused Australia with Austria!

I fondly remember Robertson & Mullens' magnificent bookshop in, I think, Swanston Street, in the later



Ray Wood, on top of The Dutchman's Stern, near Quorn, South Australia.

1960s and early 1970s. Each time I came to Melbourne from Mildura on weekends I'd be certain to visit it. Each floor as you went higher had books more wonderful than the floors below. I'd return from there with two or three boxes full of books every time.

In this pic of me I'm on top of The Dutchman's Stern in the Conservation Park of that name near Quorn. I'm an SA Parks' Volunteer, and look after the hiking trail there. That park exists because of the rare Quorn Wattle and also the equally rare White Spotted Skipper Butterfly, which are found there.

(3 September 2014)

LARRY BIGMAN
21 Bel Air Drive, Orinda, California 94563,
USA

You could have easily knocked me over with a feather twice the other day after receiving the latest envelope from Greensborough. I was impressed that so soon after *SFC* 86 you had a new plump issue for us. But I then pulled out the envelope's contents and found not just No 87, but a lovely copy of No 68! The last issue I needed to complete the run! As I already said, feather times two.

I must thank you profusely for filling that *SFC* gap for me. I've been a collector, as well as reader, from childhood. My wife pointed out years ago that I don't collect compulsively, but more so archivally, if you will. And she was right. I collect writers I find important, and the same for zines of all types. When I first glommed onto Philip K. Dick back in 1976, I bought your *Electric Shepherd* compilation of *SFC* articles within days. So I knew about *SFC* a good while ago, and as a focused PKD collector over the years, decided I wanted to get all his fanzine appearances too. Back in those analogue days, finding old fanzines from Australia was not easy. I did not think

it would be possible to find them all. By the late 1990s, via eBay and collections turning over, I found them all, except for that pesky No 68! Please rest assured now, Bruce, that there is another complete archive of *SFC* on this side of the Pacific.

I do want to comment on Michael Bishop's insightful and moving review of Steve Utley. It's really quite wonderful how he conveys a sense of Steve both as person/friend and as writer. I knew Steve going back to the 1968 Southwesterncon in Dallas. It was my first convention, I was all of 13 years old, and I thought I was in heaven. The Texas crowd back then was into everything — SF, horror, comics, old radio shows, in all their forms. So I became pals with Steve, Howard Waldrop, Tom Reamy, Buddy Saunders, and others. Steve was always a quiet guy who had that wry, sardonic Texan wit that infuses his writing. Michael truly does him justice in describing his writing and his life in such a caring way. I found his concise description of the sound of Steve's voice spot on. I immediately heard his voice from all those years ago. I think the last time we ran into each other was in Houston in 1978. I followed his writing over the years and always wished there was more. I didn't know about his health issues, though, till I read Michael's essay. As a psychiatrist these past 30 years, I now understand.

(4 April 2014)

DENNY LIEN

**3149 Park Avenue South, Minneapolis,
Minnesota 55407-1524, USA**

Curt Philips (recent TAFF winner) asked on Fiction-mags: 'Speaking of things historical, Bruce; has anyone ever published an index to the Australian SF magazines that updates Graham Stone's 1966 volume?'

Philip Stephensen-Payne replied, citing the Miller/Contento SF index and the *FMI* itself to various degrees. Graham Stone himself updated his magazine data in his 2004 volume *Australian Science Fiction Bibliography*, where 'Periodicals' comprise pp. 234–82. This is alphabetic by magazine title, and within each title chronological by issue number. SF/F magazines published in Australia get full content listings; mixed SF/nonfiction titles such as *Omega Science Digest* get listings of fiction (and SF-related nonfiction, such as book reviews) only; for general magazines such as *Overland* or *Man* only SF/F stories are listed. Magazines published outside Australia are included only where they published Australian authors.

So, for instance, *Aurealis* (up through issue 24) gets full listings of everything — not only stories but articles, book reviews (name of book and of reviewer for each), and authors of published letters in each issue. *Omega Science Digest*, as noted above, gets listings only of the two or so SF/F stories in each issue (plus occasional articles on SF-relevant topics). *The Herald* (Melbourne newspaper) gets listings of the SF serials it ran, as do other general Australian magazines and newspapers.

On the other hand, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (US version) gets less than half a page total, since only Australian authors publishing there are listed (A. Bertram Chandler, Jack Wodhams, Ron Smith,

Damien Broderick, and so on). However, the Australian edition of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (eleven issues published, 1954–1957) gets full story listings, since it was published in Australia, even though none of the authors represented (with one exception I spot) was Australian. A little confusing, but one gets used to it.

The contents of anthologies, incidentally, are similarly detailed in the 'Books' section of the *Bibliography*, which also covers single-author collections (and novels). The 'Author' and 'Title' sections of the *Bibliography* index all of the works listed in the 'Books' and 'Magazines' sections.

