

SF COMMENTARY 89

May 2015

76 pages

GRAHAM JOYCE
SPECIAL
Bruce Gillespie
Tony Thomas

MICHAEL BISHOP
on 'Who Made
Stevie Crye?'

COLIN STEELE
on the
SF/fantasy field

GENRES WORK
BOTH WAYS
Bruce Gillespie

JAMES DOIG
interviews
GRAHAM STONE

KIM HUETT
on J. M. WALSH

GUY SALVIDGE
Recent favourites

GILLIAN POLACK
on
URSULA LE GUIN
and
CHRIS WOODING



Cover: Carol Kewley: 'The World of Graham Joyce'.

Insert graphic: Cyberdemon©Id Software 1993.

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SF COMMENTARY 88: WE WERE WRONG

On page 6 of the print edition of *SFC* 88, the photo credit should read 'Polly and her faithful servant Bruce, Keele Street Collingwood, 29 August 2003. (Photo by Yvonne Rousseau.)'

On page 37, it is claimed that JERRY KAUFMAN is one of a group of authors of a Feature Letters section.

Unfortunately, Jerry's letter has disappeared somewhere between proofreading and final layout.

And, worst of all, MARK PLUMMER's Feature Letter is a repeat of his letter in *SFC* 87.

Red-faced apologies to Yvonne, Jerry, and Mark.

I must be talking to my friends

No longer in print

Things have been a bit gloomy around here since late last year, but that's because I'm used to feeling healthy, and suddenly I spent months not feeling healthy. Nowhere near as unhealthy as many people I talk to on Facebook and the internet, but not... quite... healthy.

Also, I've fooled myself into spending a great deal too much during recent years, and suddenly I had to stop spending.

So if you receive a printed copy of this issue of *SFC Commentary*, you are either a major contributor to the issue or a subscriber (\$100 per 5 issues). I can no longer afford to print copies of *SF Commentary* or *Treasure* for general distribution or trade. My only printed fanzines will be the issues of **brg** and *Treasure* that appear bimonthly in ANZAPA (Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association; I am the official editor, and we have vacancies).

More to the point, I can no longer afford to post my fanzines. Airmail postage rates have become crippling over recent years, and local rates are set to increase sharply later this year.

My main regret is that I can no longer trade paper fanzines for other people's paper fanzines. I would much prefer to read a beautiful print fanzine than attempt to read the same fanzine on screen, but I have no other choice.

And I've run out of money, or I have been in great danger of doing so since November 2014. I am officially an 'old age pensioner', but I receive about half of the standard rate because Elaine is six years younger than me, and still earning. I need extra paying work to survive. During the last three months of 2014, I received only two pieces of work I could charge for. I've been a lot busier in 2015, but I need to rebuild my bank account for the months ahead.

I trust people will keep reading *SFC*, even though it appears only as a PDF file on Bill Burns' **eFanzines.com** site. I've received plenty of splendid letters of comment on *SFC*88, but they will have to wait a bit for publication. I have stored about 200,000 words of material, and am now about a year and a half behind my own publication schedule. I hope to catch up a bit.

Sproing!!!

One day at the end of November I went for a long walk. When I arrived home, I bent to reach into a drawer. When I straightened up, my lower back went sproing!! It hurt like hell. This hadn't happened to my lower back since my visit to Canberra for Conflux a few years ago. I phoned my masseur and chiropractor, and with a bit of digging into muscles and rearranging of spine, everything went back to normal and the pain disappeared.

On Christmas Eve, I was determined to finish vacuuming the floor in the main living room, because we would be receiving visitors the next day for Christmas dinner. Elaine and I had already vacced the rest of the house, and only one floor was left untidy. However, our vacuum cleaner is about thirty years old. I need to get down on the floor and crawl around wielding the nozzle to make any effect. I finished the room, put away the cleaner, straightened up — and my lower back went Sproing!!! to the nth degree. I could barely straighten up, and I had severe pain in both hips as well as the lower spine. Elaine was afraid I would not be able to get out of bed on Christmas morning.

What could be done? Nothing. Nobody would be available for consultation until the Monday after Christ-

mas at the earliest, and my own chiropractor would not be back from holidays until 5 January. Neither chiropractors nor physiotherapists offer a locum service during public holidays. It would be no good calling a medical locum, since all such a person could recommend would be a CT scan or lots of meds.

Friends on Facebook offered plenty of helpful suggestions, some of which I followed. I tried cold packs and hot packs, munched on Nurofen anti-inflammatory tablets (ibuprofen) for several days, and took liberal doses of Panadol Osteo. Elaine went down to the Greensborough Plaza and bought some firm cushions. By piling these onto various chairs, I could sit down, but not comfortably. I had to spend Christmas Day attempting to be sociable while finding almost any movement intolerable.

I did eventually see my masseur and chiropractor, who provided help. In the second week of January I visited my GP, who recommended a CT scan. This revealed that I have 'bursitis' in the right hip, but still does not explain the continuing pain in my lower back. I was given a cortisone injection for bursitis, but it took two weeks to work. For a long time I could still control the

pain only with paracetamol.

In the first week of February, thanks to a couple of consultations with Ray the masseur, the pain subsided in my right hip and almost disappeared at the base of my

spine. However, I still don't know the long-term cause of either pain. Pulling my wheelie case probably twisted my back, but lots of other people pull along their cases in the same way. The bursitis? A complete mystery.

Hack! hack!

Even while my lower spine and right hip began to feel much less painful, Elaine bought me a new typing chair. This was the real turning point in the healing process, as I was trying to push through a lot of paying work. I was feeling a lot better — when suddenly I came down with my second bout of prolonged tickly dry coughing. The first bout had been in November and December. It disappeared while my back was sore, then abruptly reappeared in early February. No cold or sniffly nose. Just the damn cough, which made it hard to sleep at night. Worse, it turned into bronchitis. I went to the local medical clinic. Neither of two GPs had much clue about the condition. I was given one lot of antibiotics, which didn't work. A different type of antibiotics cured the bronchitis, but left me with the same irritating cough. I went for a chest X-ray. No problems with my lungs. A

blood test showed that I was not suffering from an infection. So it must be an allergic condition. I've tried testing things around the house to which I might be allergic. Nothing much has worked, but Elaine and I did get rid of a lot of old blankets and dusted a lot of corners that hadn't been cleaned for awhile. All this time, the GPs remained completely mystified by my condition, although I keep meeting lots of people who are suffering from the same cough, or have suffered from it recently. *How is one to fight an officially nonexistent epidemic?*

I have felt a lot better in the last two weeks. I take a Telfast (an antihistamine) daily, and hope for the best. My condition has been very minor compared with the medical problems that have been afflicting various friends, but I have discovered that when suffering from a persistent cough it is very hard to think of much else.

Has anything good happened recently?

As I mentioned in *SFC 88*, a highlight of last year was being able to catch up with my sister **Robin Mitchell**, who thought she was migrating back to Victoria from Queensland after 23 years. She had forgotten how chilling a cold Melbourne winter can be, especially as she suffered from bouts of asthma while she was here. She migrated back to Queensland in December, but not before visiting her son and his family, and Elaine and me. Also, I travelled with her to visit my other sister Jeanette (and her partner Duncan) at Guildford near Castlemaine, and on another day Robin and I visited Oakleigh, the south-eastern Melbourne suburb where we grew up.

Robin Whiteley, my long-time good friend and supporter, gave us two free tickets to see **Joan Armatrading** in concert at the Elisabeth Murdoch Hall (Melbourne Recital Centre) on 8 December. Since Elaine did not want to attend the concert, I emailed Murray MacLachlan, who liked the offer of a free ticket. We met in town, had dinner in Degraes Street, and wound our way through the maze of South Melbourne back streets until we found the hall. (While we were sitting in the cafe, no less a personage than former ANZAPAn Erika Lacey walked past, and said hello. She was visiting friends in Melbourne before travelling north again.)

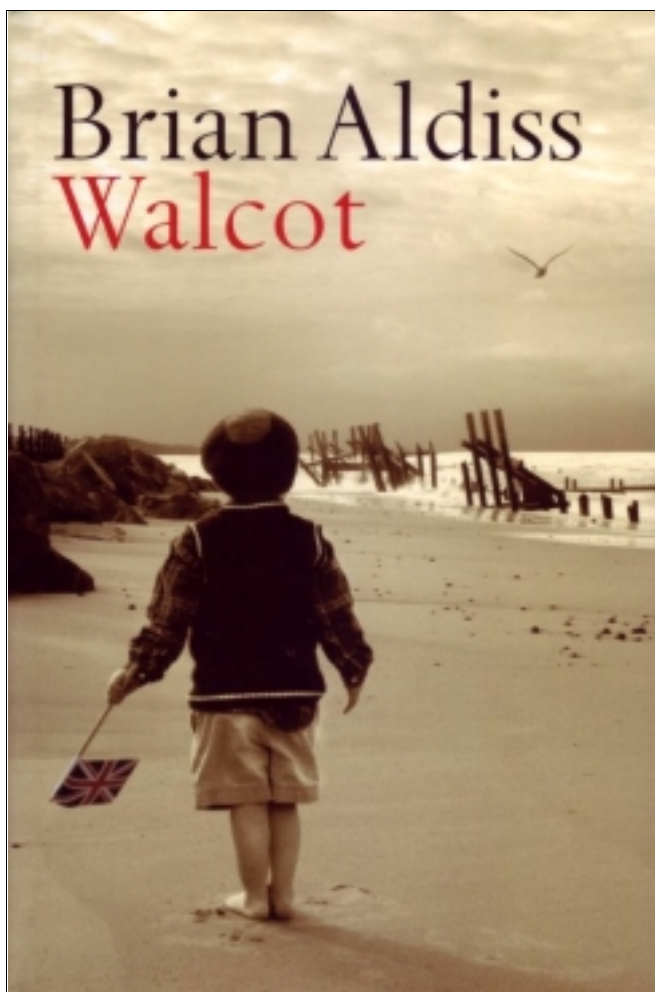
I had not seen Joan Armatrading in concert. In the 1970s she gained the reputation of being a brilliant musician and singer who was rather stand-offish with audiences (or merely shy). Not so in December. She remains a

brilliant guitarist and singer, and now has 40 years of songs to choose from. She jokes with her audience, even offering a slide show of a potted history of her career. I'm not sure how one person can make so much good noise with just one voice, a few guitars, a piano, and a bit of occasional helpful background sound effects. Who needs a backing band these days?

Thanks to many people who have been rather kind to me during the last few months. **Elaine** in particular, because she's had to put up with me. Also, she bought me the new typing chair, and she took me out to dinner for my birthday.

Sally Yeoland and **John Bangsund** took the old typing chair off our hands, then gave me an unexpected but welcome Readings token.

People kept celebrating my birthday. **Yvonne Rousseau** and her daughter **Vida Weiss** took me out to lunch at the Spaghetti Tree in Bourke Street one day, and **David Russell** and **Stephen Campbell** came up from Warrnambool to take Elaine and me out to dinner on the actual day of my birthday. David also gave me a double pass to attend a concert by **Sinead O'Connor** at the Hamer Hall. Since Elaine did not want to use the second ticket, I asked noted Sinead O'Connor fan Murray MacLachlan if he would like to use it. He said yes, then Natalie then bought her own ticket — which placed her beside us. So we had some dinner first, at Andiano in Degraes Street, and thoroughly enjoyed the



concert (despite some bits being much too loud for my ancient ears).

David also gave me a book, *Gillespie and I* by Jane Harris, and a piece of art for *SFC*, and Stephen Campbell drew me a birthday card, lost it on the way to Melbourne, then drew it again. Amazing.

I was able to obtain free tickets to hear **Michel Faber** interviewed by Ramona Koval at the Wheeler Centre, so **Rob Gerrand** took up the second ticket. Mr Faber is a very persuasive speaker, and even if he were not, his most recent book *The Book of Strange New Things* would be highly recommended.

Also in mid February, Elaine persuaded me to attend the Herbarium at Melbourne's Royal Botanical Gardens to hear a talk by the super-enthusiastic **Ken Walker** about 'Native and Introduced Bees'. Who knew that bees led such an exciting existence?

A few days later, our friend **Dora Levakis** (whose letters are often in my fanzines) invited us out to Yarraville to eat at her favourite Thai restaurant. That was a breakthrough night. We got slightly lost, walked much, and I discovered that my cough felt a lot better when I was away from home for a few hours than it is while sitting around the house. So am I allergic to something specific in our house, or to something general about the vegetation of Greensborough?

In early March, Elaine and I were visited by somebody I had not seen since September 1973, when he showed me around Toronto after Torcon 2: **Angus Taylor**, who now lives in Victoria near Vancouver, and teaches

philosophy. He wrote some fine essays about SF during the 1970s, then disappeared from fannish sight. Recently he emailed to say that he would be visiting his brother in Brisbane for six weeks, and would be invading Melbourne as well. Having managed to negotiate Mykicard, he travelled out by train to see us and eat at one of our favourite local restaurants. Much good talk followed, while Angus was surrounded by and sat on by our cats.

As well as people already mentioned, thanks to some other fine people for their gifts:

Michael Bishop and **Michael Hutchins** arranged to send me copies of a major critical magazine that once sent me print copies but is now available only online.

Damien Broderick and **Van Ikin** have sent me copies of some major critical books in which they have been involved: *Warriors of the Tao: The Best of Science Fiction: A Review of Speculative Literature* (2011), *Xeno Fiction: More Best of Science Fiction: A Review of Speculative Literature* (2013), and *Fantastika at the Edge of Reality: Yet More Best of Science Fiction* (2014), all from Borgo Press. These form a set with **Damien Broderick's** earlier collections from *Australian Science Fiction Review (Second Series)*. A wonderful selection from Australian SF critical writing from the great days of the 1970s and 1980s.

Spike sent a CD called *Wheeler's Groove: Seattle's Finest in Funk & Soul 1965-75*. I knew a bit about famous rock guitarists from Seattle, but I did not know that Seattle had also had a 1960s soul music scene.

Dick Jensen has sent me quite a few Blu-rays, the best of which has been the Oscar winner *Birdman*. He also sent me Kip Thorne's illustrated book *The Science of Interstellar*. And he has also sent me some magnificent cover illustrations that haven't been published yet.

John Davies presented me with a Blu-ray of the remastered *On the Waterfront*. This should be a good night's viewing. I haven't seen the film since 1965.

Thanks to **John Litchen** and **Mark Plummer**, I've finally been able to complete my collection of recent (post 1990s), obscure **Brian Aldiss** novels: *The Cretan Teal*, *Comfort Zone*, *Jocasta*, and *Walcot*, all very enjoyable. Mark also bought for me quite a few British books that I thought were unavailable.

Without any warning, and as a result of some random act of telepathy, **Thomas Bull** gave me a book I had been eyeing on Facebook, but knew I could not afford: the anthology *Cranky Ladies of History*, edited by Tansy Rayner Roberts and Tehani Wessely, with wonderful cover and interior illustrations by Kathleen Jennings.

David Grigg gave us copies of his two short story anthologies, *The Dark Lighthouse* and *Storytellers*. Both are recommended, and will be reviewed.

David Hyde from America sent me a copy of *Precious Artifacts 2*, his new bibliography of Philip K. Dick's short stories.

Murray MacLachlan gave me most of Edgar Rice Burroughs' 'Mars' books in the New English Library editions of the early seventies. I haven't read most of the series since I was 11 years old, but a quick scan of first paragraphs reminds me that ERB had a bit more pizzazz in his prose than most of the genre writers of the period. I'm still missing my favourite, *Synthetic Men of Mars*. Does anybody have a copy you'd like to sell me?

Thanks to all the people who are still sending me paper copies of their fanzines and books, despite the fact I'm not sending back much at the moment.

Apologies if you have sent me something wonderful lately, and I've forgotten you for the moment.

Especially missed

Since this issue of *SF Commentary* is now a year and a half late, many famous and well-loved-but-not-so-famous people within the SF world have died during the last 18 months.

For instance, a few days after Tony Thomas and I gave our talks to the Nova Mob about **Graham Joyce's** works in June 2013 (when we announced that Graham had just been diagnosed with what proved to be a terminal illness), the SF world lost **Iain Banks**, the noted Scottish novelist (also known as **Iain M. Banks**, the noted Scottish SF writer), whose contribution to our field has been enormous.

A month or so ago we lost **Sir Terry Pratchett**, who had several years' warning that he would suffer an early death from a rare form of Alzheimer's disease. His documentary about the possibility of choosing to die early was shown several times on TV here, but in the end he died from the disease itself, in the company of his family. Pratchett's 'Discworld' novels have proven far more popular than Graham Joyce's works or even Iain Banks's Culture novels, but throughout his career he maintained a direct link with his readers not often maintained by writers of fiction. He enjoyed visiting Australia to meet readers, especially to find the hats he could buy only from a particular shop in Flinders Street, Melbourne.

Two deaths in particular hit me during the last 18 months, those of **Philippa C. Maddern**, always known to us as **Pip Maddern**, and **Paul Anderson**, noted Adelaide fan. I had not set eyes on Pip since the mid 1980s, or on Paul since the late 1970s, but both leave a gap in my life.

Pip Maddern

When Pip died in Western Australia on 18 June 2014, I wrote:

'It is hard to express how shocking is the very recent news, first of Philippa Maddern's illness, of which Paul Collins told me briefly at Continuum two weekends ago, and then of her death overnight. Van Ikin kindly sent on this news.

'We have not met since the 1980s, yet memories of Pip Maddern remain glowing, starting with her appearance at the Ursula Le Guin Writers Workshop in 1975. Her extraordinary talent could be seen in her entry story, "The Ins and Outs of the Hadhya State", which went on to win prizes, and in the 1980s was picked by readers of Van Ikin's *Science Fiction* journal as the best Australian SF short story of all time.

'She took part in other writers' workshops as well, with her comments proving always valuable to up-and-coming writers.

'Pip Maddern wrote several more highly distinguished short stories, especially "Inhabiting the Inter-spaces", but did not finish a novel. She went to Oxford to do her PhD, then began her distinguished academic career at the University of Western Australia. We in Australia's SF community feel that the SF world as a whole was deprived of a great writer when Pip made that decision, but the world gained a very distinguished scholar and activist.

'I wish we could have met in recent years, but we didn't. My sincere condolences to her family and those who have been her friends over the years.'

A few weeks later, about 200 people gathered at St Mary's Anglican Church in North Melbourne for the Victorian celebration of her life. She grew up in Morwell, Victoria. The bloke I was sitting next to had travelled from Morwell that day. He remembered Pip's ten years as a choral singer there. Although we in the SF world glimpsed little of that side of her life, music and religion remained very strong aspects of her life. After a ceremony in which various devoted friends of Pip gave vivid descriptions of her personality, career, and work, the ceremony finished with a brilliant Bach organ solo.

Paul Anderson

In October 2014, Paul Anderson had emailed me from Adelaide to say that he had been diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia. This was a great shock to Elaine and me, his family, and his friends. However, I did not expect that the next email would be in December from his wife Brenda to say that Paul was acutely ill in hospital, and was not expected to live. She visited him daily, as did other old friends, such as Jeff Harris.

Paul was a member of ANZAPA during the early 1970s. He was one of the earliest subscribers to *SF Commentary*, after being a subscriber to John Bangsund's *Australian Science Fiction Review* in the 1960s. He wrote quite a few reviews for and letters of comment to *SFC* in the 1970s. Paul and his friends from Adelaide travelled to interstate conventions during the late 1960s and early 1970s, but gradually he dropped out of fandom. I stayed with Paul and his parents in the hills for a few days after the 1976 New Year's convention in Adelaide, and always meant to catch up again. Although Paul and I have been writing to each other continually since then, especially after the advent of the internet, I can't remember meeting him again after 1976.

Brenda Anderson's email, 3 January 2015:

Paul's funeral on 1 January went well, in spite of the heat (the church air-conditioning worked!) and short notice. Yes, I placed three copies of your *SF Commentary* on the table along with some SF (a Poul Anderson novel and a hardback of a Simon Black novel), a photo of Paul and

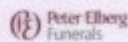
two others at some convention or other, and other photos.