(5 April 2014)

MATTHEW DAVIS

**15 Impney Close, Church Hill North,
Redditch B98 9LZ, England**

I'd just been reading up on William Tenn, so George Zebrowski's essay on Olaf Stapledon was timely. (Although, given the wealth of material in the backlog of the last four issues, there would probably have been something pertinent to anything I read.) To Tenn, Stapledon was the unsurpassed SF writer. The second NESFA volume of Tenn's fiction had an afterword by Zebrowski, and Zebrowski's essay features Tenn's catchphrase 'temporal provincialism', so everything links up.

I noted that you've begun reading the horror anthologies of Stephen Jones. When I returned to the UK in the early 1990s, the stories he selected I found useful in delineating the contemporary feel of Britain. The horror boom collapsed, and writers like Kim Newman, Chris Fowler, and Neil Gaiman went off to make their own careers in various ways. One of the writers of this period who never broke through in the same way, but with whom I always made a personal connection, was Joel Lane. Because he was gay and wrote stories set in Birmingham, his stories have an immediacy for me. Also, whenever I went to read further on Robert Aickman, Fritz Leiber, or Cornell Woolrich, I'd usually find that he had written an essay.

There's a Birmingham poet Roy Fisher who came up with the line 'Birmingham is what I think with', and that applied to Lane too. Aickman, Ramsey Campbell, and M. J. Harrison over the past 50 years have all staked their territory in a vision of post-war Britain, and Lane brought the same aesthetic to Birmingham and the post-Thatcherite era. He had a pared-down style, describing loners at the sharp end of social-economic decline and social injustice — petty crime, violence, racism, and neglect. His characters walk the streets, back alleys, and canals of the various transitional districts of the Midlands, habiting bedsits and canal boats, and frequenting genuine pubs, clubs, and gay bars of the region. He lists the damp, mould, cold, dirt, ashes of the area imbued with loneliness, melancholy, and desolation. Even a Clark Ashton Smith pastiche story 'The Hunger of the Leaves', which was in Hartwell's *Best Fantasy*, has its Birmingham allusion, since it features a debauched village Acoxgrun, referring to a real town, Acock's Green, which has a rough reputation. How many other readers

of the story picked that up I don't know.

(19 April 2014)

MIKE BOLDEN

15 Autumn Street, Orange NSW 2800

First note my change of name and address.

[*brg* I've always known Mike as 'Michael Hailstone'.*]

Also please find enclosed *Busswarble* 86, March 2006, published at last. I received *SFC* 80 (40th Anniversary Edition, Part 1), in 2009. I have delayed writing to you because of the deterioration of my sight, my stroke in 2009, and such technical problems as my printer. You can read about the second of these in the next jumbo issue of *Busswarble*, which I hope to put out soon.

How are you these days? Now and then you publish the latest news on the ailing health of some of your correspondents; you can now add me to your list of ailing old crocks, though I am at least still alive. I was sorry to read that Tom Disch is no longer with us. He wasn't all that old, not having reached the big 70, as some of us have. I loved his *Echo Round His Bones* back in its heyday. Here I found a writer of my own generation, so different from the older generation of SF writers.

Such as Wilson Tucker. His book *The Year of the Quiet Sun* made quite an impression on me, although I found its protagonists irritating. It is definitely a work of the older generation. I made a short comment on it in *Busswarble* 38, but I have seen no other comment on it until the references to it in *SFC*.

(22 March 2014)

[*brg* Sorry to hear about your illness and, as I detect from your letter, your sense of isolation. I'm surprised you don't remember the amount of discussion that Tucker's *The Year of the Quiet Sun* aroused when it first appeared in 1970. I wrote my long article about it at the end of 1971, included it in the special Tucker Issue of *SF Commentary* in 1974, then reprinted it, the other articles, and some new material (including Toni Weisskopf's excellent short biography) a few years ago, not long before Bob Tucker died at the age of 92.*]

GERALD MURNANE

PO Box 40, Goroke VIC

This is to thank you for the two magazines, *SF Commentaries* 86 and 87, that reached me recently. I won't pretend that I read even half the contents, but I read most of the letters and I note the occasional appearance of my own name in some of another corner of the text.

The latest I've heard is that *A Million Windows* will be out in June. I've agreed to appear at the Melbourne Writers' Festival for no other reason than that my doing so might sell a few copies of the new book. I don't recommend that you come along. You'll have heard it all before. Even the man interviewing me, Antoni Jach, has been there and done that — and fairly recently.

(22 April 2014)

[*brg* *A Million Windows* was released in June, and has been well reviewed, both here and overseas. I'm looking forward to your next two books, plus (at last!) a new edition of *Landscape With Landscape*, first published by Norstrilia Press in the early 1980s.*]

STEVE SNEYD

**4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield,
West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, England**

***SFC* 87:**

I like Steve Stiles' wonderfully sinister front cover showing a Nazi experimental World War II spacecraft. I also like Carol Kewley's back cover in equally dark mood.

It's a very Dickian situation. Tessa Dick is hassled by the Philip K. Dick Trust. *The Owl in Daylight*, the title of her novel that has been suppressed, is an homage/adaptation from Hegel's 'The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only as the falling of the dusk'. Maybe she could retitle the novel as *Hegel's Minerva* or somesuch?

Re 'kippling': David Langford has placed his article on the same topic, 'Have You Ever Been Kippled?', on his website ansible.co.uk. It is reprinted from his 2006 *SFX* column. Dave shows that Philip K. Dick was aware of the word, as *Kipple* was the title of a 1960 fanzine that circulated in the Berkeley area, Dick was consciously or unconsciously tuckerising the term. Also, I came across a 1956 example, on one of Radio 4 Extra's recycling of the *Goon Shows*, in the episode 'The House of Teeth', aka 'The Castle of Toothless Men'. In the Spike Milligan script, Lord Seagoon, marooned by carriage breakdown in the Dolomites, attempts to gain admittance to the titular dwelling (home of the wondrously named villain Doctor Longdangle) with the words 'Now listen, old wrinkled retainer, my retinue and I require kipple for tonight. I'm willing to pay', playing on the term 'kip' for 'sleep'.

A Nobel prize winner for literature was Harry Martinson, whose SF epic poem *Aniara* was cited specifically by the Nobel Committee. He had in common with Doris Lessing that his work was made into an opera, as were a couple of her 'Canopus in Argos' novels.

I will mention the intriguing Michael Bishop poem in a future issue of *Data Dump*.

Larry Bigman mentions reading Blish's *A Case of Conscience* for the first time. I've just re-read Blish's *Cities in Flight* tetralogy in the omnibus edition. It's the first time I'd read the novels in many decades, and in many ways I felt as if I were reading them for the first time. I'd forgotten most of the events, and even those I did recall differed so wildly from my memories of them as to be startling. I'd also forgotten how coldly ruthless the central figure, New York mayor Amalfi, is. No wonder Blish named him after a Mafia capo. This time around I can see the illogicalities that I did not see the first time. Way back then I was swept away by that Sense of Wonder: the concept of the vastness of the canvas, as well as the technical oddities (everybody still using slide rules). His alternative time stream was very over-optimistic, about

the anticipated progress of space travel. He predicts a station on Titan by the 1980s. He was oddly spot on with his prediction of the first commercial tourist flights into space, giving the year as 2013. Branson's Virgin flights, albeit only for six minutes of weightlessness, are targeted to begin in 2014.

Re Cy Chauvin: other novels dealing with fandom include Gene DeWeese and Robert Coulson's *Now You Can See It/Him/Them* (Doubleday, 1975). I saw it in Kirk Rowbotham's catalogue, and was tempted mainly because I'd corresponded with the late Buck Coulson over his extensive use of poetry in *Yandro*, his fanzine with Juanita Coulson. It involves a journo investigating murders at an SF convention that prove to involve teleportation. It's hardly a classic novel, though it does have the memorable line, 'Sci-fi is what third-rate reporters and kids who watch bad horror movies call it.' So there!

I'd assumed that the title 'Pigeons from Hell', used as the name of a rock song, was a tribute to H. P. Lovecraft's evil cross-space pigeons in the 'Fungi from Yuggoth' series, but now it seems that Robert E. Howard was the originator.

Neil Gaiman seems ubiquitous these days, tossing up with ever more unlikely celebrity contacts. Yours is the first mention I've seen that he's a Scientologist.

Re Tim Marion's reference to Manly Wade Wellman's reference to Baal: Baal could, I suppose, have inspired the name of the Celtic god Beli/Belinus/bright brother of dark/Bran/Brennus the raven god, since the Phoenicians traded for tin in Cornwall. But the other theory is that the name represents the god-ising of the Celt kings Belinus and Brennus, who captured Rome, the greatest ever Celtic triumph. As a kid, I lived in a village called Belstone, named for the megaliths, which in turn were probably named for the god.

(28 April 2014)

I've seen a mini-preview of another movie based on a Stanislaw Lem novel: *The Congress* (directed by Ari Folman), a mix of live action and animation, based on Lem's *The Futurological Congress*. (Folman's previous film, *Waltz with Bashir*, won a Golden Globe Award.)

Alan Garner was interviewed for Radio 4 ('The Bronze Age Man of Jodrell Bank') by Martin Goodman, to mark Garner's imminent eightieth birthday. He talked about his relationship with the Cheshire landscape/past, about the house where he's lived since 1956 (which he calls Toad Hall), a history of the site, a bit about his writing methods and approach, and how and why he returned to the Brisingamen/Gomrath children, after so many years, for *Boneland*.