Yes, we have two children: Stephanie, now 29, and Mike, who will be 26 in April. We all held up pretty well. So sad, but plenty of people turned up to pay their respects, including Roman Orszanski, Jeff Harris, and Lesley Bray (widow of Allan Bray). So the SF people were well represented.



*We would like to thank everyone
for their support during this difficult time
Brenda, Stephanie and Michael*

Funeral Service conducted in the
Grange Baptist Church
47 Beach Street, Grange
Saturday 3rd January, 2015



Paul Lynton Anderson
17/8/1943 - 1/1/2015

Genre barriers work both ways:

The Nova Mob talk that nearly never was

All 2013, I had hanging over me the prospect of delivering a talk to the Nova Mob, Melbourne's SF discussion group. It didn't help that the Bossa Nova, Julian Warner, seemed to have little idea of which speaker would be speaking in which month. Which month was mine?

What stopped me in my tracks was my inability to string together a set of convincing propositions. It's easy to do this in as Nova Mob talk about a Great New Author (such as Michael Chabon a few years ago) or the delights of a Great Old Author (Mervyn Peake a year or so ago). It's hard when I need to string together an argument about a concept such as 'genre'.

I had a name for the talk: 'Genres Work Both Ways'. I did not write it, because (a) I couldn't work out a clear argument about the material I have been reading; and (b) I was scheduled for the August 2014 meeting of the

Nova Mob, which was cancelled, because most of our number were toddling off to London to attend Loncon 3, 2014's World Convention. Finally, I gave the following as a talk at the first Nova Mob meeting for 2015. And then kept discovering further examples of genre-bending, which is why this article has an appendix.

It's all **Colin Steele**'s fault.

SF Commentary is even further behind schedule than *Treasure*, my other general-circulation fanzine. Colin Steele's latest column of reviews was finished in December 2013. This 23-page column (see p. 36) has remained all year on file, overwhelmed by my need to earn a living. One of the reviews in his column stands out:

Vampires in the Lemon Grove

by **Karen Russell**

(Chatto & Windus; 245 pp.; \$32.95)

Vampires in the Lemon Grove, **Karen Russell's** second short story collection, follows her Pulitzer Prize-nominated debut novel, *Swamplandia!* (2011). Russell's subject matter is not easy to describe. Some critics have called her writing magic realism, but it's much quirkier and darker, as reality unravels in stories filtered through dreams and terrors. In many ways, her short stories resemble those of Australian writers such as Margo Lanagan, Lucy Sussex, and Canberra's Kaaron Warren.

Russell's eight stories in *Vampires* are superbly eclectic. The title story follows two reformed vampires in Sorrento attempting to assuage their 'throbbing fangs' with the juice of lemons, 'a vampire's analgesic'. Russell thought her story was 'going to be a funny, and maybe pretty obvious, parable about addiction — but then the love story part of it, that was a surprise to me'.

In 'The Barn at the End of Our Term', 11 former American presidents are reincarnated as horses and bicker about their predicament and presidencies. Woodrow Wilson, for example, still believes he can restore peace to the world, while Dwight Eisenhower is in complete denial, believing 'the Secret Service has found some way to hide me here', until he can 'return to my body and resume governance of this country'.

'Reeling for Empire' features another dramatic transformation, one in which women workers in a turn-of-the-century Japanese silk factory mutate into human silkworms. Russell here reflects on the tyranny of sweatshops and how female individuality can be suppressed in society.

'The Seagull Army Descends on Strong Beach, 1979' begins as a simple tale of teenage angst. This dramatically changes when Nal, 'fourteen and looking for excuses to have extreme feelings about himself', finds a tree hollow in which seagulls, 'cosmic scavengers', have deposited artefacts from the future.

In the longest and most powerful story, 'The New Veterans', Beverley, a lonely middle-aged massage therapist, finds her life dramatically changed when she treats an Iraq war veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder. Her massage unlocks his huge back tattoo, depicting a 2009 'death day' in the Iraq war. The veteran seems to be recovering, but is it because Beverley has increasingly become involved in that day's traumatic events? She may be able to change history, but will it be at a cost to herself?

Russell's short stories, full of cathartic magic and elegant prose, confirm her as one of America's best young writers.

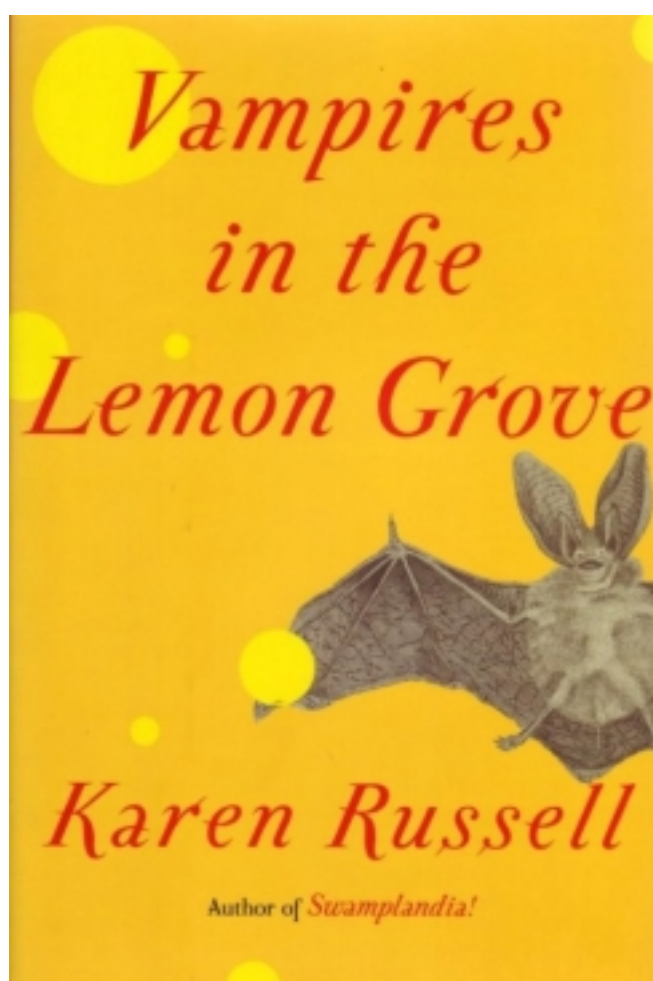
— **Colin Steele, 2013**

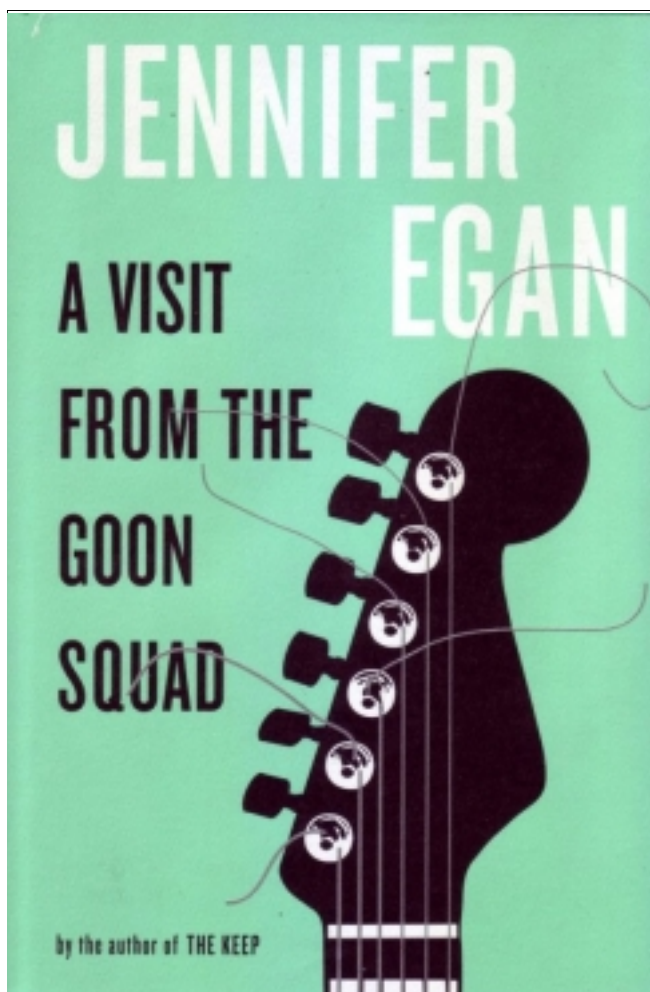
If that review doesn't make you want to tear down bookshops to find *Vampires in the Lemon Grove*, what will? Colin writes about the works of an author who appears to be writing the kind of fiction I have been looking for, yet seemed to be unknown to everybody in SF.

Not long after I read Colin's piece about Karen Russell, I read the following by **Rich Horton**, posted on the Fictionmags e-list, about another up-and-coming American author:

I believe we discussed **Jennifer Egan's** story 'Black Box' that was in the *New Yorker's* special SF issue in 2012 ... an excellent story that I know at least two Year's Best editors wanted for their books (me and Jonathan Strahan ... maybe more). Egan (or her agent) said no, which might lead the more paranoid among us to assume she doesn't want to be associated with squids in space. (There could be many other reasons of course ... maybe she just didn't feel the pay we offer was fair.)

Anyway, I've just read her novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), a Pulitzer Prize winner. It is quite wonderful. It's sort of a fixup, in that each chapter is a separate story, each from the POV of a different character, and most of the chapters were indeed published separately in magazines. But that's not really fair, because the book reads like a novel — everything in its place, even if the places are temporally (and formally!) disparate. The chapters are actually cunningly intertwined ... telling the story of Bennie Salazar, a once famous rock music executive, and his personal assistant Sasha, a fairly brilliant woman with a deeply troubled past and a bit of a problem with sticky fingers; but spiralling out and back and forward from their stories to the stories of





people they are linked with ... school and college friends, wives and husbands, other relatives ...

It's also SF, in that two of the chapters are set in the future (and interestingly so), but the novel is really about early twenty-first century (and late twentieth century) America, in an almost Dickensian way (despite being not all that long) ... and the sections in the future work to illuminate the now (and also to complete the stories of several characters). Of course, SF is often enough about the now!

Anyway, I loved it. I should note that in recent years the Pulitzer seems to have been pretty reliably an excellent novel ... not always the case in the past. (Though again, what might we think looking back in 50 years?).

— Rich Horton, February 2014

Why are two of the best regarded American authors (Egan with the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction; Russell nominated for the Pulitzer, among many other awards) almost unknown among SF and fantasy readers, although their work seems to be just the sort of things we hungrier readers are looking for?

I found in Melbourne bookshops all of Jennifer Egan's books except her first. Since then I've read three of her novels, *Look At Me* (2001), *The Keep* (2006), and, of course, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), as well as her collection *Emerald City* (1993).

I also found in Reading's or Brunswick Street Book-

store Karen Russell's books, *St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* (collection) (2006); *Swamplandia!* (novel) (2011); and *Vampires in the Lemon Grove: Stories* (2013).

Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* has been wildly overpraised. I suppose it's clever to present a series of nested short stories — each one contains characters or elements that are fully developed in the next story, but no story reaches backward to the earlier stories. But it doesn't add up to a novel, and the two stories supposedly set 'in the future' contain no SF speculations.

Much more interesting to the SF reader are her other two novels. In *Look At Me*, the main character has been in a car accident that has so scarred her face that she has been given, effectively, a new face. The trouble is that she had earned her living as a model, so suddenly she has no career. At the same time she is pursued by several mysterious characters, including one who seems to be an Alien Living Among Us. The truth of his nature is a bit prosaic, but the quality of his alienation is well rendered.

The Keep (2006) is the novel that shows how brilliant Jennifer Egan can be, and may be again.

As it grows dark, Danny arrives at a Middle European castle to which he has been invited by his cousin Howie. Nobody has met him in the village below, and he stumbles around trying to enter the castle. Eventually he gets there, but not before he notices a woman in a lighted window in a distant part of the castle grounds. She seems

to guide him to the door into the castle. There he meets his cousin Howie, rich enough to have bought the castle, seemingly a very different person from the kid from Danny's past. He runs a hippie-ish colony of refugees from modern society. Nothing is reassuring about the group or the castle. Danny is told to stay away from 'the Keep', a solitary building on a knoll away from the main part of the castle. Danny, of course, reaches the Keep, and meets the Baroness von Ausbinker, whose family has owned the castle for centuries until forced to sell it to Howie.

Meanwhile, in a separate narrative, Ray is a prisoner whose writing class is led by Holly, the only woman the prisoners ever meet. She encourages Ray to write a novel, while her relationship with Ray, and between them both and the other members of the writing class, unravels.

The two narratives do converge, in an unexpected and fantastical way.

This is exactly the kind of wildly improbable story (made probable by the clarity of Jennifer Egan's prose, a mixture of hip talk and visionary descriptive passages) that might have won a Hugo in the 1970s. It might still have won a Hugo in 2007, but nobody in our world noticed it. Yet it is no more fantastical than many Hugo-winning novels, and is much more readable than most of them.

How to summarise *The Keep*? Madison Smartt Bell, in a *New York Times* review of 2007:

Egan constructs a prism that refracts themes of power, knowledge, confinement and escape through the multiple levels of her story. All the characters are imprisoned in one way or another, if not in a physical jail or labyrinth or keep ... then in various mental squirrel cages, of which the world of addiction is the simplest.

Sounds a lot like the novels and stories of Tom Disch to me, but Disch wrote a lot more carefully than Jennifer Egan does, and his novels did not win the glittering prizes of the literary world.

Karen Russell's short story collection *Vampires in the Lemon Grove* (Knopf; 2013) and latest novel *Swamplandia!* (Knopf; 2011) are both better written than anything by Jennifer Egan, and more closely resemble the fantasy I know and love. I've already quoted, from Colin Steele's review, some of the zanier ideas that underlie the stories in her collection — but they are no zanier than the ideas in the good fantasy and horror collections that I read.

Karen Russell has a more interesting mind than most genre writers, though. She may well be the best US writer these days, although I still prefer a few Richard Powers novels, such as *The Time of Our Singing*.

Take 'Reeling for the Empire', the best story in *Vampires in the Orange Grove*. Transformation stories are legion in horror-dark fantasy fiction — indeed, they are the true backbone of the genre. But Karen Russell can put the reader through the whole experience of the transformation, from the inside out. Effectively sold into slavery by their fathers, the women in the silk factory are given a drink that begins to change them. 'We are all

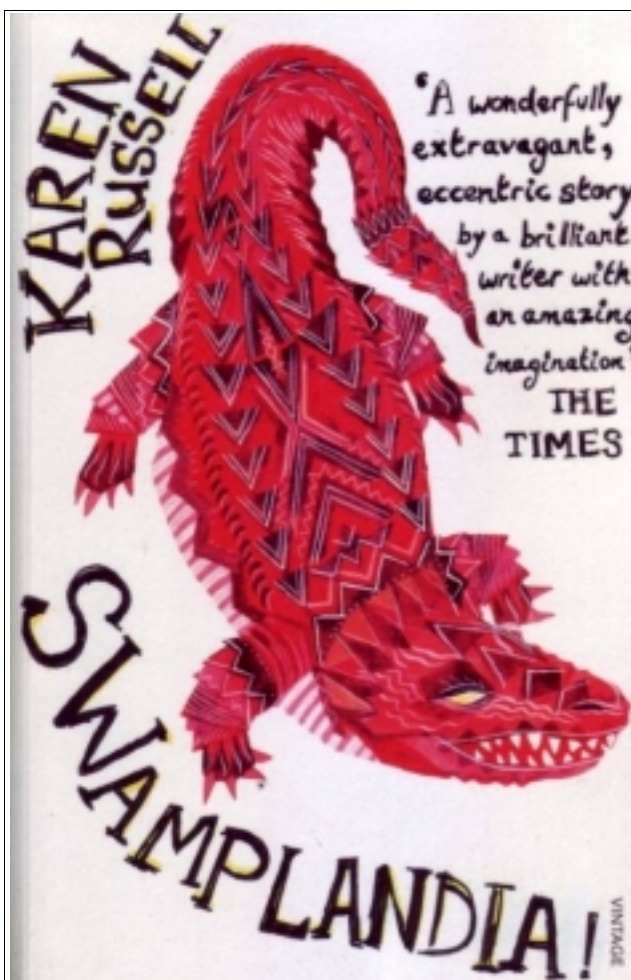
becoming reelers. Some kind of hybrid creatures, part kaiko, silkworm caterpillar, and part human female. Some of the older workers' faces are already quite covered with a coarse white fur'. They begin to produce silk from their bodies: 'Yards and yards of thin color would soon be extracted from me by the Machine'... 'The Agent's drink is remaking your insides. Your intestines, your secret organs. Soon your stomachs will bloat. You will manufacture silk in your gut with the same helpless skill that you digest food, exhale.'

The narrator finds a way to make her own silk emerge black instead of coloured, 'unwinding one cocoon for an eternity ... as if you had a single memory. Reeling in the wrong direction'. She discovers that she can change the thread's colour through accessing her darkest memories. She teaches the other women to do the same, and the revolution has started. The Agent arrives back, to find the one-room factory transformed, like its inhabitants: 'I see us as he must: white faces, with sunken noses that look partially erased. Eyes insect-huge. Spines and elbows incubating lace for wings. My muscles tense, and then I am airborne, launching myself onto the Agent's back'.

Karen Russell's novel *Swamplandia!* depends not on just one idea, but a whole teeming swamp full of them. Ava, 13 years old, lives with her father, brother, and sister in an alligator park in the Florida Everglades. The main attraction of this park has been Ava's mother Hilola Bigtree, who every day would wrestle alligators in the swamp's pond. How does a human being wrestle and subdue an alligator?

The Seth [the alligator] would lurch forward, yanking [the human] back into the water. The [human] would pull him out again, and this tug-of-war would continue for a foamy length of time while the crowd whooped and wahoed, cheering for our species. To officially win an alligator wrestling match, you have to close both your hands around the gator's jaws ... One curious fact about [alligator] physiognomy is this: while an [alligator] can *close* its jaws with 2,125 pounds per square inch of cubic force, the force of a guillotine, the musculature that opens those same jaws is extremely weak. This is the secret a wrestler exploits to beat her adversaries — if you can get your [alligator's] jaws shut up in your fist, it is next to impossible for the creature to open them again. A girl's Goody ribbon can tie off the jaws of a four-hundred-pound bull gator.

When Hilola dies of cancer, the park is left without its main attraction. It's all the rest of the family can do to feed the alligators, and hope that some tourists turn up to look at them. Within a few months, tourists stop arriving. Ava's father leaves the park to try to find employment on the mainland, followed by her brother. His story is told as the alternative narrative, and Ava and her brother do not meet again until the end of the novel. Ava and her sister are left without income, trying to keep the park together. And then Ava's sister falls in love with a ghost sailor — she tosses around on the bed in the room next to her sister having it off with her ghost boyfriend.



She follows him into the Everglades after his ghost trawler (which Ava and her sister have already found and explored) disappears during a storm. Guided by the peculiar figure who calls himself the Bird Man, Ava sets off into the Everglades to find her sister.

The spiral of the plot of the first two-thirds of the book is relentlessly downhill, but the prose has no sense of melancholy. Ava seems to lose everything that makes her life worthwhile, yet the tone of her story is one of suppressed excitement mixed with anxiety. Ava may be losing much, but she is discovering all those things that hit you when you are 13 years old, plus a vast range of experience unique to her. Karen Russell makes this strange mixture work by the magic of intense prose, which dumps the reader right in the middle of the swamp, in the middle of Ava's thoughts and adventures, making the events seem plausible yet hyper-real and fantastical. During the journey by Ava and the Bird Man through the Everglades that takes up the last part of the novel:

Our excellent luckiness was the moon. It was full and enormous, and without it, I doubt I could have made it even half a mile through the swamp that night. Water the color of hard cider slid between the trees and everywhere I looked I saw schools of tiny red and black fishes. I'd never seen fish like this before ... and I didn't know any of their names. Linty flowers covered the floating twigs. The air was smelling saltier to me; perhaps I was nearing the Gulf.