His house, half a mile from Jodrell Bank, is in sight of Alderley Edge, a Mesolithic/Neolithic/Bronze Age area with six burial mounds nearby, making it to him a sacred site. He has now established a charitable trust to protect the house and an Old Medicine House he rescued from demolition and brought to use as an extension. The trust provides school visits and courses, involving archaeologists and writers. He believes it has been a sacred site for 10,000 years.

He says that as he stares into the fire at home, 'invasive images' come into his mind, fuse, and in that stage of self-hypnosis he starts to see and hear people talking,

moving, and acting. He writes down what he experiences. 'The landscape is telling stories through me ... I am the landscape, the landscape is me; I can't differentiate the two.'

About *Boneland* he says that he became sick of the two children after the earlier two books. He hadn't turned away from them, but adults who'd read the books as kids kept saying something was missing, so he found himself pulled back to the world of those books, exploring the idea of kids who had been exposed to another dimension grown up.

(31 July 2014)

WALKER MARTIN somewhere in USA

To be a collector nowadays you have to have a thick skin and put up with ignorant non-collectors calling us 'hoarders'. They don't even know the difference between collecting and hoarding junk. Because of that damn hoarding reality TV series show, even my wife has started calling me a hoarder.

I have a large SF book and magazine collection, so we might have more in common than you might think. I believe in building up our own personal libraries of books, pulps, music, and movies. I have thousands of DVDs, mainly mystery, SF, and Western, but my favourites are film noir. Pulp conventions always have a couple of dealers selling bootleg DVDs.

The bar at conventions: I once met and became friends with the pulp artist Norman Saunders because we were just about the only drinkers at the Pulpscons in the eighties. Dwayne Olson was another guy I used to drink with in the Crown Plaza bar in Dayton, Ohio. He's the expert on Howard Wandrei.

I really believe collecting books and pulps to be the most fun in the world and I'll go down doing it with my last dollar.

(4 May 2014)

ALEX PIERCE Brunswick West VIC 3055

I have been getting back into the habit of writing reviews this year, which I have greatly enjoyed. I hope that, by the time you receive this, I will have finished writing about *Hav* by Jan Morris, which is one of the most compelling books I've ever read. I have never read a book twice in a row, until this one.

As well, my husband and I have embarked on Project Bond for the year. We will be watching one Bond movie a fortnight for the year, posting a review. This week we watch *The Man with the Golden Gun*.

One of the best parts about fandom is the desire to share with others. I was recently approached by some students to start an SF Society at my school, which we are trialling at the moment, and trying to make as inclusive as possible.

(9 May 2014)

LYNC
PO Box 104, Coburg VIC 3058

Re: Ben Langdon's *This Mutant Life*, an anthology that features my story 'Manga Dude, Where D'Ya Get Your Inspiro, Man?': Ben has his origins in the comic book scene. We are both members of the Alternate Worlds writers' workshop, which grew out of the SF writing course Paul Collins gave at Writers Victoria a few years back.

Next ANZAPA, you'll see a photo of four of us in *From the Lair of the Lynx*. Linda (L. M. Bibby), and Hayley Barry-Smith are both in this collection. Kathryn is in Volume 2: *This Mutant Life: Bad Company*. The only member of our group who didn't contribute to either is Michael Green. The third volume is planned to come out early in 2015. I'll have a story in that one too.

The other authors are people he knew on-line, and/or people whose stories were selected from the slush pile.

Bad Company is well worth hunting up — if only for Kathryn's story. Kathryn Hall is a Varuna scholar, and a terrific writer. Her story asks the question: 'What if Adam and Eve — being created, not born — cannot die? What would their lives be like?' Ben should have some available at Continuum. Retail price is around \$16, but he usually sells them directly at a much cheaper price — around \$10 — because of the saving on postage.

(15 May 2014)

[*brg* As readers of both my magazines will notice, Lync has been rather busy over the last year or so. As you will see in *Treasure 2*, her first novel, *Nil By Mouth*, was launched by George Ivanoff on behalf of Satalyte Publishers at Continuum X in June.*]

MURRAY MOORE
1065 Henley Road, Mississauga,
Ontario L4Y 1C8, Canada

How to describe *SF Commentary* 86?

If *SF Commentary* 86 were an item for purchase in a fast food restaurant, it would be a Super Sized item. You do publish large issues, Bruce.

If *SF Commentary* 86 were the prey of a boa constrictor, because of its size, weeks would pass before it was digested.

Following on the long digestion image, on the first day of north-of-the-equator summer of 2014 I finished reading *SF Commentary* 86 dated February 2014.

If, Bruce, you want to encourage your friends to read, I report that you are succeeding. Because I read the several George Zebrowski articles, I was motivated to take from a shelf my copy of his *Synergy New Science Fiction: Volume One* anthology (Harvest/HBJ Book, 1987) and begin to read it. An argument for buying books today because you might, in this example, want to read a 1987-published and purchased book 27 years in the future, i.e. 2014.