It's the particularity of each paragraph and turn of the story that keeps me reading, because for much of the novel it is difficult to see where the story is heading. Highlights include Ava's wrestling with alligators, and the storm scene that sets free the ghost trawler that had been stuck in the mud for half a century. The climax of the final journey is as wonderfully liberating as the endings of journeys of the main characters in Victor Hugo's two greatest novels, *Les Misérables* and *Toilers of the Sea*.

So why do we in the SF and fantasy world not know about authors like Egan and Russell? Perhaps they don't want us to. Becoming known as an SF or fantasy fiction writer might be a recipe for disastrous book sales. That still doesn't explain why we SF people don't know about them, and claim them as two of Our Writers. After all, Kurt Vonnegut Jr tried for 50 years to shake off the simple fact that his early works are science fiction, but we kept placing *Cat's Cradle* and *The Sirens of Titan* at the top of our favourite novels lists.

There is a more important question. Why do writers in our field, people we claim as Us, who write as well as Egan and Russell, don't have their success in the field of general literature? Since science fiction began as a formal genre in 1926, our lot have been asking, 'Why don't you lot accept our best writers as being as good as you lot?'

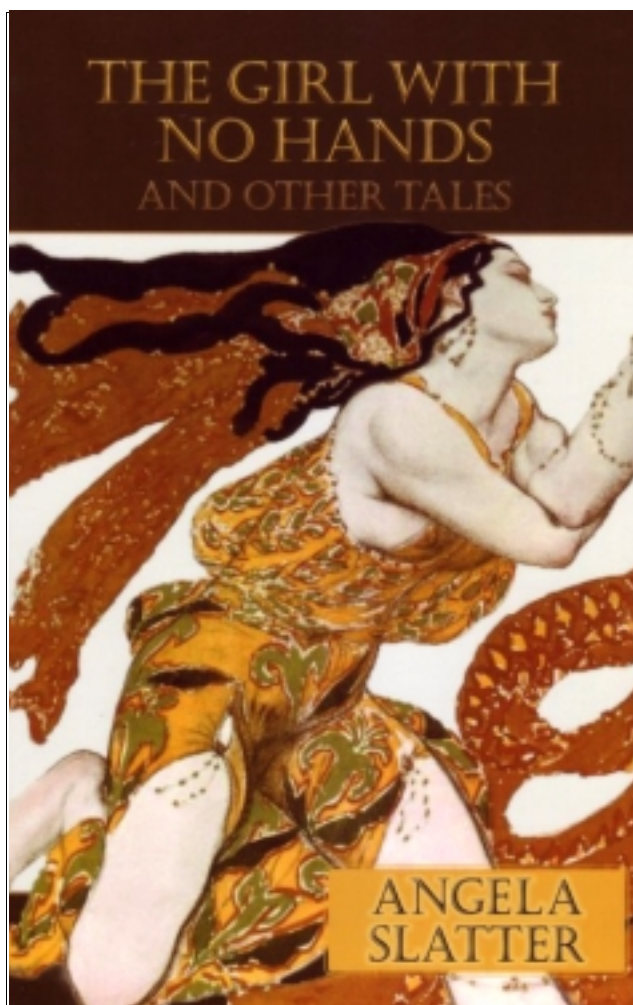
Why, for instance, is **Angela Slatter**, Australian fantasy writer, not winning Book of the Year all over Australia for her recent volumes? Is it simply that her Australian publisher, Ticonderoga Books, does not enter her books in these prizes? But would her books be accepted by judging panels? Would a publisher whose books can be obtained only over the internet, and in very few bookshops, be counted as a true-blue, dinky-di publisher? Or are internet-only small press publications, no matter how well edited and manufactured, still considered one rung above self-published books?

Are our readers of literary fiction are missing out on some of the best writing in the country? They might object that Angela Slatter tells re-told fairytales, but so did Angela Carter in Britain. Angela Carter's books had no trouble crossing genre borders.

But have there been any winners of short story contests around Australia that have yielded better fiction than Angela Slatter's '**The Bone Mother**' (in the collection *The Girl With No Hands*, Ticonderoga, 2010)? The first paragraph has a clarity and sense of menace that makes it impossible not to finish reading the story:

Baba Yaga sees the child from her window and knows that her daughter is dead. She bashes the pestle against the bottom of the mortar and swears she will not weep. The child is at the gate now, her hands nervously moving in the pocket of her apron. The old woman sits at the window to wait.

This is no ordinary fairytale. For a start, it has a sense of the danger facing any person merely by living in the world, a sense of danger found in the original *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. No happy endings in a Grimm's tale or an Angela Slatter tale.



The blond girl shivers. Her stepmother sent her here and her mother, reduced to a tiny doll wiggling in her pocket, seconded the notion. She, however, is not sure.

The little girl Vasilissa fears for her mother, herself, the family she has left behind, but does not yet see that old woman Baby Yaga is the person most in danger, 'the crone who must stand alone'.

This short story is filled with wonderful images, such as the three female riders and the man approaching the house with the axe. Vasilissa is set a task by her grandmother Baba Yaga, and she is up to it. Her grandmother faces the consequences of her whole life, and is up to it.

My favourite story in this volume is called 'Frozen', but it much stranger and more disturbing than the recent Disney movie, which itself is based on one of Hans Christian Andersen's harshest tales.

Australian readers may jump up and down and shout to me, 'What about **Margo Lanagan**?' Yes, One of Us, a fantasy and SF writer whose early works are brilliant, and who has steadily improved. She has jumped the wide sargasso sea between our world and the literary world. However, the process actually went the other way. Margo Lanagan's books have always been published by a major publisher, Allen & Unwin. Major publishers have publicity budgets, they send out lots of review copies, they enter their authors' books in the literary competitions. All this

requires a major investment. It was only after Margo Lanagan's fourth book that we in the Australian SF and fantasy community began to notice her work, give her our prizes, and ask her to attend our conventions.

I feel the same should have happened to Kaaron Warren, and may yet do so. What could be more arresting than the first paragraph of the first story in **Kaaron Warren**'s collection *The Grinding House* (CSFG Publishing; 2005)?:

The fresh young widow washed her husband's body. She dipped her cloth into cloudy water and rub rubbed at him, cleaning the pores, washing away dried blood, picking at it with her long, strong fingernails. She closed her eyes as she touched his body but he was so cold she couldn't imagine him alive. She laid her head on his belly and let her tears wet him.

Again, as in the writing of Angela Slatter, we find an absolute clarity of diction and vision that can be found rarely in other Australian fiction.

'**Fresh Young Widow**' tells of a town in which those who died are wrapped in clay and placed in the city wall. After a person's death, most people in the city become part of the ritual of 'burying' the body in the wall. However, the purpose of the clay-making and baking is not merely to honour the dead; it is to create new life:

The clay had changed little over the last hundred years. The statues circled the town, staring in, watching the people. Her husband was part of the third row. He stood in front of a child, dead twenty years. The widow's mother was the clay-maker then.

The fresh young widow went to him, at night, when all others were asleep.

She fell to her knees, weeping. Then she took a small hammer from her backpack.

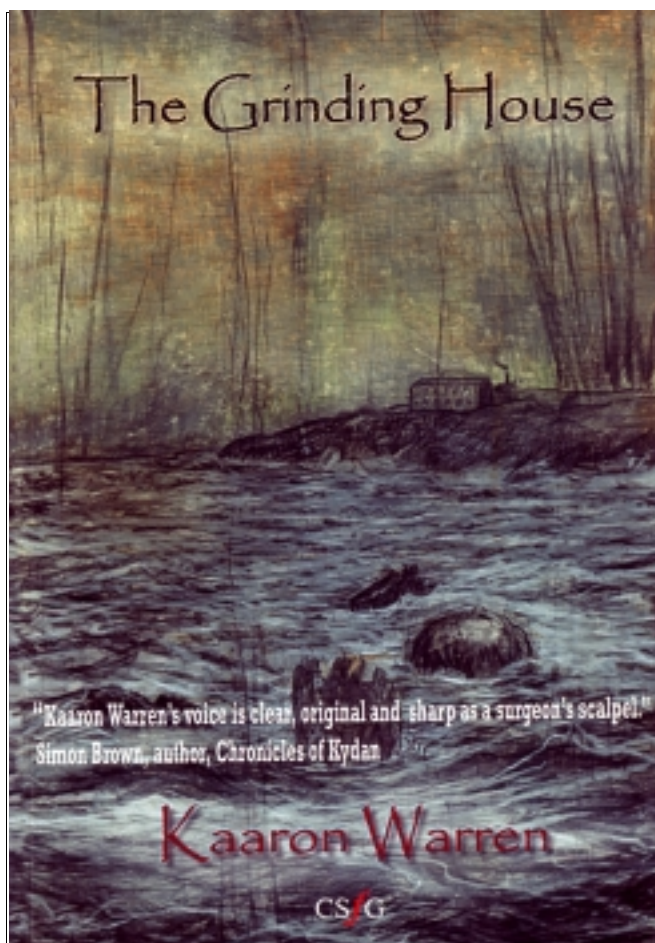
She tapped hard at his belly, and the clay cracked. A sighing sound emerged. She lifted out the pieces and reached inside.

There was a baby girl in there, gasping for air. She cried with a dry throat. The widow lifted her out and wiped some clay dust from her face. Cleared her nostrils. She tucked her into the folds of her skirt.

This passage is so powerful that I imagine the author did not know what would happen until she wrote it. Here is the essence of great fiction: reaching deep into the heart of most pressing sorrow, and finding the new life that will complete the sorrow and redeem the sufferer.

Why is this story not already known as one of Australia's greatest short stories? The simple answer is because, although it has been published twice, in the original volume from the Canberra Science Fiction Group and in the collection *Dead Sea Fruit* (Ticonderonga Publications), nobody has ever found it on a shelf in a major bookshop, or, if a person buys online, found it recommended by a major publisher or retailer, such as Readings.

I wish SF and fantasy readers discovered brilliant books that are obviously genre books, although they are not labelled as such. But I am pained much more by the great stories and novels emerging from our small press



publishers that nobody outside our circle is seeing. I have no solutions to this problem, but I do think we should have no complacency about the fact that much of the great fiction we read, stories and novels that win our prizes, never escapes from our little circle. One day they will be discovered, of course, but probably much too late to benefit their authors.

— Bruce Gillespie, July and October 2014

Appendix: Why bother with genre at all?

I wrote the above article in October 2014. Since then I've read some novels that make me wonder whether I need to look for any fantasy or science fiction within the genre.

It all began with the movies. One of 2014's best three films shown in Melbourne was Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin*. The film is filled with blazing images. Neither the plot nor the reasoning behind it is clear, but no viewer will ever forget the strange woman wandering the roads of Scotland, luring lonely men into her car, taking them to a lonely house ... then doing something very strange to them.

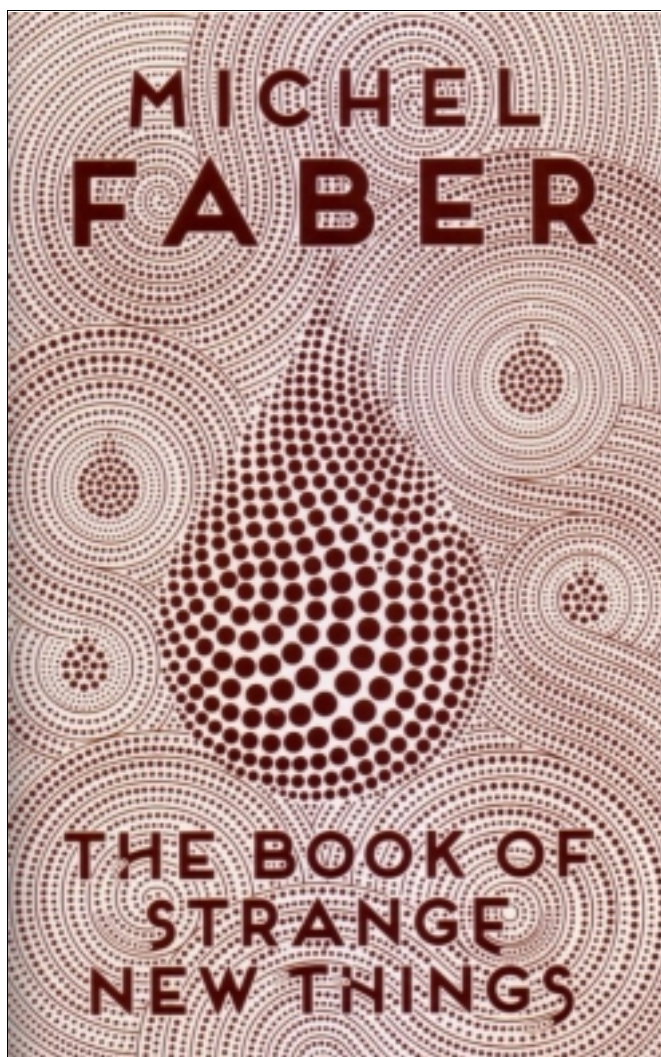
The answers to all my questions about the film were in Michel Faber's novel of *Under the Skin* (2001). I knew of Michel Faber, of Dutch descent who had grown up in Melbourne, because he was interviewed extensively when his novel *The Crimson Petal and the White* was a great

success in 2002. I had never heard of *Under the Skin*, a science fiction novel in all but publisher's label, which was his first novel. I could not believe that it had not been picked up by the British SF cognoscenti and given the Arthur Clarke Award or BSFA Award.

Much left unclear in the film is made clear in the novel. Not that it is wooden or explanatory in tone compared with the film. It's just that many of the book's events could not have been rendered into film without spending \$100 million. Like the alien woman in the film, the alien woman of the book is harvesting human male flesh, which is sent back to her home planet as a lucrative delicacy. She is part of a huge bureaucracy/factory complex hidden below a field in Scotland. As in the film, she falls in love with Earth itself, and gains empathy for her victims. However, in the book much of the motivation for her actions is the callous way she is treated by her alien bosses. This is a thoroughly enjoyable reading experience, of the kind I rarely find in genre SF.

Soon after I became aware of both the film and book of *Under the Skin*, it was announced that Michel Faber would be touring Australia to support the publication of his most recent (and, he says, his last) novel, *The Book of Strange New Things*. Nothing in *Under the Skin* could have prepared me for the shining beauty of Faber's new novel. But as I already knew that Faber can write convincing science fiction, I went along for the ride of 600-plus-pages.





Marcel Theroux writes in his *New York Times* review:

At the outset of ... *The Book of Strange New Things*, its protagonist, Peter Leigh, is about to venture into space. Peter is a pastor who has been selected to travel to a newly colonized planet at the request of its native population. His official job title is 'minister (Christian) to indigenous population'. His vocation will set new records for both missionary work and long-distance relationships: Peter is going to be separated by light-years from his wife, Beatrice. Leaving Bea; their cat, Joshua; and a 21st-century planet Earth where the current sense of climatic and geopolitical chaos has been magnified by a couple of sadly too-plausible degrees, Peter heads off to take up his new ministry.

In February, Rob Gerrard and I visited the Wheeler Centre in Melbourne to hear Michel Faber speak to an audience of several hundred people. Faber is a man in his mid fifties who looks thirty, and who speaks with quiet conviction and coherence. Nothing he said contradicted my favourable impression of the novel, and much that he said illuminated the methods by which he achieved that quality. First, Michel Faber is an atheist, so he is not writing propaganda for Christianity. However, he now finds himself a much less fierce atheist than he was in his youth, and he can see how many types of faith can help people get through very bad times. Second, we believe

that Peter Leigh is a committed Christian evangelist because, as Faber explained to us, the narrative is written from the inside out. He had no idea what would happen in the novel until he wrote it, like a actor who must create a performance in a film with no script to guide him from moment to moment.

The Book of Strange New Things could annoy some people who like a good old-fashioned SF novel. Faber offers no explanation of the scientific principles that underlie this mission. We are told nothing about the amazing interstellar drive that must have enabled ASIC (a mysterious non-government organisation) to send an expedition to the planet Oasis, or about the instantaneous communication device that enables Peter to stay in touch with Bea in Britain. (The text does not use the word 'ansible', but Michel Faber probably was aware of Ursula Le Guin's famous communication system.)

Otherwise, Faber is meticulous in his creation of the planet Oasis (a planet as different as possible from the one in *Avatar*, he says), its very alien aliens, the strangely diffident human inhabitants of ASIC headquarters on Oasis, and Peter Leigh's mission. He experiences none of the difficulties he expects to find, and instead faces problems he could not have anticipated. He thought he would have great difficulty communicating his religion to the aliens. Instead, they welcome him; they asked for someone like him to replace the previous preacher, who disappeared without explanation. Peter throws himself into his job, including his attempt to translate the Bible (the 'book of strange new things'). He is so enthusiastic that he is seen by the other ASIC staff members as 'going native'. He feels fulfilled, but soon he realises that all the dangers of the job are being faced not by him, but by his wife Bea back on Earth. In the end, this is a book about two people separated by many light-years, which echoes Faber's own experience; while he was writing it, his own wife was dying of cancer.

And why was *The Book of Strange New Things* not published as science fiction? In conversation with Ramona Koval at the Wheeler Centre, Michel Faber was both a bit shamefaced and unapologetic. He felt that the SF label would 'frighten off' many people who have otherwise enjoyed the book. So that's us, folks! Still frightening after all these years.

David Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks* is an even more startling use of the science fiction genre than that found in *The Book of Strange New Things*. I've looked forward to Mitchell's new novel ever since I read *Cloud Atlas* and saw the Wachowskis/Tykver film. To judge from *Cloud Atlas*'s two segments set in the future, Mitchell is totally familiar with the genre and unafraid of using SF ideas for his own ends. Like Michel Faber, he has the literary resources to make far-future scenarios seem as lively as those set in the past or present.

As he admits in a recent *Age* interview (4 April 2015), 'My books look complex but they were all built out of smaller units than a novel usually is; they're built out of novellas.' In *Cloud Atlas*, he split each novella into two, with one section in the first half of the novel, and the completing section in the second half. In *The Bone Clocks*, the six novellas cover events of six different years between 1984 and 2043. As William Skidelsky writes in the

Guardian:

Each [part] deals with a different chapter in the life of Holly Sykes, a teenage runaway who grows up to become a successful memoirist. Two sections — the first and last — are narrated by Holly herself; the others by figures who at various points come into contact with her. In the first section, set in 1984, 15-year-old Holly goes on the lam in Gravesend, Kent ... In the final part, set some 60 years later, an elderly Holly hunkers down on Ireland's west coast as the world lurches towards environmental apocalypse and the global socio-economic order disintegrates. In between, Mitchell ranges between styles and genres with his usual promiscuity.

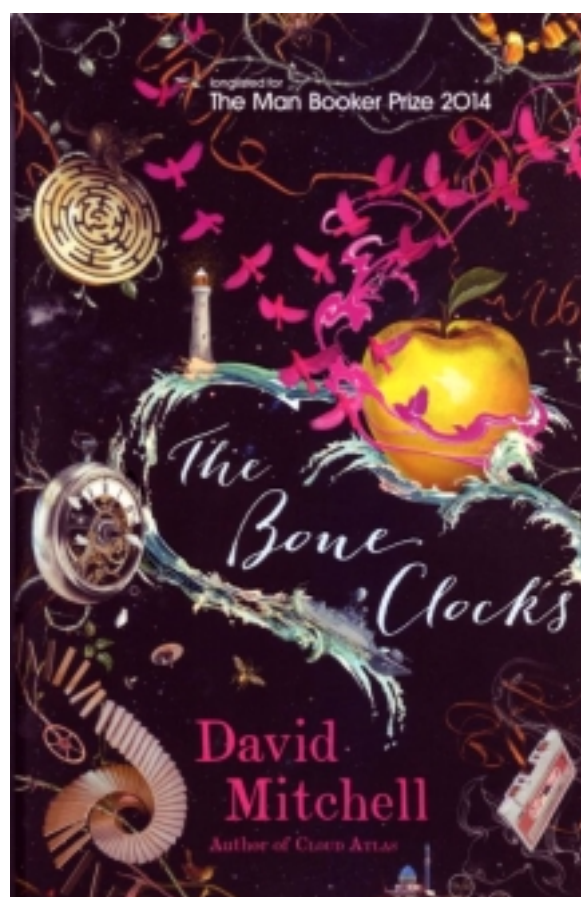
Although each of the narrators in *The Bone Clocks* has an authentic voice, and inhabits a living world, many events in their lives are influenced by an irregular series of inexplicable incidents that seem the result of supernatural causes. The fifth section is devoted entirely to the novel's mysterious background story, the age-old and largely invisible battle between two groups, the Anchorites and the Horologists, who sweep up human participants (including many of the characters in this book) as collateral damage. The real question, as asked by critic James Woods in the *New Yorker*, is whether the novel is about enduring human concerns, or about the zany war between two Marvel-comics sets of super-antagonists. The fifth of the six novellas is entirely devoted to the last knockdown battle between the Anchorites and the Horologists, yet it's the sixth novella, about the world we're heading toward, that haunts the reader long after finishing the book.

Both Faber and Mitchell are masters of the fine sen-

tence and the can't-put-me-down narrative line. In *The Book of Strange New Things*, Faber's prose carries the reader through long episodes of exposition and quiet contemplation that should be boring but are fascinating and enlightening. In *The Bone Clocks*, Mitchell's capacity for emitting killer phrases adds to his capacity for telling an exciting yarn. As Woods writes, 'David Mitchell ... has an extraordinary facility ... he can get a narrative rolling along faster than most writers, so that it is filled with its own mobile life. You feel that he can do anything he wants, in a variety of modes, and still convince.' Woods is not convinced by *The Bone Clocks*, because he feels that science fictional background story sucks the life out of the book's other concerns: 'the human case had disappeared'. I feel that part 5, which is all science fictional machinery, is the only boring section of *The Bone Clocks*, but in the end the battle between the super-tribes is not the point of the novel. The final section casts a shadow backward through the rest of the book, showing us that it is about the changes in civilisation that have clutched at the fabric of our lives since the 1980s, changes that will soon make it impossible for us comfortable tribes of the earth to maintain our illusions about our lives.

Which brings us back to the final pages of *The Book of Strange New Things*, which also offers no reassurances to 2015's readers. Both books show the extent to which two astute literary writers can play with science fiction ideas (while treating them quite seriously) in order to illuminate major concerns about life in the twenty-first century. Which is, after all, what I have always expected from the best science fiction books.

— Bruce Gillespie, April 2015



James Doig with Graham Stone

A life with books: An interview with Graham Stone

James Doig writes: Here is an interview I did with Graham Stone a few years ago on one of his trips to Canberra.

Graham Stone (1926–2013) was a legendary Australian bibliographer, book collector and book dealer. He is best known for his *Australian Science Fiction Bibliography* and *Notes on Australian Science Fiction*. He has also brought back into print rare works of Australian science fiction and fantasy. He didn't publish his books through commercial publishers but printed and bound them himself, and was a member of the Australian Bookbinding Society.

First appearance in the journal *Wormwood*, published twice a year by Tartarus Press, devoted to 'literature of the fantastic, supernatural and decadent'.

JAMES DOIG: You were born in Adelaide?

GRAHAM STONE: Yes, the beautiful city of Adelaide. What a dump! My recollections of Adelaide are 50 or 60 years out of date. I've only been back there a few times, and briefly. It's very much homogenised — much the same as other Australian capitals. But when I lived there at an early age I knew that it was, to put it kindly, a backwater. I've put down my thoughts on conditions in Australia before the war several times, and I won't repeat them here.

JD: How long did you live in Adelaide?

GS: Up to the age of 14.

JD: Did your first experience with fiction magazines begin in Adelaide?

GS: Yes, my early reading in boys' magazines. I've set down some memories which have been published in part in several places over a long period. One of my current projects is to put all that in order and update it. It should amount to a book.

Briefly, I started reading the pre-adolescent English boys' weeklies, and there was quite a bit of primitive science fiction in those. I haven't been able to pin down dates, but I remember the first interesting thing was a serial in *The Champion* — probably in 1933, when I was seven years old — called *The War of the Planets*. All I can remember is that it had intrepid rocketeers mixed in a war between, I think, Mars and Venus. It introduced to me space flight and rocket propulsion, which was a complete novelty. The concept of communicating between worlds and travelling between worlds, and the concept of non-human intelligence was something new and fascinating to me. And I thought, 'This is what I want to read.'

There was also *Terror from the Stratosphere*, which was in

The Triumph, another of the boys' weeklies. There were a number of these periodicals all published by the same firm. There was a whole industry with writers grinding out material. I haven't seen too many examples of the very early boys' periodicals, but I have seen examples from about 1911, and several from the 1920s and 1930s.

There were other odds and ends from this time. I remember the comic strip *Mandrake the Magician* running in the *Women's Weekly* in 1933 or 1934. A lot of this stuff involved magic, which isn't all that interesting. The first episode that I read had a brain transplant — a human brain transplanted into a gorilla.

As for books — there was juvenile science fiction at that time, but I didn't see any of it. However, there were two of Wells's novels that were in the house, *The Invisible Man* and *Food of the Gods*. There was Verne, but he was already quite dated.

While I was in Adelaide, the last of the boys' weeklies that I read was *The Modern Boy*. It was quite a bit different to the others — it was up-to-date and emphasised things that were going on in the 1930s. I followed it religiously for several years, and I was especially interested in the serials involving Captain Justice. It closely resembled other adventure serials that were popular at the time, such as *Doc Savage* in the American pulps. You had stereotyped characters — a scientific genius, a general handyman, a smart-arse teenager, and so on. If you picked up *The Modern Boy* at any time the odds were that there would be a *Captain Justice* serial running. There were robots, dinosaurs in Antarctica, interplanetary flight, and so on.

In 1936–37 *Buck Rogers* ran in the *New Idea* in competition with *Mandrake the Magician* in the *Women's Weekly*. There was a lot of interest in *Buck Rogers* and it ran for a long time and got away from the original concept. It didn't start off as a comic strip, but as two prose stories in *Amazing* in 1928–29. The interesting thing is that the title of the original story was *Armageddon 2419*, which suggests to me that it was first written in 1919 and took

a while to find a publisher. It starts off with Rogers just after the First World War; he pokes around a mine, gets entombed, is overcome by gas, and is miraculously preserved in a coma for 500 years. He wakes up to find the Americas, and the world, have been taken over by Mongols. The comic strip actually starts well into the series, which is when I started reading it.

I moved around in Adelaide — my father died in 1937, in the depth of the Depression. He was a PMG phone technician and had regular work, but my two older brothers were out of regular work right up until the war. My mother had some superannuation, which was a pittance, and she tried various ventures, including running a residential at Semaphore, which was a particularly run-down part of Adelaide. This was in 1937. There were two local libraries that had some interesting books, particularly by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

They weren't public libraries in the sense that we know now. There were two kinds of libraries: the institutes, which were derived from the earlier Mechanics Institute or School of Arts libraries, and commercial rental libraries, which were just a shop front — you walked in and there were shelves everywhere and three signs up, always the same — Mystery, Romance, Western. My mother ran just such a place as her next venture. Anyway, this place was obviously run by someone who knew something — there were a lot of books of interest to me, and there was a shelf of Edgar Rice Burroughs. I read most of the works of Burroughs in just a few months — it's a marvel that I survived it!

After that I had pretty much exhausted Burroughs. There was Dennis Wheatley, and above all an early work of a writer better known as John Wyndham, who in those days used the name John Beynon, with the repulsive title *Planet Plane*. This was a first-trip-to-Mars novel with the classical Mars of desiccation, deserts, canals, with a few Martians hanging on, and also some robots, which he called 'machines'. Very dated now, but it was hot stuff then and I was greatly impressed with it. A few months later I spotted a magazine which featured on its cover what was obviously a sequel. It was *Tales of Wonder*, the first English SF magazine, though it was half American in content. From then on I started looking for similar magazines and I was off and running. That's how it all began.

JD: When did you leave Adelaide?

GS: I'd had a trip to Sydney at the end of 1936 — an el-cheapo bus tour. My brothers had both moved to Sydney in search of work. We had an uncle there who had a small clothing factory and he gave my older brother a job as a rep. My other brother couldn't get a regular job in Sydney and he took off and eventually got work as a miner at Mt Isa. So I had been to Sydney and I saw it as the height of civilisation and wanted to live there. At the end of 1939 my mother gave up running the library and she asked her brother to give her a job, which he did. She worked for him for a couple of years, until 1941. I don't know how you could do this during the war, running a clothing factory, but he obviously went broke! She then worked for David Jones for a couple of years, until early 1944. Then she went back to Adelaide, drag-

ging me with her.

She hated Sydney and thought it was crude, vulgar, and American. But I loved it — it was inundated with American pulp magazines. I was only into SF, but there were millions of them! The shop-front lending libraries overlapped with regular newsagencies. Often a place would be both — a newsagent that loaned books for a small fee. These places usually had tables stacked high with pulp magazines. They were remainders, unsold copies that were dumped in Australia. The copies that didn't sell in America were sold as waste paper; they were loaded in ships as ballast, came out here and were taken up by Gordon and Gotch, Woolworths, and the newsagents. This had been going on through the Depression and there were literally millions of these things, of which SF was only a small part.

JD: Is that when you started collecting?

GS: I've gone hot and cold on collecting. At the present time I've got next to nothing. I've sold a lot of stuff that I should have kept. The few things I've kept include the first issue of *Amazing Stories*, which was the holy grail of science fiction collecting, and I got a tolerable copy. I've also kept a copy of the first issue of *Astounding Stories of Super Science*, which ended up as *Analog*. I've also kept a 1931 issue of *Amazing*, which has the first part of *Space Hounds of IPC*, and the reason I have is that it is inscribed by Smith to Robert Heinlein.

JD: Where did get that?

GS: After Heinlein visited Sydney in 1954 — he met the Sydney SF group — he sent us a stack of magazines.

Also, I've kept the August 1937 issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, the first American SF magazine I saw, and which has a lovely cover of a magnificent dinosaur; a reprint of *All-Story* magazine with the complete *Tarzan of the Apes*; and Wells's *The Time Machine* — a first edition, but later issue, and not a very good copy, so it's not worth a fortune. At auction it might get a few hundred. But that's about all. It's a pity, because I should have kept a lot of the Australian stuff. Once I decided to let everything go, I let everything go.

JD: When did you get involved in science fiction fandom?

GS: This is curious in a way. In Adelaide you had to search for magazines, but I found some. I read every word, down to the ads. *Thrilling Wonder Stories* had a Science Fiction League Department which had a few pages of reports on what local fan groups were doing. One particular issue had a request for contacts to start a local branch in Adelaide by John Gregor. Somehow I missed that — if I'd seen it I surely would have contacted him. However, I did know through *Wonder* that there were a few fans in Sydney, but I didn't follow up at that time.

I didn't do anything until late in 1940 when I found a bookseller who had a lot of stuff that he was sitting on. I should explain that this was September–October 1940. All the US stuff had stopped coming in June due to the currency restrictions, and import procurement control had been introduced. A lot of stuff would not get ap-

proval for import. Anything that wasn't essential was prohibited. From then on the existing stock of stuff dwindled and most of it was destroyed for waste paper. This guy, Nash, ran a bookshop at the Spot opposite the Randwick Ritz Theatre. He hung on to his magazines because he knew they would be worth something one day. I'd been getting stuff from him and he asked me if I knew two guys who lived around the corner from him. I got their addresses, wrote to them, and immediately got a letter from one of them, Bert Castellari. He was glad to see me — he was delighted to meet anyone who had heard of SF. There were so very few of us.

JD: Who was involved at that early time?

GS: Bert and Ron Levy. They lived in adjoining streets, almost back to back. Their club was the Futurian Society of Sydney. The first meeting of that club was 5 November 1939. The same group had been meeting previously through 1939 under the name of The Junior Australian Science Fiction Correspondence Club. They were all teenagers at that time. For reasons not clear to me they decided to start a new club. Perhaps they decided to give up on the idea of a correspondence club; there were so few known outside Sydney. The idea behind the name, the Futurian Society of Sydney, was to show which side they supported in the current controversy in the United States. A later book, *The Immortal Storm* by Sam Moskowitz, describes the shebang in exhaustive detail. The Sydney group favoured the New York Futurian faction of Wollheim, Pohl, Kornbluth, etc.

By the time I met Bert there was an interregnum. There had been a meeting which had broken up in confusion without fixing a date for the next meeting. All the executives had resigned and the remaining members were left wondering about the future of the thing.

Anyway, I met Ron Levy, Bert's friend, and we had a really good meeting at Bert's place. There was also Bill Veney and Bruce Sawyer. It wasn't a proper meeting, but it had been arranged that everyone be invited to Bill Veney's place to get things started again. That was the first proper meeting I went to. It was later called the First Conference, and was attended by most of the members at that time. So, it started again and staggered on. But there was a lot of pointless bickering over points of order and so on, but we saw each other all the time and exchanged stuff.

JD: Who was regarded as worth reading by members?

GS: We ran a poll of the best writers and had nominations for the best story of 1939. It was dominated by E. E. Smith, who was someone mentioned a lot, Jack Williamson, and Eric Frank Russell (not to be confused with the local fan Eric Frederick Russell). Of course, a lot of leading figures were just beginning at that time — Sturgeon and Heinlein. Simak had been writing for a few years. As for books, we knew of Wells, Burroughs, and a few more, but books weren't important.

JD: The society had a successful library didn't it?

GS: There was a library that ran for years and ended up

in my hands. By the 1970s nobody was interested in it. I made it available, but nobody wanted it and I sold it off.

JD: The society also produced publications, didn't it?

GS: Individuals published stuff. The society only produced one small item in the war period. Bert mostly, and other people from time to time, published the *Futurian Observer*, which was a single fortnightly sheet and reported such news as there was. There were others who published fanzines. Vol Molesworth produced several titles, originally called *Luna*, then *Cosmos*. It consisted of a few pages of miscellaneous stuff. This was through 1939 and 1940. The foundation members were Molesworth, Veney, Castellari, Levy, and Eric and Ted Russell. Other early members didn't stick.

A group of members, Levy, Dwyer, and one or two others, produced a magazine called *Zeus*, which consisted of miscellaneous, rather primitive humour.

One member was David R. Evans, who was born in rural Wales and learned English only at school. He was older than the other members and was interested in writing and had stories published in cheap magazines. He was into weird, supernatural, and science fiction. He struck up a correspondence with Bob Bloch, who sent him copies of *Weird Tales*, which of course you couldn't get here because it was banned. There were a lot of complaints in the mid thirties about US magazines, especially horror, and there was a list of titles that were specifically banned. *Weird Tales* got in there mainly because of the artistic nudes on the cover.

Evans had a letter in *Amazing* in early 1939, and that was how he was contacted by the society. Being older and having some idea of what was what, it was only natural that he immediately took a leading part in the society. However, it didn't go so well, and it was thought by some other members that he was the main source of everything that went wrong, quite wrongly I thought. At the First Conference it was decided that members should be screened by a committee to see if they were suitable — this was a polite way of expelling Evans. But he remained friends with members, and a regular group used to meet at his place on Sundays through 1940–41.

The publication that really dominated the group was *Ultra*, produced by the Russell brothers, which was much more substantial than the other fanzines. The first two issues were carbon copied, but then they liberated a stencil duplicator from the Boy Scouts, and after a few experiments got it to work. This made things a lot easier. It ran for two and a bit years — 30 issues — and each issue ran to 20 or more pages. Various stuff, some of it worthwhile.

Also, at this time there was the first activity out of Sydney. Warwick Hockley produced a number of issues of *Austra-Fantasy* in Melbourne. Don Tuck also commenced activity in Hobart.

JD: When did you get involved in the Australian Book Collectors Society?

GS: 1947. After the war the currency control was still on, so we resorted to various fiddles for getting science fiction. There were basically two possibilities. We got

hold of a fan in the US who was interested in something Australian and did a swap. The other way was to go through England, which was the same situation, but a lot looser and was able to get stuff in.

Sometimes, the authorities loosened up and you could get American books through Angus and Robertson, then things would tighten up again. Through A&R I came into contact with other collectors who were doing the same thing.

Walter Stone (no relation) started the Book Collectors Society and was the leading figure for many years. He got interested in Arkham House books. He brought in a number of those. Another who was particularly interested in fantasy was Stan Larnach. They used to have a regular gathering on Friday night in a coffee shop. You could go in, have a coffee, and sit there chatting until 11 o'clock, and the Book Collectors had a regular table. Not to be outdone, the Futurian Society started a regular Thursday night gathering, which continued in various locations for some years.

We got exposed to serious book collecting through the Book Collectors Society — we found out what it was all about.

JD: What book collectors do you recall?

GS: Well, I've mentioned Stan Larnach, who was an early member of the Book Collectors Society. He was in the Anatomy Department at the University of Sydney for

many years, and was an expert in Aboriginal craniology. He was a voracious reader and book collector, and was especially interested in Gothic and Penny Blood literature.

Ron Graham was a well-off business man who accumulated a world-class science fiction collection, which was eventually donated to the University of Sydney library. His collection of pulps was one of the best in the world, and included complete runs of science fiction magazines.

Leon Stone (again, no relation) was a great amateur journalist and a historian of that movement. He accumulated a large library of books, including a lot of Penny Bloods and boys' weeklies. The tragedy was he lost the lot in a fire that burnt down his house in 1961.

David Cohen was born in London and came to Australia in the late 1930s. I met him when he was heavily involved in science fiction fandom in the 1950s, but I lost contact with him after that. After he died I was called in to assess the collection he had left behind. Damp had destroyed a lot of stuff, but there were still some important items, including the first issue of *Amazing* that I have. There were also runs of *Weird Tales* and *Unknown*, but if he had specialty press books like those of Gnome Press or Arkham House, they had already been sold off.

— James Doig and Graham Stone, 2003

Graham Stone special issue of *Mumblings from Munchkinland*



The Editor writes:

Chris Nelson's *Mumblings from Munchkinland* 34 not only includes Chris's much anticipated tribute to the life and work of Graham Stone, but also marks the 25th anniversary of my favourite Australian fanzine.

I like this magazine not only for Chris Nelson's writing and layout style, which mixes seriousness and lightness in equal measure, but also for the fact that he takes Australian fan history seriously in a way no fanzines have done since the great days of John Bangsund and John Foyster. During the life of *Mumblings*, Chris has been interviewing older Australian SF fans before they leave us. Many, such as Bert Castellari and Don Tuck, had been inactive in the SF field for many years, but Chris tracked them down. In the case of Graham Stone, Chris has interviewed family members as well. He has found photos and information unsuspected by anybody who knew Graham only through his SF activities. An unmissable document.

Write to Chris at 25 Fuhrman Street, Evatt ACT 2617, Australia, or read this great magazine at <http://efanzines.com>.

— Bruce Gillespie, April 2014

Kim Huett lives in Canberra, collects fanzines and much else related to the history of science fiction, and writes fannish and historical articles for the major fanzines.

Kim Huett

Spotlight on J.M. Walsh

Given human nature, it's hardly surprising that research is not properly understood or appreciated by every person who needs it. Too many people looking for information take the line of least effort by typing a few words into their search engine of choice and making do with however little that reveals. Even worse, too many seem to assume that anything not predigested and made obvious via search engine should be considered beyond human ken and further enlightenment not even be attempted.

Now there's nothing wrong with a quick search if the objective is simple, looking for a recipe, the name of an actor, the location of a restaurant. When our objectives become more complex, when we want to know more than the absolute basics, that's when proper research is required.

To give you an example, I recently pulled the summer 1938 issue of Doug Webster's fanzine *Tomorrow* out of my collection. That issue has an article about *Tales of Wonder* editor Walter Gillings I wanted to look at in order to help me with another article I'm writing. While reading this article, however, I was taken aback to discover the following: 'But despite the support of English author J.M. Walsh, whose "Vandals of the Void" appeared about that time, and who confessed to the Ilford enthusiasts that he preferred writing science-fiction to the mystery stories

for which he is famed ...'

This half sentence contradicted every part of what little I thought I knew about J. M. Walsh. I had long assumed him to be a mysterious Australian author who had managed to sell a handful of stories to the US science fiction magazines before disappearing. I thought it most likely he had been an enthusiastic teenage reader of science fiction who decided to write the sort of stories he loved but had then given up because of the difficulties involved in selling to US editors from Australia. Clearly some research was in order ...