I am also reminded, by John Litchen's review of *The Martian Chronicles*, that I took that Bradbury classic from another shelf, with intent to read it, for the second time,

but that I have not begun. I have the Kornbluth biography reviewed by Zebrowski; another not-yet-read book.

I am less encouraged to make a priority to read Olaf Stapledon, after scanning the beginning of *Last and First Men*, courtesy of the Gutenberg Australia website. Currently I am reading Heinlein's *The Green Hills of Earth* collection (Shasta, 1951), a book published in the year of my birth, and Lafferty's *The Man Who Made Models: The Collected Short Fiction: Volume One* (Centipede Press, 2013), in addition to the Zebrowski anthology.

Oh yeah, before typing this LoC I read a Cornell Woolrich short story, originally published in the 1930s in a detective pulp magazine.

And my current novel reading is my first in the Doc Ford character series, set in modern-day Florida, *Night Vision* by Randy Wayne White. I have reached page 138. White is not making me less a fan of John D. MacDonald.

I should be reading the Hugo nominees, but I feel no urgency. I have a hold with our public library for a copy of *Ancillary Justice*, a novel that seems popular (winner of the Clarke Award and BSFA Best Novel). But I see *Ancillary Justice* is the first third of the inescapable trilogy: oh dear.

(13 June 21014)

TOM WHALEN
Stuttgart, Germany

I'm still here and still trying to keep up with *SF Commentary* online. Last print issue I received was No 82. I was commuting for two years — one year to the University of Freiburg, last year to the University of Bamberg: a long commute, 4–5 graduate seminars a semester, lots of prep. Now back to a saner schedule, so more time for my own work.

SF Commentary 87:

Michael Bishop's poem — much appreciated, especially by the main character of my novel *The Straw That Broke*.

You made a slip-up on the director of *Amour*: Michael Haneke the Austrian director. Peter Handke is the Austrian writer.

Lewton/Robson's *The Seventh Victim*: cinematic noir poetry, as if pulled straight out of a depressive's dream.

(I'm still teaching a film course at the Kunstakademie here in Stuttgart on Friday afternoons. Last semester's course was on Post-war Japanese Cinema. You can see the syllabus here: <http://tomwhalen.com/courses/film-courseSS14.html>.)

Good to see Stephen Campbell mention D. G. Compton's *The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe*. A great novel; also great is Tavernier's film *Death Watch*, based on it.

I wonder why the original English edition of Compton's *Die Herren von Taloz* was never published. He wrote it in 1987–88; in 1997 the German translation appeared: 400 pages. I haven't read it, but maybe someday.

(2 August 2014)

Many of my friends refuse to watch *Amour* because they're too close to the characters' fates, but I've always tried to keep Larkin's 'the costly aversion of the eyes



from death' in mind. They should also listen to Isabelle Huppert on Haneke, when interviewers says things to her like John Waters did last week at Lincoln Center:

JW: So, Michael Haneke, he's a a real laugh riot, I bet?

IH: Of course he is, much funnier than you think.

JW: Do you ever crack up in the middle of a really extreme scene?

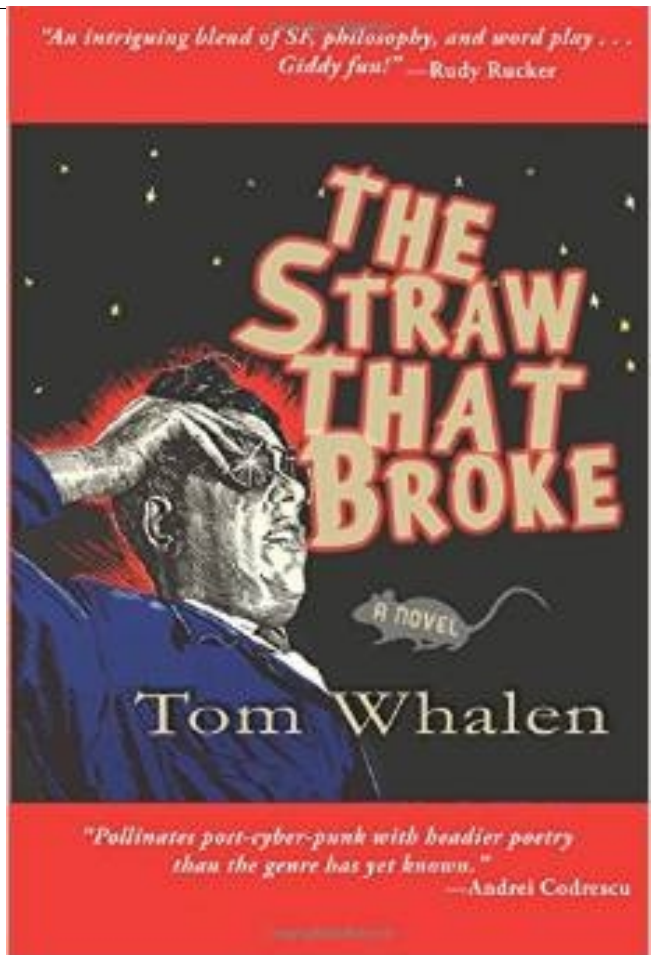
IH: What do you mean, crack up? He is very funny. He is Viennese. He is an Austrian. You know the tradition of great Austrian literature like Karl Kraus and even Thomas Bernhard. Michael is in this lineage of creative writers and filmmakers. So yes, he is funny, I think.