First step was to check out Van Ikin's introductory essay in his 1982 anthology, *Portable Australian Science Fiction*. Sources online might also offer some biographical detail in regards to Walsh, but mostly such sources are of anonymous authorship and thus less to be trusted than material backed up by a name and a reputation. Van soon dispelled some of my confusion: 'Born in Geelong in 1897, James Morgan Walsh had published over one hundred books (mostly mysteries) before he wrote the stylish space-thriller *Vandals of the Void* (1931).' Okay, so given Van Ikin is the sort to have done his homework, I've no doubt he's right about when and where Walsh was born.

Armed with this basic fact, I then searched online and found sundry sources in agreement with Van Ikin. In addition, the anonymous author at Goodreads also claimed: 'Walsh visited England in 1925 to negotiate with publishers, returned to Victoria but left for permanent residence in England in 1929 ...'

This would explain why Scottish fan Doug Webster thought J. M. Walsh English. National identity was a slippery concept among the residents of the British Empire. Even in the 1930s a good many Australians thought as themselves as Englishmen in every respect but place of birth. Although Walsh was born in Geelong, it would probably have not seemed strange to either Walsh or Gillings to describe him as being English.

Further work with the search engine added little, apart from some basic bibliographical details. Among those details, however, is the fact that Walter Gillings published an article by Walsh titled 'To-Day's Dogmas — To-morrow's Fallacies' in the fifth issue of *Tales of Tomorrow* (an article I've never seen but would very much like to read one day).

Having exhausted the obvious, it was now time to examine the Australian National Library's Trove database, a very useful online resource, the contents of which



don't show up on any search engine I'm familiar with.

Not surprisingly, most of the appearances of Walsh in Trove's collection of scanned Australian newspapers turn out to be instalments of his mystery novels. Science fiction may have excited him more, but it's clear from the number of newspapers that serialised his work that writing mysteries was where the money was. Other than this, however, the many appearances of Walsh's fiction didn't add much to my knowledge of the man, but luckily they weren't the entire picture.

The earliest probable appearance of our man that I found was a letter by a J. M. Walsh of Pakington Street in the 6 February 1912 issue of *The Geelong Advertiser*. The author of this letter complains about cadets throwing stones into his house and the lack of response by those in authority when he wrote a letter of complaint. If this is the right Walsh, it confirms that he once lived in Geelong and was willing to put pen to paper from an early age, since he would have turned 15 on 23 February in 1912.

Of more interest is the instalment of a literary column that appeared in *The Queenslander* dated 18 June 1921. This mentions that *The Lost Valley* by J. M. Walsh was the second winner of a competition funded and promoted by Victorian entrepreneur C. J. De Garis. According to the AustLit website: 'De Garis also saw himself as a patron of the arts and, in 1919, launched a Great Australian Novel Competition, the winner of which was awarded the De Garis Prize.' Exactly how the winner was decided or what prize was awarded I've not been able to discover. Indeed, from what I've read about C. J. De Garis, he appears to have been such a chaotic individual that many of his activities cannot be neatly pinned down at this late date.

The Daily News of 23 January 1925 mentions Walsh having booked passage to England 'for himself and his bride', which confirms the accuracy of the mention on Goodreads. Additionally, *The Freeman's Journal* of 19 November 1925 has news of our man in London: 'Mr. J. M. Walsh, the Australian Catholic novelist, who is at present visiting London, and Mrs. Walsh were received at the Mansion House by the Lord Mayor, Sir Alfred Bower, Baronet, and Lady Bower, and lunched with them on Sunday, 27th September.' Given *The Freeman's Journal* was later retitled *The Catholic Freeman's Journal* I think it's a safe bet that they were correct when describing Walsh as a Catholic.

This brought me to 1927, when the Australian Booksellers Association decided to promote local talent with an Australian Authors' Week.

First, though, J. M. Walsh turned up in a plebiscite conducted by Melbourne newspaper *The Argus* just before the Australian Authors' Week. The stated intention of *The Argus* was that the plebiscite should 'indicate the relative popularity of Australian poetry and prose writers'. Cynically I suspect this plebiscite was more about *The Argus* taking advantage of the Australian Authors' Week promotion to sell a few extra copies, a fairly predictable move by a newspaper even then.

Regardless of the motives of *The Argus*, J. M. Walsh did surprisingly well in the prose section, making it to 11 with 90 votes. Given he was a writer of action stories rather serious fiction, this is impressive if you believe, as I do,

that when it comes to polling the reading public would prefer to be seen as intellectual rather than honest. Obviously, having his novels serialised in numerous Australian newspapers helped Walsh overcome such incipient snobbery by ensuring he was very well known to the readers of *The Argus* and other newspapers.

During Australian Authors' Week, a headline in the 30 August 1927 issue of *The News* announces that 'AUSTRALIAN AUTHORS' WEEK WILL BE HELD THROUGHOUT COMMONWEALTH FROM SEPTEMBER 12 TO 19'. *The News* then helpfully published photos of 20 authors involved in the promotion, including one J. M. Walsh. As it is a scan of an elderly newspaper, the photo isn't the best, but still better than anything I've found online. (The best I've found there is a line sketch of Walsh on the Goodreads website). (Interesting to note by the way that 8 of 20 photos published by *The News* were of female authors, not a bad gender balance for 1927 I would assume.)

Far more interesting is a column on books in *The Daily News* of 24 September 1927, in which J. M. Walsh is against the suggestion that a tariff be placed on imported books by foreign authors. To quote him in full:

It has been suggested on more than one occasion that a duty on imported books, or some sort of tariff legislation, would improve the position of local writers, and enable them to compete against the imported article. That may be so in other lines, but it does not hold good with books. The cutting off of the reading supply of a big majority would not make them turn to the local writer. We would still mourn for our unobtainable Zane Grey or Ethel Dell. But show the reading public that we have a Zane Grey or an Ethel Dell in our midst, convince them by inducing them to read such local authors that they are getting quite as good a yarn, and the thing is done. Legislation won't help us. Propaganda and advertisement will, but after that we have to stand on our merits as individual writers, and our several abilities to produce the goods required.

The most recent mention I found was a biographical piece published in *The Courier-Mail* dated 8 June 1935. It includes various useful tidbits of information: 'James Morgan Walsh (he writes as J. M. Walsh) is an Australian, now living in England, and is regarded as the foremost writer of the day of Secret Service mystery fiction. He was born in Geelong about 55 years ago, educated at Xavier College in Melbourne, and started life as an auctioneer.' It should be noted that every other mention I've seen has Walsh's birth date as 23 February 1897, so I assume *The Courier-Mail* guessed, and guessed badly. On the other hand, I do like the idea that Walsh was the obvious predecessor to Ian Fleming. This is not so unlikely if you consider that new Walsh books were being published right up to when he passed away on 29 August 1952, the same year as the first Bond novel, *Casino Royale*, appeared.

It was at this point that I decided to pass my findings on to Chris Nelson to see if he could add anything. I knew that if anybody had any further leads on the story of J. M. Walsh it would be Chris. He kindly responded with

NEW WORLDS

PROFILES

J. M. WALSH

1897 - 1952



Nova Publications regrets to announce the death, on Friday, August 29th, of J. M. Walsh, celebrated mystery writer and fantasy author, after a short illness.

Born in Geelong, Australia, he began writing as a hobby while still in his teens, and had numerous short stories published while still at school. When in his early twenties, he won a prize in a competition for the best Australian novel, and soon after decided to make writing his fulltime profession.

While still a young man he came to England and settled down to build the background of a literary career which has produced over one hundred full-length novels and scores of shorter stories covering many types of fiction, including science fiction, of which latter he was a pioneer. In the Collins Mystery Series he was as well-known under his pseudonym of Stephen Maddock as under his own name.

In the science fiction field he is best known for his two early novels, published originally in *Amazing Stories*, entitled "Vandals Of The Void," and "Vanguard To Neptune," the latter being published in pocketbook form in this country by Kemsley Press only a few weeks before his death. Under the pen-name of H. Haverstock Hill, he also had a semi-fantasy published before the war entitled "The Secret Of The Crater."

Long a pioneer writer of science fiction, he devoutly believed in it as a contemporary literature of the times and lived long enough to see it becoming an accepted fact. As an Adjudicator on the International Fantasy Award Panel his knowledge and good judgment of the field are irreplaceable.

Fantasy fiction has lost a great friend and noble henchman—but not before he had made a lasting contribution to the medium.



various scans from two different science fiction magazines, for which I thank him.

The first was of the back cover of a 1952 issue of *New Worlds* which was devoted to an obituary for Walsh. This is interesting for two reasons, the first being the claim that *Vandals of the Void*, a story that had first appeared in the Summer 1931 issue of *Wonder Stories Quarterly*, had just been reprinted in paperback by Kemsley Press (a division of Kemsley Newspapers). While I can find evidence of a hardcover edition of *Vandals of the Void* being published by John Hamilton Ltd in 1931, the only mention of Kemsley Press in regards to J. M. Walsh is their 1953 paperback, *Vanguard to Neptune*. If Kemsley had already added *Vandals of the Void* to their Cherry Tree line, it appears to have slipped down a bibliographical crack. On the other hand, both *Les Corsaires du Vide* (1951) and *Mission Secrete pour Neptune* (1955) were published in France by Hachette.

The other matter of interest is the mention of Walsh being one of the judges for the International Fantasy Award. Further enquiries haven't revealed just how he came to be involved, but I think we can safely blame Walter Gillings for that. Since Gillings was deeply involved with the creation of the International Fantasy Award, it would be an obvious move on his part to ask Walsh to participate, given Walsh was enthusiastic about

science fiction and could add a certain amount of prestige to the award panel. According to Chris Nelson, Walsh attended the 1951 International Science-Fiction Festival Convention (also known as the Festivention) under his Havestock Hill pseudonym. Nobody seems to know why he attended a science fiction convention for the first time or why he didn't attend under his own name, which leads me to suspect he was there specifically to discuss the IFA. How correct I am about any of this I doubt we'll ever know unless somebody better informed than I writes up a history of the International Fantasy Award. Apparently Greg Pickersgill has access to many of the source documents, so perhaps one day ...

The other scans are of Walter Gillings' third instalment of *The Impatient Dreamers*, a lengthy biographical piece about his attempts to foster science fiction in the UK. This instalment appeared in *Vision of Tomorrow* No 3 (November 1969), an issue not in my collection. According to Gillings, it was Walsh who contacted him after an English magazine named *The Writer* published one of Gillings' propaganda pieces promoting science fiction. To quote from *The Impatient Dreamers*:

his enthusiasm for science fiction was a great incentive to me in the days of the Ilford Circle, which he visited twice before it closed down in the summer of '31.

To our little group, seated comfortably in our host's drawing-room chairs, his recital of his early struggles as a part-time writer was as fascinating as his yarns of life in his native Australia, where he had been a sheep and cattle man, auctioneer and newsagent before he settled down to authorship in 1923. And when we got down to our subject, his views on the possibility of life on other worlds were interesting enough to serve as the basis for a special Recorder write-up on *The Case for the Martians*.

So the English fans knew of Walsh's origins, even if Doug Webster all the way up in Scotland didn't. More importantly, it seems that Walsh had given traditional science fictional topics more than a little thought if Walter Gillings were willing to base an article on some of them. I assume the *Recorder* mentioned was the *Ilford Recorder*, the newspaper where Gillings worked. And again, this would be an article I'd quite like to read.

There the trail peters out. All in all, while my researches have turned up a number of interesting nuggets of information, this is still a surprisingly incomplete record for somebody who was a well-respected and well-patronised author in his day. Nonetheless I feel better educated for my research now that every single one of my assumptions about J.M. Walsh has been overturned. There are still questions to be asked, though, questions such as why and when he developed an interest in science fiction (something those articles in *Tales of Wonder* and *The Ilford Recorder* essay might help to answer). Part of me suspects that further research might reveal even more if I can find the right questions to ask. But then, that's the thing about research. There's always something more to discover if you look hard enough.

— Kim Huett, January 2015

Reading Graham Joyce

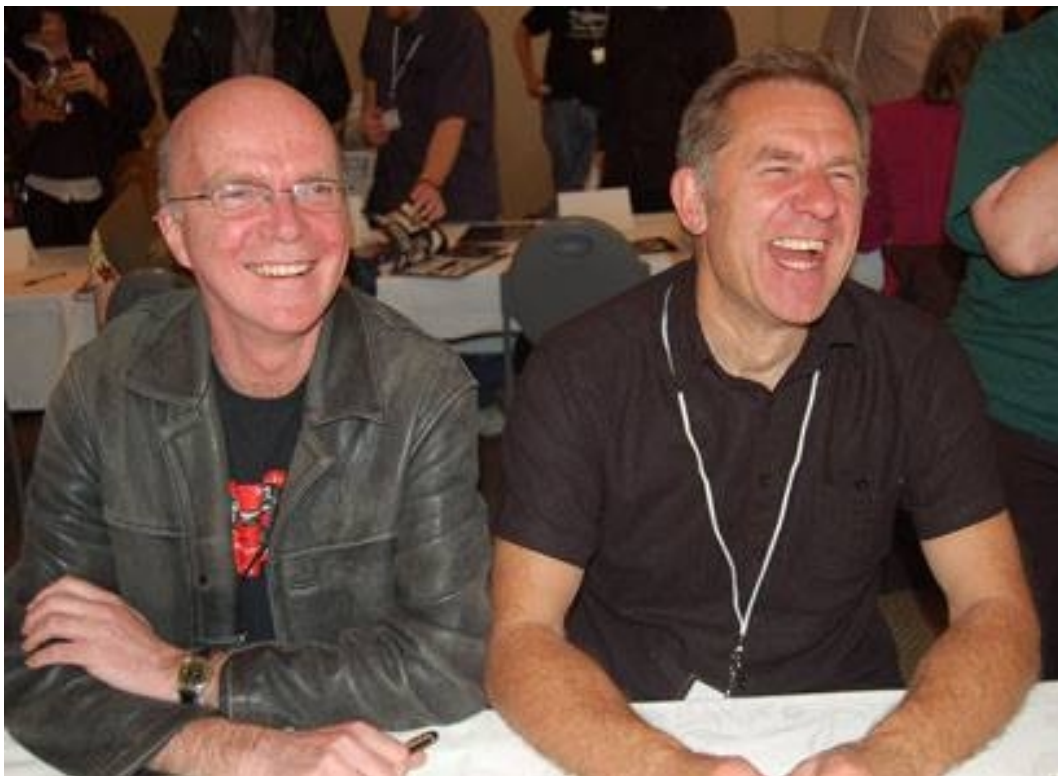
Bruce Gillespie writes: When **Tony Thomas** and I wrote our two articles (originally talks for the Nova Mob meeting, 5 June 2013, **Graham Joyce** had just been diagnosed with lymphoma. From then until he died, on 9 September 2014, he maintained a lively, even inspirational conversation with his readers through his blog, and continued to work on a new novel.

The first news I had of his death was from legendary New York fan **Andrew Porter**: 'Graham Joyce, who was to be toastmaster at the 2015 World Fantasy Convention, died suddenly Tuesday in the UK after being administered a new drug to combat his lymphoma, which he had been battling since mid 2013. I first met him at the British Fantasy Conventions in the late 1980s–early 1990s. A really nice guy, one hell of a good writer.'

My own regret is that I was not able to attend the 2007 Conflux (Canberra's annual convention) at which Graham Joyce was guest of honour.

The reality of enchantment: Three recent novels of Graham Joyce

by Bruce Gillespie



Rob Hood (L.) and Graham Joyce (r.) at Conflux, Canberra, 2007. (Photo: Cat Sparks.)

Readers, writers and critics have spent the last hundred years trying to draw a distinction between two literary genres: science fiction and fantasy. One that makes sense to me is that science fiction deals with events that might possibly happen, whereas fantasy deals with events that can never happen. There are many exceptions to this rule, of course. Science fiction readers have always conceded that events that happen routinely in our literature, such as time travel and faster-than-light travel, could never happen, but were necessary for the plots of many stories. These days mathematicians tell us that time travel and faster-than-light travel probably don't exist, but there is no mathematical reason why they should not. Similarly, fantasy contains all sorts of phenomena, such as vampires, fairies, goblins, werewolves and zombies that I assume do not exist, and never have existed, but I realise that some people think they do exist in today's world. However, such readers regard fantastical events as real events, and therefore they would treat fantasy stories as realistic stories.

What unites these genres? Joanna Russ said it in 1972. She wrote that both SF and fantasy stories can be described as 'wish-fulfilment made plausible'. In science fiction, we seek out possibilities of a future world, or an alternative world, but the impulse is usually to discover a set of possibilities that will be better than those we see in our present world, and make them happen, or to outline possibilities that are much more threatening than those we see around us, and prevent them happening. In fantasy, writers seek out worlds that are far more congenial than those they find around them, or explore supernatural possibilities that are much more frightening or horrible than those in the current world.

The second part of Russ's statement, 'made plausible', is the important one. Science fiction readers tend

to regard the events in most fantasy stories as impossible or highly implausible, and therefore much less interesting than stories based on real-world possibilities. Fantasy readers tend to regard the events in science fiction stories as offering an insufficient range of interesting scenarios, therefore by definition as boring.

But what about examples that don't fit the simple categories? As our speaker, Caitlin Herington, reminded us at the April 2012 Nova Mob meeting, a central division in fantasy is between the kind of story that plunks us straight into a fantasy world without any transition from this world, or often without much preliminary explanation; and the type of story begins in our ordinary world and either drops us abruptly into a fantasy world, or offers a slow transition from everyday reality to a world that contains fantasy elements. This is the type of fantasy novel that Graham Joyce writes.

As examples of the first type of fantasy I would offer the endless series of blockbuster alternative world fantasies. To me, they all seem to resemble each other, both in subject matter and style. Nearly all of them have a map at the beginning, and feature some endless pilgrimage across fairly boring, vaguely medieval countryside. There are lots of kings, queens, princes and princesses, dukes etc., all of which I object to on ideological grounds. In short, they are backward looking to a version of Earth's history that never existed. There are, of course, plenty of more interesting alternative fantasy worlds, going back to those offered by such charming English writers as Kenneth Grahame, in his *The Wind in the Willows*, or by the great story-tellers such as the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen. My own favourites are those offered by Ursula Le Guin in her 'Earthsea' series, where not only are the landscapes and characters vivid and meaningful, but also built of very fine prose.



Bruce Gillespie (l.) and Tony Thomas (r.) presenting our talk about Graham Joyce's novels, Nova Mob, 5 June 2013.
(Photo: Frank Weissenborn.)

One could probably trace the other type of fantasy, what I call 'urban fantasy', back through the twentieth century, including such books as Travers' *Mary Poppins*, in which a fairly routine story about a nanny and her charges is transformed by Mary Poppins' ability to use magic. For me, though, the best writer of modern urban fantasy is Alan Garner, beginning with *Elidor* and *The Owl Service*. In a recent article, Graham Joyce named *The Owl Service* as one of his best ten fantasy stories, and I suspect *Elidor* is just outside his top ten. At the beginning of *Elidor*, ordinary English kids in a gritty northern town discover a portal into a magic kingdom. Unfortunately, they stir up the nastier inhabitants of the magic land, who chase them back to suburbia, then attempt a very nasty home invasion. Few novels offer such a direct confrontation between the fantastic and the realistic; a pattern that appears again, more subtly and disturbingly, in *The Owl Service*. Garner offers a model of a type of novel that has clearly influenced Graham Joyce.

II

Who then is Graham Joyce, and why am I talking about his books? I'm not offering him as the *best* fantasy writer in the world today. From my reading over the last few years, I like Peter Beagle's short stories more than I like anybody else's. I am, however, offering Graham Joyce's approach to story-telling to readers who are jaded by almost everything else around that bears the label of 'fantasy' or 'young adult'.