I'm teaching *Amour* in my film course next semester. Peter Handke, who scripted a few of Wenders' films and has directed films based on his own books (*The Left-handed Woman*, *Absence*), on the other hand, is an Austrian whose humour it would be harder to locate. My favorite work of his is his take on his mother's suicide, *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*.

I've asked my publisher to send one of my two author's copies of *The Straw That Broke* to you. (The other goes to Michael Dirda, a book critic for the *Washington Post* and an SF fan, whom I've also worked with in the past.) He said he would be glad to.

This short, playful interview on the book might be fun: 'Post-Humanism, Ontology, and the Encyclopedia Mouse: An Interview with EM and Tom Whalen on *The Straw That Broke*' <https://medium.com/@richardgrayson/post-humanism-ontology-and-the-encyclopedia-mouse-8578c9983a99>.

Richard Grayson is an old friend from Brooklyn who lives in Arizona now. He published a number of short story collections in the '70s, '80s, and '90s. He asked me if I wanted to do a meta-interview he could put on tumblr.com, so I wrote the interview in an hour and sent it off. The Encyclopedia Mouse is my character and the driving force of *The Straw That Broke*. Richie isn't an SF reader as such, but in a sense he creates alternate universes, for example, by being the only Democrat running



for US Representative in Wyoming (even if he doesn't live in that state) against a proto-conservative Republican incumbent.

Richie took the cover of the book from [amazon.com/The-Straw-That-Broke-Whalen/](http://www.amazon.com/The-Straw-That-Broke-Whalen/) and my image from: tomwhalen.com. The book cover is also up at: <http://blackscatbooks.com/scatalog/>.

(8 August 2014)

We also heard from ...

ELIZABETH DARLING (Kyneton, Victoria): After the loss of Peter Darling (see *SFC* 86) 'Miranda and I are still sorting through boxes. We found this AussieCon stamp. Doesn't look as if it's been used at all. We thought you might like to have it. We were sorry to hear of the death of your cat.' Unfortunately I no longer have an ink pad to show off the stamp.

JEFF HARRIS (Adelaide, South Australia), who is 'saddened at the loss of Peter Darling. I knew about losing Graham Stone, but Peter's was an unexpected shock ... It is excellent to see *SF Commentary* continues its solid tradition of ongoing publication when many more fanzines have gone to Ghod, especially those that started in the same era as *SFC*. Also a worthy list of contributors too. Good one, young Brutus!

JOHN D. BERRY (Seattle, Washington): 'Oh, I do look forward to reading an interview with John Cute! But I hadn't heard until now of Peter Darling's death; I'm

very sorry to learn of it now. I don't expect anything with the leisurely publishing schedule of *SF Commentary* to be a bearer of news, but in this case, for me, it was.'

FRANK BERTRAND (Manchester, New Hampshire): 'As I deal with being a great-grandfather, and turning 70 this coming October, I continue to try and make sense of the works of Philip K. Dick.'

ANDY DUNWOODIE (Wendouree, Victoria), who, when I sent him a copy of the new edition of George Turner's *The Sea and Summer*, was suffering from Victoria's February heat wave: 'Ballarat was 42 degrees today, and I believe Melbourne was close to it. We have a couple of elderly neighbours, and we have to check them out when we have days like this. I feel for the ones who can't handle it.'

TIM TRAIN (Lalor, Victoria), who sent in exchange 'a long-awaited (and long-belated) Christmas edition of *Badger's Dozen*. I think I'll be making that zine annual from now on anyway, and hopefully avoid this trouble in future.' It's a pity your schedule is becoming limited, Tim, as *Badger's Dozen* is the most amusing fanzine received by the few of us who see copies.

ADRIENNE RALPH (Northcote, Victoria), who sends us long and newsy letters emails from time to time, often after I've finally produced a packet of fanzines, or with Harjinder arranges long and delightful lunches with us. 'We are both well, and *loving* retirement. Autumn is such a lovely time. The days are cooler, the burnt land turns green again, and the birds and wildlife come out to play in this weather. Our garden is often visited by rainbow lorikeets, budgerigars, and sulphur-crested cockatoos.'

MARK LINNEMAN (Sacramento, California): 'My retirement is fine, if somewhat uneventful. Had a (mild) case of the shingles last month — not particularly fun. Would not recommend being on a nine-hour-plus plane flight (delayed by storms) just after it hits. I was in Detroit on the last day of a convention when I started getting symptoms.' When he wrote, Mark was planning a summer of conventions, including LonCon, the World SF Convention in London, and the convention held in Eire the week after: 'My ever-decreasing mobility is likely to be somewhat of a challenge; I'm using a wheeled walker for any distance at all at this point. Theory is that I'm going to travel some more while I still can. If Helsinki gets 2017, I would really like to attend, but we'll see.'

DAVID HYDE (somewhere in California), was 'sad to note the passing of two wonderful Oz SF fans, Peter Darling and Graham Stone. My commiserations to you all down under.'

PHYRNE BACON (Gainesville, Florida), has been working on her mathematical research for many years: 'I am having a wonderful time with my book. I plan to publish an unfinished first edition as soon as possible, but that may be as much as a year away. I keep proving new stuff along the way to finishing up, so the book gets longer and longer. Last fall, I discovered a wonderful new area for research, and I have been struggling with it ever since. Today, for example, I was typing up a series of algebraic results inspired by some of my new geometric results.'

RICHARD MORDEN (one of the editors of *Ethel the Aardvark*, Melbourne Science Fiction Club, Moonee Vale

VIC 3055) told me that 'The magazine committee is happy to advertise *SF Commentary* in *Ethel the Aardvark* in exchange for new printed releases of *SF Commentary* being delivered to the MSFC for our collection.' Which is very considerate of Richard and the committee, considering that I promised to send a donation in exchange for advertising in *Ethel*, then forgot about sending the cheque. I've heard that pressure of work is forcing Richard to relinquish his half of the joint editorship (along with Peter Ryan) of *Ethel*. Perhaps the next *Ethel* editors will be a little less forgiving.

HENRY GASKO (Wallan, Victoria) emailed me after I asked how he and Judy has survived bushfires that ringed the town of Wallan last February: 'Everything is okay here now as well. The fires were about 1 km from us. A lot of properties were affected in the hills and the west and north edge of Wallan, south and west of Kilmore, and Daraweit is isolated but mostly intact. Lots of smog everywhere of course.'

FRANCIS PAYNE (Upper Plenty, Victoria) lives in the same general area as Henry and Judy, along a country road. 'The fires this year were a bit scary, though not quite on the scale of 2009. Today the warnings for the area have been downgraded to Watch and Act, so not so alarming. Kilmore was a ghost town today — most of the shops shut, very little traffic, as the Northern Highway was closed off.'

CAROL KEWLEY (Sunshine, Victoria) has 'started a webcomic that I'm updating weekly so far, if I can keep up with one new comic page per week. It's at <http://dystopicgothic.thecomicseries.com/comics/first> and includes the old cat comic strip (*Lucky*) from a few years ago. I have a new strip in *Perihelion* magazine at <http://www.perihelionsf.com/1407/comics.htm>.'

ROB GERRAND (St Kilda, Victoria) particularly enjoyed 'the George Zebrowski piece on Arthur C. Clarke' which 'is a tour de force'.

PETER GERRAND (West Melbourne, Victoria): 'Thank you for kindly sending me a copy of your new edition of *SF Commentary*, with the articles by you, Miranda, and me on our good friend Peter Darling.'

DEREK KEW (Bulleen, Victoria) has been enjoying John Litchen's Real Science Fiction articles. Derek has also had some severe bouts of illness over the last two years, but has still managed to travel to Greensborough for several luncheons-of-comment. He started this tradition 40 years ago when I lived in Carlton and Derek was lecturing at RMIT in Melbourne. Elaine and I always enjoy these lunches, especially as Derek likes talking science and good old-fashioned Real Science Fiction.

CHRISTINA LAKE (Falmouth, Cornwall) is still trading paper fanzines with me. 'Doug and I have been promising an issue of *Head!* for ages, but have been sidetracked by working on a PR for Novacon.' The very latest news (17 November 2014) is that Christina has just won the 2014 Nova Award for Fan Writer.

DAMIEN BRODERICK (San Antonio, Texas) had just received *SFCs* 86 and 87 when he emailed. Since then he has arranged with Van Ikin to send me copies of the latest two volumes that he and Van have compiled of the best from Van's magazine *Science Fiction: Xeno Fiction* and *Fantastika* (Wildside Press, available from Amazon.com).

RICK KENNETT (Pascoe Vale South, Victoria): 'I

particularly liked the pieces on Robert Bloch at Cinecon in 1981. I smiled at the mention of the impromptu gathering in the foyer as I was among that company. Got my paperback copy of Bloch's 1945 collection *Opener of the Way* autographed. "Golly gee whiz, Mr Bloch," I gushed. "I reckon this contains some of your best short stories." It was only later that it occurred to me that in essence I'd said, "You haven't written a good short story since 1945." Which is *not* what I meant!