I cannot remember why I first felt compelled to collect Graham Joyce's books. I don't seem to have read anything by him before coming across his novella 'Leningrad Nights' in Peter Crowther's *Foursight* collection in 2000, but by the time I read 'Leningrad Nights' I had already collected five books by him. Some were review copies from his long-time British publisher Gollancz, but others I had bought. After I read 'Leningrad Nights' I bought everything else I could find by him, but I didn't start reading his books with real attention until his 2002 novel *The Facts of Life* won the World Fantasy Award in 2003. As he will tell you, given half a chance, Justin Ackroyd was on the panel that chose *The Facts of Life* as the best fantasy novel of the year. I enjoyed the book very much, so read the two major novels that followed it, *The Limits of Enchantment* (2005) and last year's *Some Kind of Fairy Tale*, which form a trilogy without being a series. Recently I have caught up reading most of the Graham Joyce books that had been sitting on the shelf since the early 1990s.

I don't know much about Graham Joyce himself, except that everybody liked him when he was the Guest of Honour at a Conflux convention in Canberra in 2007. For information about him, I can only quote from *Wikipedia*. He was born in 1954 and grew up in a small mining village just outside Coventry to a working-class family. After receiving a BED from Bishop Lonsdale College in 1977 and an MA from the University of Leicester in 1980 he 'worked as a youth officer for the National Association of Youth Clubs until 1988. He subsequently quit his position and moved to the Greek island of Lesbos and Crete to write his first novel, *Dream-*

side. After selling *Dreamside* to Pan Books in 1991, Joyce moved back to England to pursue a career as a full-time writer. He has a PhD in English literature. Presently, Graham Joyce resides in Leicester with his wife, Suzanne Johnston, and their two children, Ella and Joseph. He teaches Creative Writing to graduate students at Nottingham Trent University.'

He has won a considerable number of awards, not only the World Fantasy Award in 2003, but also the British Fantasy Award in 1993, 1997, 2000, and 2008, and also awards for his young adult books. He is one of the few authors who were published regularly by Gollancz in the early 1990s and who are still on its list. The others seem to have been deported to small or very small presses, in both Britain and America.

So Graham Joyce must be able to sell copies of his books. Moreover, he sells copies although he doesn't fit categories. Even the *Wikipedia* article admits that 'Both publishers and critics alike have found difficulty in classifying Joyce as a writer. His novels have been categorized as fantasy, science fiction, horror, and mainstream literature — with some even overlapping genres.' A useful comparison can be made with Brian Aldiss, a writer whose work I value more than Graham Joyce's, who has seen his career unravel over the last twenty years because he is will not write books to fit within other people's categories.

III

How do Graham Joyce's books work?

There has been a change in Joyce's approach since 2002. His books have gained a great deal in depth and complexity of approach. Reading them can help show clearly some of the failings of the early novels.

As I have already said, Joyce's novels begin in a realistic world. *The Facts of Life* (2002) is set in a rural environment not far from Coventry, where Joyce grew up. It covers the years before, during, and just after World War II. *The Limits of Enchantment* (2005) has a rural setting in the 1960s that reminds me of *Midsomer Murders* territory without the high body count. *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* (2012) seems to be set in the present day, with a background story set twenty years beforehand.

In the earlier novels, the fantasy element is very particular and disruptive of the lives of the characters. In *Requiem* (1995), the character is haunted by a very disturbing ghost during a trip to Jerusalem. In *The Tooth Fairy* (1996), the tooth fairy of legend is presented as an ugly, dirty, vengeful little man who seems intent on committing as much mayhem as possible on friends of the main character. In *House of Lost Dreams* (1993), the best of Joyce's earlier novels, a newly married couple who settle on an idyllic Greek island find themselves acting out ancient Greek legends, drawn into a kind of mystical and ecstatic experience that reminds me of John Fowles' novel *The Magus*.

The narrative of each of the recent novels is based around a rich family and social milieu, compared with Joyce's earlier novels, which offer a more restricted range of everyday experience. In *The Facts of Life*, which was Graham Joyce's World Fantasy Award winner, the

Vine family is led by Martha, a widow. Joyce's summary of the Vine family demonstrates the tone of the whole book:

Odd family indeed, starting with Martha and her phantom visitors. Then Aida, the eldest, married to a man who by common consent looked like a walking corpse; and then the spinster twins Evelyn and Ina, pillars of the spiritualist church ...; Olive who could cry for everything and Una who wouldn't squeeze a tear for anything; and Beatie who would put up her fists to defend the sanctity of an intellectual idea, and Cassie who thought it passing strange that human beings were not equipped with wings to fly.

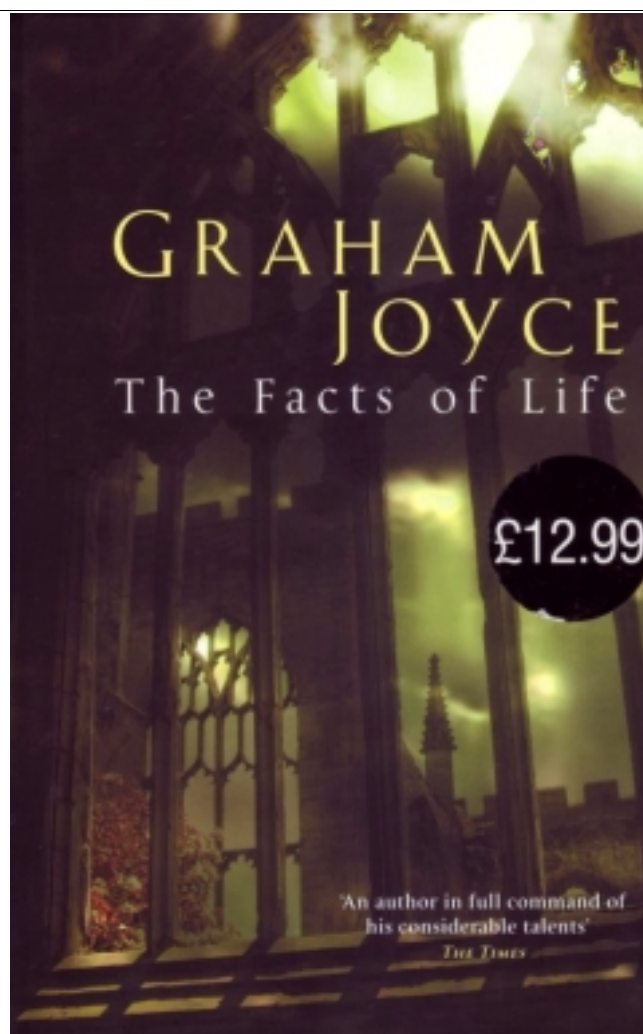
So this is your normal busy family in Joyceland, whose members get along with life as best they can, but also are occasionally afflicted with incidental psychic abilities. The main character is Cassie, who has recently given birth to a boy after a one-night stand with a chap whose first name she does not remember. The rest of the family try to persuade her to give away the boy for adoption, but she won't. She has no means of support, so each branch of the family agrees to take care of her and her son Frank in turn. In this way we get to know more than each branch of the family wants to reveal. Meanwhile, their mother Martha, who receives occasional warnings from dead people who knock at the door, tries to keep the whole family together and not at war with each other.

Apart from Martha and her daughter Cassie, who has some very strange powers when sufficiently stimulated, the main character is Frank, the child she refused to give away. His child's view of the world as he grows up is complicated by the fact that he also has some psychic powers. He discovers under a weed-covered little country bridge a face that he calls The Man-Behind-the-Glass. Occasionally this face tells him things he needs to know or pass on to other people.

As Graham Joyce says, in an interview reprinted in his *Wikipedia* entry, 'My grandmother was one of these old women who used to have dreams and visions and messages arriving. She would fall asleep in a chair, there would be a knock on the door, she would go to the door, someone strange would come to the door and deliver a message. And then she would wake up again in her chair. Now my mother and my aunts told me these stories over and over again. But they just lived with it side by side. They didn't fight it as in a fantasy or horror film. They didn't have to overcome it. It didn't get worse and worse and worse. They just accepted this mystery and then they cooked the dinner.'

The novel is basically about 'accepting the mystery' while growing up in Britain after the war. However, the fantasy elements never seem incidental to the plot, because the odd poppings out of psychic messages often lead to sorting out problems that have plagued the family for years. Also, the fantasy elements give the story a constant tension, aided by Graham Joyce's ability to cut away from one story strand to another, and splice them all together into one narrative arc.

Life with the Vines is not all good humour and hard work. The carpet bombing of Coventry in 1940 during World War II had the same effect on that city as had the



bombing of Dresden four years later. Everybody expects a massive raid, but nobody knows when. The young Cassie 'hears radio broadcasts in the thin air ... She somehow was the equipment' (p. 155). She is the only person who knows that the bombers are approaching, so rushes through the streets of Coventry to raise the alert, even as the regular bombing begins. Chapter 23 of *The Facts of Life* has more to say about the blitz in Britain than the whole of Connie Willis's recent 1200-page novel *Blackout/All Clear*. We follow Cassie as the streets disintegrate into heaps of rubble. Entire rows of houses explode, burn and disappear. She sees the burning of Coventry Cathedral. People try to save the cathedral's precious relics as 'the jewel of the city melted' (p. 165). 'History had been pulled from the town like a set of black molars' (p. 170). 'The city was a broken bowl, spilling fire.' (p. 171). The fire station command centre has been abandoned. Then she comes across what at first appears to be the corpse of a young soldier. In her arms he comes to life, and together they have a visionary experience that has a direct impact on events at the end of the novel, twenty years later. At the end of the night Cassie staggers back to her family house on the edge of Coventry, to find it untouched and the rest of the family safe. 'I've been helping the dead', she tells them.

I can give little idea of the multiple strands of this book. For instance, in the 1960s Cassie and Frank stay with Beatie and her partner in a communal household

that suffers all the problems that faced many communal households during the 1960s and 1970s — no one, especially the men, wants to share the work load, and everybody wants to share all assets, especially the women. When the community disintegrates, the exodus back to Martha's house begins the process of reconciliation in the book.

IV

Earlier in *The Facts of Life*, Frank and Cassie had stayed on the farm run by Cassie's sister and brother-in-law. This remains Frank's spiritual home for the rest of the novel, always the place to which he wants to return, although he is forced to live with all the other sisters in turn:

Frank took to life around the farm ... He behaved as if he had always been there. He got dirty, he got wet ... The farm was a wonderfully wet place. Water fell from the sky and bubbled from the ground and the water was cupped and delivered in ponds, springs, streams and brooks in a way that it never did in the city. The earth oozed and flowed and flooded ... (p. 46)

Graham Joyce has always shown a great ability for creating images of landscape and natural processes. However, in the earlier, darker books, the images of landscape can have a very oppressive quality; for instance, the Thai jungles of his novel *Smoking Poppy*, or the fiercely sunlit Greek island of *House of Lost Dreams*, where the sun symbolises both paradise and hell.

More than anything, *The Facts of Life*, *The Limits of Enchantment*, and *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* form a trilogy because of their celebration of the English countryside. Away from the cities, hidden away from the endless changes made by humans, areas of relatively unspoiled rural areas remain. It's as if in about 2000 Graham Joyce decided to write about what he really loved and appreciated, instead of offering more mere variations on the horror story. However, he does not write sunny pastoral stories. He sees within the countryside the remains of mystical influences that stretch far back into British history. I suspect he was influenced by Rob Holdstock's Ryhope Wood novels, or the work of Alan Garner. In his book of essays, Garner writes that people living now in his Chester village have the same DNA as that obtained from 5000-year-old skeletons discovered in the area. There is a Britain much older than Christianity, or even the Saxons.

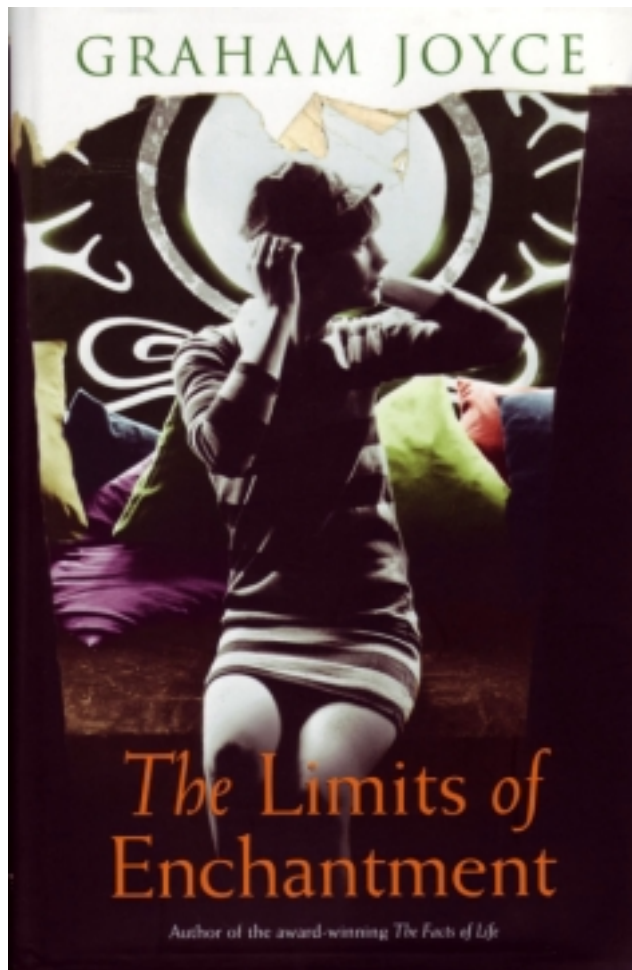
In *The Limits of Enchantment* (2005), this takes the form of ancient practices handed down from woman to woman over centuries. Fern Cullen is the adopted daughter of Mammy Cullen. They live in an tumbledown house on the edge of a rural village. Mammy earns her living as a midwife, with almost magical abilities to deliver babies, even those seemingly born dead. She also roams the woods gathering herbs, which she offers to people who need help. In particular, she gives abortion potions to women who suddenly find themselves with unwanted babies. Mammy always demands that the woman tells her the true name of the father. In this way, she has a unique

perspective on the pattern of exploitative male behaviour in the area. 'Fornication was a very popular activity in this dark corner of the English Midlands' (p. 31), comments Fern, again reminding me of many episodes of *Midsomer Murders* TV show, where the only sane inhabitants of the English countryside are the detective, his family, and his sidekick.

Mammy hands on some of her secrets to Fern, but many she has still kept to herself when she suffers the worst of possible fates: one of her clients dies after she has taken the abortion powder given her. The whole village seems to turn against Mammy Cullen, a man bowls out of a pub and throws her to the ground, she goes to hospital injured, and never leaves it before she dies. Fern realises how vulnerable is her own position in the village, especially as Mammy has handed on to her the fabled list of the unwanted fathers of the district.

This, of course, simplifies a highly diverse and diverting story-line. The central plank of this story-line is Fern's indecision about whether to join the centuries-old line of wise women, or become merely another modern young miss. Mammy has told her to 'Ask'. Gradually Fern immerses herself more and more in the surrounding countryside:

Even as I walked I felt myself going, drifting, but this time I didn't call myself back, and there came to me a kind of vision. The beads of rainwater on each branch-tip or bud and on every bracken leaf began to expand; perfect, light-refracting silver spheres inflat-



ing until they were pregnant globes of light. The bracken became heavy under their new weight, tilting back until the fleshy spring of the green stems snapped back and triggered like catapults, firing the globes into the air; so did the budded branch-tips of the trees, flinging iridescent baubles of light into air. I knew I could ride these baubles of light. Get right inside them, and drift free over the houses, where I would hear folk talking. The moment was a gift (p. 64).

The novel, like *The Facts of Life* before it, and *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* after it, is about this gift of vision. It's buried deep in nature, but also in the nature of the person who can perceive it completely. It is not, like the visions given to the heroes of Joyce's earlier novels, a curse as well, but it could be if the character does not make a transition successfully. Joyce gives his novels a feeling that transformation is always possible, and that's what keeps his narratives constantly exciting.

In Fern's case, she has to deal with the attentions of several young men, only one of whom is interesting to her. Arthur McCann is an awkward young chap, like most of Joyce's young male heroes, who has no idea how to woo a woman. They do get together, of course, but only after one of the funniest and most honest sex scenes I've read. It's Chapter 18 if you want to skip the rest of the book.

Fern also undergoes great dangers. During the ceremonial process by which she becomes a wisewoman she finds herself transformed into a hare in the field for a night, part of nature itself. Unfortunately, as a hare she nearly gets shot by a poacher. When next day she returns from that experience to her human form, she has to fight the attempt of the people in the big house who want to get rid of her by declaring her insane. She has to face a panel sent by the local Health Board, who not only want to cast her out of the cottage so they can pull it down, but make sure that, if committed to a mental institution, she can never reveal Mammy's list.

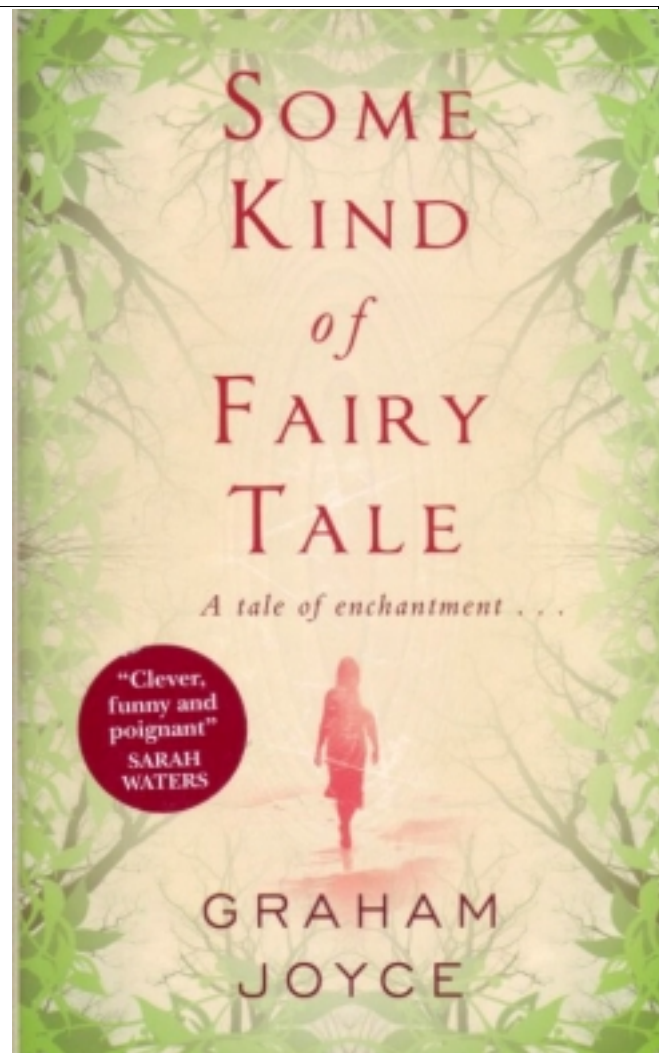
Early Graham Joyce novels often have very unsatisfactory endings, probably because he was trying to write a kind of dark novel that could not end satisfactorily. In the recent novels, he takes a lot of trouble to restore a balance within and between people. I suspect that Graham Joyce himself underwent a long journey from the painful, abrasive adolescent world of *The Tooth Fairy* to the very last lines of *The Limits of Enchantment*:

Mammy's words came back to me again. She said you have to look beyond what hurts you. She said you must listen to the sounds behind the sounds. She said that eventually all the pain falls away, and what's left behind is only beauty (p. 250).

V

In *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* (2012), Graham Joyce starts at the point where he left off in the previous two novels, and takes a really long journey, with many surprises along the way. The book is his longest and most ambitious.

The basic story arc is very simple. We meet a family,



Peter and Mary Martin, who have invited their family home for Christmas. They are very much the same kind of down-to-earth people we've met in all of Joyce's novels, scraping along as best they can. Mary opens the front door to a knock, and faints. Greeting her is her daughter Tara, who was last seen by anybody twenty years before.

Tara's return is most shocking to her brother Peter and his wife Genevieve, and to her old boyfriend Richie Franklin. Because of the circumstances of Tara's disappearance, Richie and Peter have not spoken to each other for twenty years, because Richie was blamed by the police for her disappearance. Each of these characters has continued to be affected by Tara's disappearance, so much so that their lives have been frozen in a kind of unspoken despair. 'Tara's disappearance had so diminished them [her parents]. They had been transformed overnight from confident, poised parents in their prime to frail, powerless, elderly, and lost individuals' (p. 119). Richie, a good musician, has given up on a career or even life in general. Peter was going to be an academic, but has found a living as a farrier in the local town.