BRAD FOSTER (Irving, Texas) was greatly surprised to find a 'small package waiting at the post office, and my great, great delight at opening it to find the Mahavishnu Orchestra boxed set therein. I have already looped through all five albums several times now since getting it. Have not listened to all of this in so long; just wonderful to hear again. Reminds me of how amazing it was the first time to discover this music. This is way too kind of you to send this. I simply cannot justify any sort of outlay of cash for music these days; just too many other expenses to have to keep up with.'

BILL BURNS (Hempstead, New York): 'I particularly enjoyed the stories on Bob Bloch, who I expect most current fans (if they know his name at all) will connect only with *Psycho*. There seems to be very little interest in fannish history today, and even quite a bit of disdain, rather similar to the lack of interest in (and even contempt for) science among American non-fans and, sadly, politicians.'

COLIN STEELE (Canberra, ACT) tells me of a long article on Ron Graham by **Pauline Dickinson**, in which she says, 'In 1969 his help enabled the young Australian science fiction critic Bruce Gillespie to buy a portable typewriter so he could produce adequate stencils for his influential magazine, *SF Commentary*'. I haven't seen the article, and forgot to ask Pauline about it when she was in Melbourne in June. Yes, two great boosts to *SFC* in 1969 were the loan from **Jack Pitt** (whose obituary appears in *SFC* 86) to buy my first duplicator, and the gift from **Ron Graham** that allowed me to buy a portable typewriter on which I typed all issues of *SFC* from No. 5 until No. 21. I was never able to thank Ron adequately, but did keep sending him *SFC* until he died in the early '80s. I lost track of Jack Pitt after 1970, and heard nothing more about him until his death noticed appeared in *The Age* last year.

IAN COVELL (Middlesbrough, England) commented on Rog Peyton's 100 Best SF Novels: 'Even after 20 years, I think I could have predicted about a third of them — that David Ambrose book for one, and the ones by Finney, McCaffrey, Russell, Cooper, Stewart, Halde-man, and the like. I agree with a reasonable percentage, which is a good average with the entirety of SF from which to choose.'

MARTY CANTOR (Los Angeles, California): 'Since I retired near the end of 1999 I have become busier than I ever was when I was working full time. I have to find (and take) a full-time job so that I can have some free time for myself.' I suspect that means he has little time

for writing letters of comment.

MALCOLM EDWARDS (London, England), as head of Orion Fiction in Britain, is probably busier than any of my other correspondents: 'I should volunteer to be dropped from your mailing list, as I'm aware they're expensive to produce and send, and I can perfectly well read them on screen. Do you want to be added to the Gollancz review list? Say yes, and I'll see what I can do.' I told Malcom that this was probably not a good idea. I was knocked off the review copies list of British Gollancz a few years ago when postage rates started hurtling toward their current height. It's just now too expensive to send review copies from one country to another. Indeed, it's now too expensive for Australian publishers and distributors to send me review copies. Phtooey, British Mail, Australia Post, US Post Office, and Canada Post.

DALE SPEIRS (Calgary, Alberta, Canada): 'I received *SF Commentary* 87 in the mail today; many thanks. I dispatched the final print issue of *Opuntia* to you last week. You don't have to send me print copies of your zine anymore, since *Opuntia* will henceforth be online only. No 274 has already been posted at <http://efanzines.com>, and I'll see your zine there. On 31 March, Canada Post raised its rates by 35 per cent. There is no way I can afford the new postage without dipping into my capital, so that concludes the print run. I will, however, keep it going online.' I know the feeling well. No 87 may well have been the last print edition of *SF Commentary*. I'm very much enjoying *Opuntia*, which appears regularly on efanzines.com.

CLAIRE BRIALEY (London, England) in April was overwhelmed by work and preparations for LonCon. She and Mark Plummer found themselves at the centre of the LonCon whirlwind, especially as house guests kept popping in both before and after the convention. Despite this, she and Mark kept up a regular schedule for *Banana Wings*, and Claire contributed regularly to ANZAPA: 'I can't carry on like this because I will, definitely, be ill again. Fortunately the pressure should drop a bit by this time next week, and then it's nearly Easter when we've got a bit of time off. I'm planning to sleep through most of it. I'm looking forward to that.'

THOMAS BULL (Doncaster, Victoria) kept me up to date on the doings of the Melbourne SF Club, although I cannot attend regularly. Fortunately the library has been moved to a less expensive storage facility, but I have not heard of it finding a regular home.

AMANDA ELLIOTT (Melbourne, Victoria) was 'happy (and much relieved) to announce that the Chronos Awards have arrived! Given their fragile nature (and previous harrowing trip through the post), I would like to deliver your Chronos myself, either to your mailbox or front step, or to your place of work if that is easier.' Which she did. Thanks very much, Amanda, the Continuum committee, and the 2014 Chronos Award voters.

— **Bruce Gillespie, 15 November 2014**