Tara tells her story to Peter, and then to a psychiatrist, Dr Vivian Underwood, but nobody believes her. In interleaved chapters, the psychiatrist offers a professional diagnosis of Tara's mental state, based on details from her story. The explanation is plausible, except from the beginning we are far more likely to believe the truth of

her account. She was taken away on a white horse from the Overwoods by a fairy who looked like a kindly Greek god, lived with the fairies, who also look like ancient Greek deities and live in a kind of commune in which everybody fucks everybody else often and with great enjoyment, causes two of the fairies to do battle with each other over her, and escapes six months later back to ordinary existence. While she experienced six months away, the world had changed by twenty years.

I could comment on many aspects of the novel, including the fact that Graham Joyce really enjoys writing vigorous sex scenes, but the vital link with *The Facts of Life* and *The Limits of Enchantment* is Tara's account of her initial disappearance from this existence. Joyce writes: 'The Outwoods was one of the last remaining pockets of ancient forest from which Charnwood took its name' (p. 12). Again we're reminded of Rob Holdstock's Ryhope Wood, where his characters descend hundreds or even thousands of years through human history into prehistory as they travel deeper into the last remaining ancient wood. Tara is escaping from her boyfriend Richie. She has quarrelled with him after aborting his child. She is only fifteen. She feels strongly that this land 'is a mysterious freak, where the air is charged with an eerie electrical quality, alternately disturbing and relaxing. The earth echoes underfoot' (p. 5). In this place, reality is magical, a quality that reaches full pitch at the beginning of May, when the bluebells are blooming:

The scent from the bluebells was overwhelming, but it was also giving me a kind of peace, a serenity ... I walked amongst the bluebells again and I must have known that by treading them underfoot I was releasing more of that strange perfume into the air ... The bluebells made such a pool that the earth had become like water, and all the trees and bushes seemed to have grown out of the water. And the sky above seemed to have fallen down on to the earth floor; and I didn't know if the sky was earth or the earth was water. I had been turned upside down. I had to hold the rock with my fingernails to stop me falling into the sky of the earth or the water of the sky. But I couldn't hold on, and I know I went soaring.

This is some of Graham Joyce's finest prose, other than the cave sequence in *House of Lost Dreams*, written two decades earlier. In seeing and feeling this vision, Tara is preparing to leave ordinary existence. It only takes the invitation of the man on the white horse for her to ride away with him. She thinks he is taking her home, but instead she crosses a mysterious dark barrier and finds herself in Joyce's nightmarish rather than heavenly alternate land of the fairies, from which she cannot escape for six months.

More than any of Joyce's earlier novels, *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* establishes fantasy worlds not merely as comfy alternatives to so-called dull reality, but as the furthest extension of one's most subtle appreciation of the excitement of the real world. It's only Tara who, after she returns, notices how all her relatives have been trapped by the dullness of ordinary life instead of seeing its possibilities. Her return unleashes many of their possibilities, so each of them has set off on a new path by the

end of the novel. Graham Joyce is an increasingly transformative, visionary author, but he sees visions by looking at existence straight in the eye.

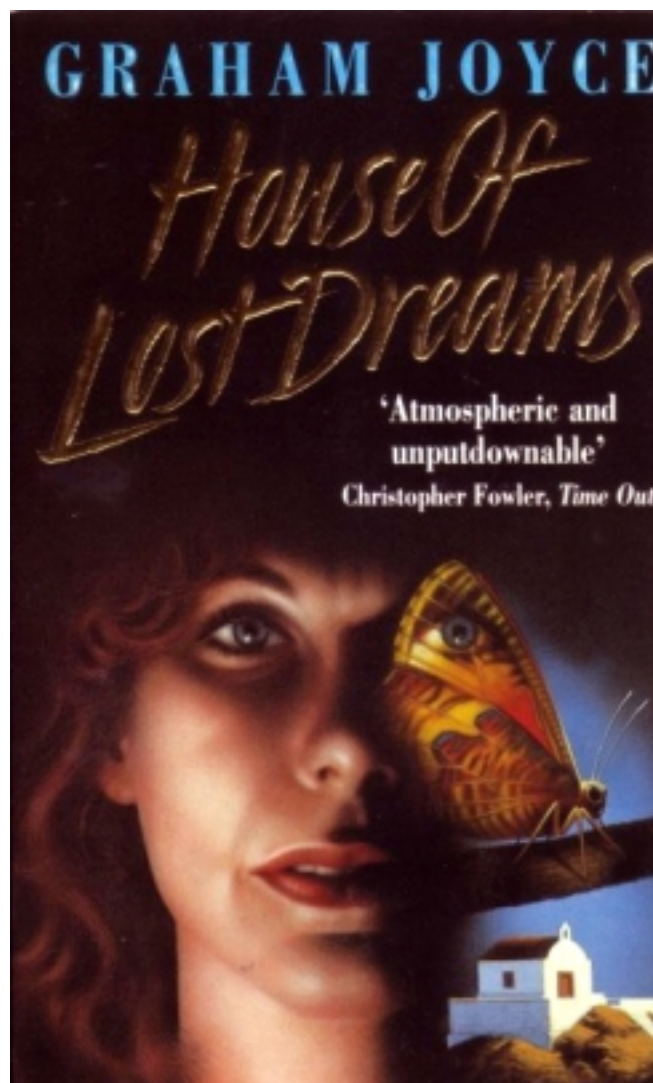
Epilogue

I haven't talked about Graham Joyce's career as such, because he has tried several genres and story forms. I haven't even talked about his best work, a novella called 'Leningrad Nights' (1999), which is so much more interesting than even the best of his novels that I still find myself unable to talk about it. In America it was in a collection called *Partial Eclipse and Other Stories*, and in Britain in a stand-alone chapbook edition. Read it first, if you can track it down.

His only attempt at science fiction, which degenerates into fantasy, is his first published novel, *Dreamside* (1991), for me his only really disappointing book.

His second novel, *Dark Sister* (1992), won the British Fantasy Award in 1993.

House of Lost Dreams, the most vivid of his early novels, appeared in 1993. Highly recommended, it prefigures all the themes and literary qualities that I've just been discussing in Joyce's work.



It was followed by some novels that I enjoyed up to a point, which is their foundation in everyday reality. Novels like *Requiem* (1995), *The Tooth Fairy* (1996), *Indigo* (1999), and *Smoking Poppy* (2001) are based on horror images, done well, but feature self-lacerating characters, usually young males who can't get the girl or don't know which direction to take in life. These themes return in his recent young adult novel *TWOC* (1995), which is the only one of the YA novels that I've read.

Standalones include *Memoirs of a Master Forger* (2008), published as by 'William Heaney'. I read the first few pages so irritating that I gave away the book. Joyce was trying to 'be funny' instead of relying on the natural, free-flowing observational humour that is a major aspect of his other novels.

The other recent standalone is *The Silent Land* (2011), which is exciting and interesting for the first two-thirds of its length, but whose mysterious scenario is resolved by a clunky cliché. It seems very thin compared with the

trilogy of novels that I've discussed.

A sad note to end on. Tony found a note from one of his publishers, Peter Crowther of PS Publishing, to the effect that:

My good friend Graham Joyce is very poorly recovering from lymphoma cancer. As he said on his Facebook page, 'I have begun a course of chemotherapy, which does knock you about a bit. So if I've not answered messages, enquiries and all the rest, please understand why. Anyway I'm upbeat: I'm surrounded by family and good friends so I'm not in a bad place and hope, like everyone in this situation, to win through.' I've spoken with Graham and he's pretty much his normal self so all he needs right now is as much good karma as you folks can muster.

— Bruce Gillespie, 1 June 2013

On Graham Joyce:

The Young Adult novels and more

by Tony Thomas

for the Nova Mob 5 June 2013

This talk forms a sort of addendum to what Bruce has just been saying, and was written in the first place without knowing what he had said, and then revised slightly to take it into account.

Like Bruce, I first read Joyce thanks to Justin Ackroyd's championing of *The Facts of Life*, and Justin must have been at least partly instrumental in arranging for it to receive a World Fantasy Award. I liked the book very much at the time, but don't remember it well, even after hearing Bruce's summary, nor the other Joyce novels I read around the same time in 2006–2007, including *The Limits of Enchantment* — which I thought the best of them — and the earlier *Indigo*, *Smoking Poppy*, *Requiem*, and the YA *Do the Creepy Thing*. Many of these were from libraries and I didn't then own copies. Then for some reason, I stopped looking for older Joyce, but I did read each new novel more or less when it came out, including the two later YAs, *Three Ways to Snog an Alien*, which I read aloud to my then new partner Eva, and the more recent *The Devil's Ladder*. Somewhere along the way I also caught up with the earlier YA *TWOC*. I've re-read the four YA books recently in order to talk about them tonight. And I've just found a reference to another YA in the books listing inside *The Stormwatcher* (1998) called *Spiderbite*, which

Joyce may now disown — at least he always seems to refer to himself as the author of only four YA novels.

These four late YA novels form a very interesting sub-set in Joyce's oeuvre. They're from 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2009, a period where Joyce seems to have stopped writing adult novels entirely: *The Limits of Enchantment* is 2005, and *Memoirs of a Master Forger* is 2009. *Simple Goal Keeping Made Spectacular* (which I haven't read) is also 2009. And as Bruce has remarked, in the 2000s Joyce seems to be working with material that suits him better and that he knows better, local life in regional cities and towns, families and their problems, the stuff of much general literature in fact, but very brightly and succinctly brought to life in some very lively prose.

Here's the opening of *Do the Creepy Thing* (2006), the second of the late YA novels:

Caz lives about ten minutes' walk from the centre of town. Five minutes if you jog: but who the hell wants to jog? She also lives close enough to the river for the mists of spring and the grey fogs of autumn to haul themselves out of the water, roll along the bank, climb over the backyard wall and reach cold, damp fingers into the house where she lives alone with her mum.

Just two girls together. That's the way it has been since her dad ran off with the teenage baby-sitter when she was nine. 'Actually, it's a relief,' is what Caz's mum said at the time. But the smart house on the hill got sold and Caz and her mum moved into an old brick terrace property. The wooden window-frames are rotten and the doors are draughty. Damp mould peppers one wall of the kitchen.

If Caz's mother was a drunk, or a debt-head, or just a nasty-bitch-in-general, then it would be easy to blame her for some of the things Caz gets up to. The old I-didn't-have-a-normal-childhood defence. The understandable-with-my-background line of argument. But Caz's mother isn't, and so Caz can't, and anyway Caz wouldn't.

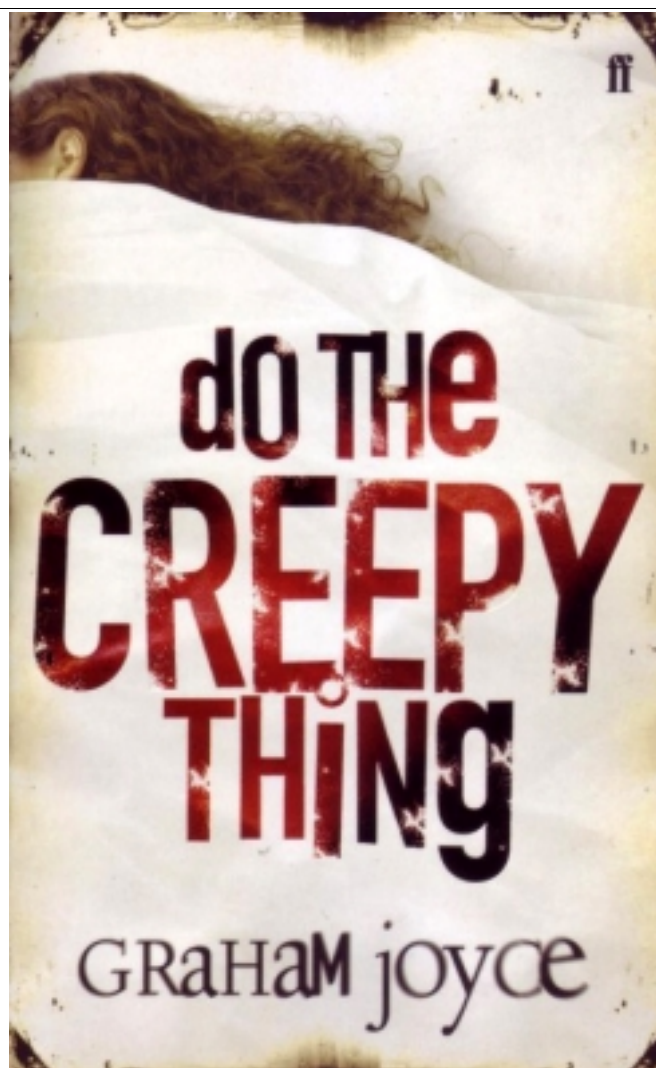
This brings to life characters, place, and situation with no wasted words, starts the story off at a cracking pace and continues to move through lots of incidents with short takes and short chapters. Not untypical for YA novels I guess, but done snappily, in the present tense, and with a lot of wit.

Caz and her friend Lucy are 14-year-old schoolgirls and the thing that they get up to, the *Creepy Thing* they do, is break into people's houses in the early hours of the morning, go right up to the sleeping occupants, and wait for 15 seconds without waking them, then run off. No stealing, just the thrill of getting away with it. Until they break into Mrs Tranter's house and, while Caz is counting out the 15 seconds, the old woman wakes up and clamps a bracelet on Caz's wrist, which it turns out she can't get off. This sole supernatural element sets the plot running, but it's hardly the only centre of the story, which is much more concerned with Caz's daily life: how she deals with her mum's new boyfriend, Neville, who's also her somewhat nerdy maths teacher, and his religion the Free Movement Ecstatic Church with its slimy Elder Collins, and her sometime boyfriend Mark, and Toby the strange tattooist, and the part-time job she and Lucy have collecting glasses in pub, even though underage.

The bracelet (and the indelible tattoo it leaves behind on Caz's wrist) appear to affect Caz's health and circumstances adversely, but there are also benefits — she gains the ability to tell when people are not telling the truth. The bracelet comes with a magic other, the tiny sun-glasses-wearing Fizz, who may be a demon or a helper, and who strangely (and perhaps significantly) resembles a figure from the comics in her wardrobe.

Joyce's strategy here, and in *Alien* and *TWOC*, is to use a bit of supernatural apparatus as a sort of metaphor. On the one hand it's clear that these supernatural events are happening. On the other, they are generally only fully seen by the main characters, so we could read the events as happening mostly in their heads. This is too simplistic, but Joyce carefully leaves the possibility open, so we are left balancing on the edge between reality and fantasy. This is something I would normally hate in a novel, but Joyce is so astute at this balancing act, and so adept in his resolutions, and so funny and wise in his depictions of character, that I forgive him everything.

In the last fifty pages of *Creepy Thing*, which are terrific, Caz is saved from her demons, whether personal or magical, Lucy is saved from an abusive father by the



nerdish Neville who turns out stronger than expected, and Caz makes a big decision about whether to pass on the harmful/beneficial bracelet to another as it was passed on to her. Here's the very end:

It's a beautiful morning. The air is still mint-fresh and the sun has burned away the morning mist. A sweet breeze blows in from the river. It's still early, but a few more people are about. Walking to the park, Caz feels light. She feels like she could float. She feels like singing.

She follows the course of the river through the park, then makes her way across the grassy bank towards the bandstand. When she looks up she sees that Mark is waiting for her. He waves. She waves back happily, and for a moment her silver bracelet gleams with brilliant, reflected light.

Joyce maintains his metaphor, and his balancing act, right to the last words.

Appearances to the contrary, I'm just a soppy sentimentalist at heart, and I have to admit that this, and the earlier rescue of Lucy, brought a tear to my eye.

As did some of *Three Ways to Snog an Alien* (2008), where the trope is that girls are aliens, or more specifically: is the new girl at school, Angelica, who would like to be

Doogie's girlfriend, really an alien? When Doogie sees her lick up her ice-cream with a foot-long forked tongue, Doogie wonders about Angelica, but she's so normal otherwise that it doesn't stop him snogging her — and now there's no sign of a forked tongue, quite the opposite. Like the lead characters in all of the YA novels, Doogie is somewhat of an outsider, not sharing his alien suspicions with his friends but instead going for help to the internet. And the internet has provided Joyce with two comic strands which play throughout the novel to great effect. The first is the (I hope) invented site DatingTips.com which Doogie is supposed to be looking at for his friend, Matt. Here's an early example, where Doogie has taken Angelica on a first date, and is following this advice from the website:

Girls prefer a guy to be confident and decisive. So don't wring your hands asking her where she wants to sit. Even if she suggests a particular table, she's probably testing to see if you can really call the shots. So choose a table and lead her there. Be clear about who is in charge and you'll save yourself a lot of hassle later on. She'll appreciate that. So basically, when the girl suggests something, like let's sit at the back, you have to say no, let's sit at the front, so that she can admire how confident you are.

The waitress comes up. Not a word, just holds her pencil over her pad. 'I'll have a cappuccino,' Angelica says.

'No,' I say, 'we're both having ice-cream.'

'Huh?' says Angelica. 'I'd rather have a coffee.'

I look at the waitress. Her nostrils twitch. Otherwise no movement. 'Look, I'm paying. It's my treat, so I say what you have.'

The waitress turns her head a fraction to face Angelica, and I see her eyebrow go up slightly. Angelica looks at the waitress, then looks back at me, and her eyebrow goes up fractionally, too.

'All right,' I say, 'you can choose any kind of ice-cream you want. Me, I'm having a Mint Chocolate Chip.'

Angelica shakes her head a little, then lets a jet of air pass between her teeth. 'Okay, I'll have a Neapolitan.'

'That okay with you,' says the waitress, 'if she has a Neapolitan?'

'Yeh, it's fine,' I say.

'It comes with a spoon and a wafer. Is that okay for her, too?'

'Yep, that's okay.'

The waitress goes off with our order.

This strand continues throughout the novel, funnier and funnier, with the waitress taking an even bigger part, until Doogie learns that DatingTips.com, which even he has doubts about as it's obviously written for older guys, is stuffing up his life rather than improving it.

The other internet strand is the chat room which Doogie turns to for help about aliens. This is a site for an aliens-are-among-us conspiracy group and he's contacted, via heavy security precautions, by a chat-roomer whose nom-de-guerre is Van Helsing. Van Helsing takes no convincing to believe that Angelica is an alien, and

sends Doogie off to spy on her and her family, especially the 'alpha-male' of the 'hive', Angelica's father.

Me: You should see her dad. He's massive and has a funny way of breathing. She has to teach him how to be a human being. How to say hello and all that. She pretended he'd got some condition or other ... asp ... asp

Van Helsing: Asperger's Syndrome. Yes, that's their get-out-of-jail-free card. Whenever they do anything that alerts attention to the fact that they're not one of us they call it Asperger's Syndrome.

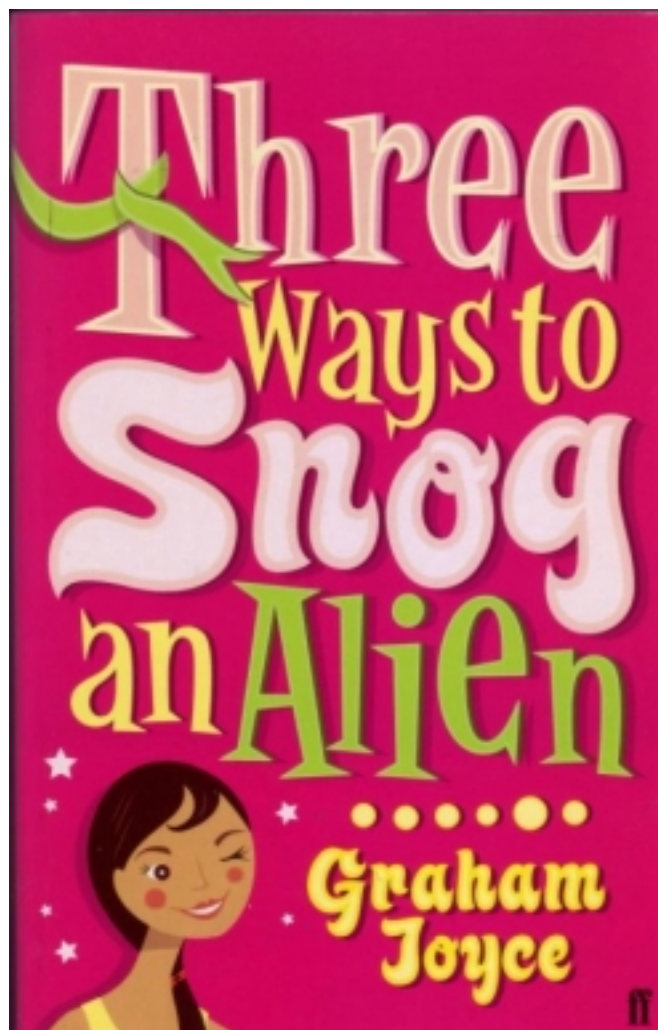
Me: Is there such a thing?

Van Helsing: Yes. Did he count your buttons?

Me: What?

Van Helsing: People with real Asperger's Syndrome want to count your buttons, or talk about lawnmowers. Don't be fooled. Do you think you can get inside her house again? You need to take a look at what he's working on with that so-called software.

This strand continues until Doogie meets Van Helsing, in order for him to remove a chip which Van Helsing is convinced has been implanted in Doogie's head. In the café, all the customers, the old lady with the hearing aid, even the waitress are apparently aliens. Doogie has wised up by now.



'All of them?' (he says)
 'All of them.'
 'You're a raving lunatic!'
 'Oh dear,' says Van Helsing, rising from his seat.
 'I'm too late.'
 'Too late? What do you mean too late?'
 'They got to you, didn't they, Doogie?'
 'Got to me? What are you on about?'
 'The chip has already started working.'
 'Eh?'

He lifts the scalpel in his hand. 'Come on, Doogie. There may still be time after all. Let me take it out.'

But Doogie escapes this successfully, and a little later at school, he reflects on what he has learned.

I look over at Angelica at her desk. She's writing away. At this moment she doesn't seem alien at all. She just looks like a pretty girl writing in class. But that doesn't mean she isn't one. It still doesn't mean I'm wrong about her. I mean, Van Helsing may be completely insane, but that doesn't mean there is no such thing as an alien, does it? Maybe Van Helsing started out like me. Maybe he had an experience with a girlfriend and it drove him crazy. Perhaps that's when he started seeing aliens everywhere he looked. I think there must be loads of Van Helsing's lurking out there in the shadows of the Internet, ready to direct kids over the cliff edge. Gang leaders. Drug dealers. Politicians. Religious nutcases. All going: here, kiddies, here's some sweeties for you, follow me.

I feel such a prat for falling for it.

These include some of the learning experiences which Doogie has had as well as some of those which appear in the other YA novels. In *Alien*, once again, Joyce maintains his metaphor right to the end, keeping that balance between reality and fantasy hanging in the air, and providing yet another, for me, teary ending. At Angelica's suggestion she and Doogie go on a day trip to visit a stone circle. Angelica is drifting off, when Doogie asks:

'What do you think it was for? These stones in a circle?'

'Oh, it's what's left over,' she says dreamily. 'Let me snooze.'

'What?'

'From when the first ones came.'

'First ones?'

'They were like . . . launch pads. Landing bays. Very old technology . . . a few thousand years ago.'

I sit up. 'Eh? What are you talking about?'

Angelica suddenly sits up too. She has her hand over her mouth. 'Gosh. I was dreaming. Babbling in my sleep. It's just nonsense.' Then she lies down again and closes her eyes.

I look hard at her. Her eyes open. She looks back at me then closes her eyes again. The sun is beating down on her olive skin and making her hair shine like water. Her lips are like the buds of a flower. I shake my head and pretend that I didn't hear what she just said. I want to kiss her again, because whatever else

she may be, she's a girl and she's beautiful.

Sniff, sniff!

I think that *Do the Creepy Thing* and *Three Ways to Snog an Alien* are little masterpieces of their type, coming of age stories, full of humour and life and wisdom. The earlier YA novel *TWOC* (2005) is good too. The fantasy element here comprises the visions of his dead brother Jake which only the lead character, Matt, 16, can see, and which represent Matt's way of shirking responsibility for his own actions. Matt goes through a series of learning experiences too, especially at a camp for recalcitrant children, gains some friends, including the counsellor Pete, a role that Joyce apparently played in real life. But the metaphor is less sharp, and less well sustained, or perhaps I am less than enchanted by the car motifs throughout — *TWOC* means 'taken without owner's consent', used for joyriding.

The last of these four, *The Devil's Ladder*, similarly deals with a couple of teenage protagonists, 14-year-olds Sophie and James this time, also outsider types, who turn out to be savants: they can see demons haunting us, when few others can. This novel is a more conventional fantasy (without so much of the interesting play between metaphor and reality), returns to the past tense when the previous three were in the present, and turns on a battle with the main demon with the help of some standard props, a wise woman, a mysterious old book, and her



dogs. The incident of the ghostly night-time visitor to Joyce's grandmother that Bruce recounted earlier, is incorporated as part of the structure of this book. All is more than adequately done, and the school setting once again works very well, but overall I think this is of lesser interest than the previous three YA novels, and the ending is quite a let-down. Maybe Joyce had a contract with Faber to provide a fourth YA novel, but he had somewhat exhausted his inspiration.

There's an interesting precedent for this group of novels I've been talking about in *The Tooth Fairy* (1996), written as an adult novel but with a teenage protagonist, a wise-cracking evil fairy that only he can see, and the possibility again of reading this as happening in his own head. But there's far too much sex for a YA and, as I read it seven or eight years ago, I can't say much more.

The first adult novel after the series of YAs was *Memoirs of a Master Forger* by William Heaney (2009), published pseudonymously for reasons I have no idea about, though the cognoscenti immediately knew and Justin sold it to me straightaway as the next Joyce novel. One of the central tropes of this novel is that the main character, Heaney, can see the demons that haunt just about everyone else (cf *Devil's Ladder*). Never let a good idea go to waste, I guess. I haven't re-read this but find that I wrote in the back of the book when I read it in 2010:

This is another beautiful, successful book — though it takes nearly to the end to find out what it's about. It's a love story — maybe all Joyce's books are essentially love stories. Love might be sexual or paternal — it's always thwarted or misunderstood — but the resolution is always in favour of love, or at least its

promise. And the fantastic element can nearly always be read as 'real' or a metaphor. Here demons, elsewhere aliens, tooth fairies etc. etc. And the incidental details add an amazing amount, too — here there's a gritty anti-Iraq war statement, with characters from a story previously published in the *Paris Review*.

The *Paris Review* story, which I came upon totally by accident in 2007, is '**An Ordinary Soldier of the Queen**', which went on to win an O. Henry prize in 2009. It puzzled me at the time. It combines a lot of realistic war action, by the ordinary soldier Seamus, a colour sergeant, in various war zones, with a conclusion that takes him to a mysterious other place and something like a haunting by a mysterious Arab. I still don't understand it. But when Seamus turns up in *Master Forger* he's haunted by demons, chains himself to the Buckingham Palace railings, and blows himself up. I think I need to reread *Forger*, which is more packed with ideas than any other Joyce novel, maybe too packed, but as I remember very funny.

Like Bruce, I was flummoxed by *The Silent Land* (2010) once I realised it was a variant on Bierce's 'An Incident at Owl Creek Bridge'. This was so well disguised that I kicked myself for not realising it earlier. Joyce brought all his skills to it, but the story was too hoary and I lost interest once we got to ghosties and strange happenings in the mist.

I think *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* may well be Joyce's masterpiece, but Bruce has spoken enough about it. In it, fairies can cause cancer in people they dislike, but equally can cause remission by removing the spell. Let's hope a kind fairy is looking over Graham's shoulder. He deserves it.

— Tony Thomas, June 2013

Colin Steele

The field

Books about science fiction

Science Fiction

by Mark Bould (Routledge; 239 pp.; \$39)

Professor Mark Bould co-edits the journal *Science Fiction Film and Television*. *Science Fiction* is a misleading title, given that the book is about SF films, being part of the Routledge Film Guidebook series. Bould covers films from 1895 to the present day, citing examples from over 40 countries. The three main sections cover themes in film, such as science and SF, colonialism and globalisation, and race and gender issues. The ten major films analysed in depth range from *Le voyage dans la lune* (1902) to *Avatar* (2009). *Science Fiction* is an excellent scholarly analysis, the downside being the often esoteric language, sadly necessary for current academic reward purposes.

Some Remarks

by Neal Stephenson (Atlantic; 326 pp.; \$32.99)

Neal Stephenson, cult best-selling author of books such as *Snow Crash*, *Cryptonomicon*, and *Anathem*, writes in his introduction to *Some Remarks*, 'Certain persons who know what they are talking about where publishing is concerned have assured me that I have reached the stage in my life and career where it is not only possible, but advisable, to release a compilation of what are drolly referred to as my "shorter" works.'

Fellow SF author William Gibson's recent collection of essays, *Distrust That Particular Flavor*, received minimal editing and updating. Sadly the same problems arise in *Some Remarks*, a collection of essays, interviews, and two short stories dating from the early 1990s through to 2012. One section that has dated, and could have been easily updated, is a 2004 Slashdot interview in which Stephenson predicts an optimistic future for brick and mortar bookshops, not imagining the demise of bookshop chains like Borders.

The longest piece in the collection, 'Mother Earth, Mother Board', is a 1996 'hacker tourist' travelogue, documenting the global FLAG transoceanic cable, the 'longest, fastest, mother of all wires'. While much of the travel detail in this 118-page essay, written originally for *Wired* magazine, is dated, the whole, nevertheless, remains a valuable, if esoteric contribution, to science history.

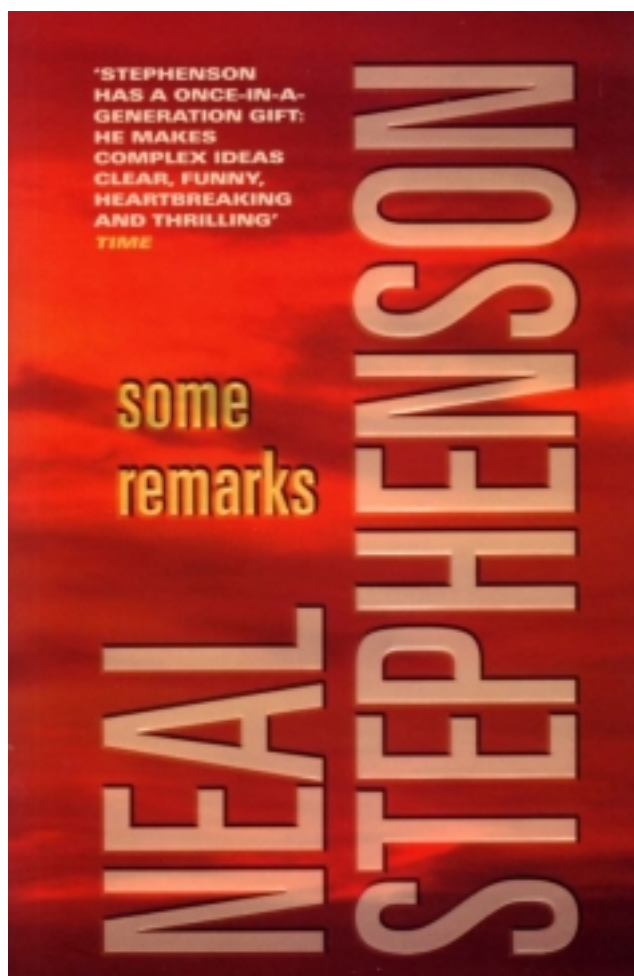
Stephenson's love of the history of science, as shown in his mammoth 'Baroque Cycle' trilogy (*Quicksilver*, *The Confusion*, and *The System of the World*), is reflected in his

2010 essay, 'Metaphysics in the Royal Society 1715–2010', which reaffirms his academic interest in Leibniz in particular and seventeenth-century metaphysics in general.

The essays by Stephenson on his youth in Ames, Iowa, his education, family background, and early career experience, such as in computer programming, are the most valuable in establishing an autobiographical context for his massive fictional volumes. In a 2008 Gresham College lecture, he wonders if he was invited as a 'sort of Idiot Savant', an SF writer of 'idea porn'. Certainly Stephenson has never lacked for ideas.

He notes that the optimistic golden age of SF has given way to 'fiction written in a generally darker, more skeptical and ambiguous tone'. This lack of optimism is reflected, he feels, in the current barrenness of the American space program. 'I worry that our inability to match the achievements of the 1960s space program might be symptomatic of a general failure of our society to get big things done.'

Stephenson contributes a new geek-like essay, 'Arse-



bestos', on how he now works while walking on a treadmill. He believes 'geeks and nerds' support the propagation of information and ideas. In a 2012 *Time* magazine essay, he sees a declining attention span in society and that rational thought is 'being pushed out by New Superstition whose victims can find testimony on the Internet for anything they choose to believe'.

His solution, to a culture 'trapped in a collective stasis', is to read more widely. Books are our 'collective memory and the accumulated wisdom of our species'. His 2008 novel *Anathem* imagined a future in which bookish people are like medieval monks, 'living austere but intellectually complex lives in voluntary seclusion'.

Some Remarks is a collection for the general reader to dip into rather than to read cover to cover, but for Stephenson fans, of which there are many, it will be an essential purchase, particularly for the autobiographical insights. As Stephenson concludes, 'I hope that people will enjoy finding all this stuff in one place, browsing through it, and reading the bits they want.'

***Extreme Metaphors: Selected Interviews with J. G. Ballard, 1967–2008*
edited by Simon Sellars and Dan O'Hara (Fourth Estate; 503 pp.; \$59.99)**

J. G. Ballard (1930–2009) is perhaps best known because of Steven Spielberg's film of *Empire of the Sun*, which depicted Ballard's wartime childhood, and David Cronenberg's film of his controversial 1973 novel *Crash*. Ballard said, just before the publication of *Crash*, that 'Sex times technology equals the future'.

Ballard is one of a small group of authors, such as Kafka, Pinter, and Orwell, to have his fiction summed up by an adjective. 'Ballardian' now conjures up a contemporary world of soulless shopping malls, gated communities, and surveillance cameras; the cult of media celebrity; and climate-ravaged landscapes.

Ballard's memoir *Miracles of Life* was published in 2008. A flawed revisionist biography by John Baxter, *The Inner Man*, appeared in 2011. *Extreme Metaphors* brings together 44 interviews with Ballard published between 1967 and 2008. The interviews, chosen from over 200 by Melbourne Ballard scholar Simon Sellars and Rio-based philosopher of technology Dan O'Hara, is virtually a Ballard 'biography in interviews'.

O'Hara hopes that 'it could be read as a chronological account, in Ballard's own words, of the development of his thought — Ballard on Ballard, as it were'. Sellars' 'ultimate aim was to showcase the power of Ballard's intellect, of his philosophy, of his predictive powers ... as a philosopher of media, consumerism and technology ... I rate him equal to, if not higher than, McLuhan and Baudrillard. What elevates him is the fact that he couched this philosophy in an accessible form, fiction, and therefore had an impact that was deeper, much more subversive, much more inveigled into people's everyday lives'.

The interviews, all prefaced with a brief editorial introduction, begin in 1967 with one by the poet George MacBeth. The 1970 interview with the formidable Lynn Barber, then at *Penthouse*, covers the 'interior design of sexual fantasies' and the future of the book, Ballard

presciently pointing out, 'the technology of the book publisher is so out of date'. Fellow author Will Self is told in 1995 that repetition is a key to Ballard's fiction, so that that certain repeated phrases become a kind of Ballardian hypertext.

In 1978, Ballard had reflected how 'each of us will be at the centre of a sort of non-stop serial'. Ballard, in emphasising the isolation of the individual in an increasingly technology-driven world, foreshadowed the impact of social media, such as YouTube and Twitter. *Extreme Metaphors* reaffirms that, for Ballard, fiction and reality became inextricably intertwined in his visions of 'the dying twilight of tomorrow'.

***Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: The Annotated Frankenstein*
edited by Susan J. Wolfson and Ronald L. Levao
(Harvard; 400 pp.; \$45)**

The Annotated Frankenstein, edited by Professors Wolfson and Levao, while looking like a coffee table book, is a superb work of accessible scholarship from Harvard. It reproduces the 1818 Mary Shelley edition in a two-column format, juxtaposing the story on each page with commentary and annotations. The almost 100 colour and black-and-white illustrations range from portraits of the family to cinematic adaptations of the novel. The editors comprehensively cover the influences on the writing of the book, such as the French Revolution and the Shelley family, as well as the novel's later dramatic reincarnations. A must for libraries and lovers of the novel.

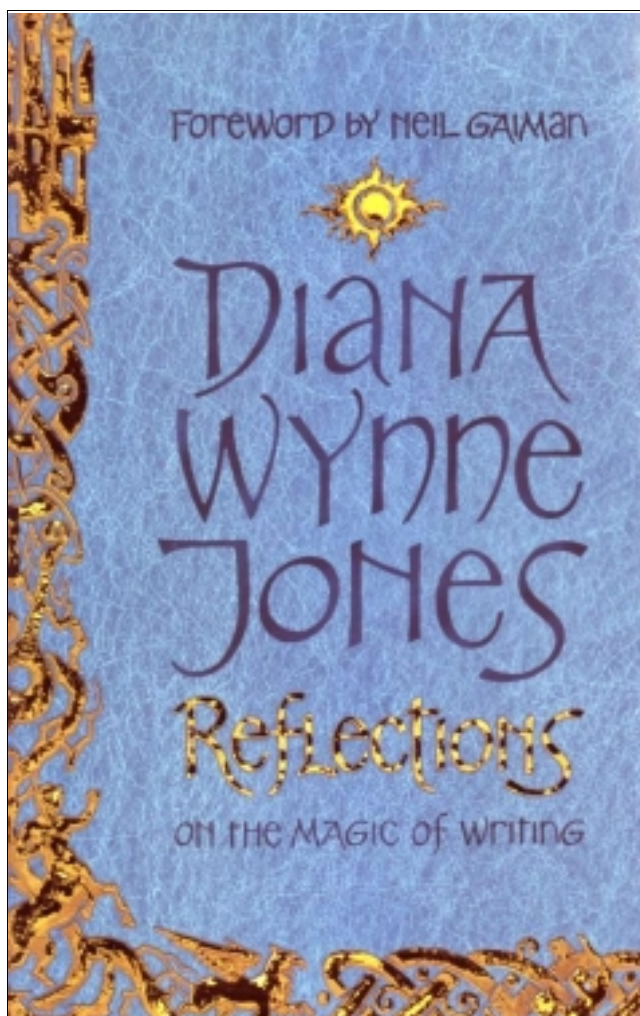
Books about fantasy

***Reflections on the Magic of Writing*
by Diana Wynne Jones (David Fickling; 299 pp.; \$59.95)**

Two of the most famous British fantasy writers of the twentieth century, Diana Wynne Jones and Alan Garner, may well be unfamiliar to the young fans of J. K. Rowling and Stephenie Meyer. Philip Pullman has described Alan Garner as 'the most important British writer of fantasy since Tolkien', while Neil Gaiman comments in his 'Foreword to Reflections' that Diana Wynne Jones was 'quite simply the best writer for children of her generation'.

Wynne Jones, who died in 2011, is probably best known for her 'Chrestomanci' series and her book *Howl's Moving Castle*, which became a successful animated film by Japanese director Hayao Miyazaki. She was never as strident as Terry Pratchett regarding J. K. Rowling's lack of acknowledgment of her source inspiration, but she did appreciate comments, such as that made by London's *Daily Telegraph*, that her novel *Charmed Life* 'dealt with a young wizard discovering his powers at a magical academy 20 years before J. K. Rowling, but with bucketloads more style, wit and charm'.

Reflections brings together 29 of her essays, speeches, and memoirs. She begins her long essay 'The Shape of



the Narrative in *The Lord of the Rings* with her Oxford recollections of Tolkien, noting that as a lecturer he was disorganised and inaudible, and often talked to the blackboard, so as to discourage student attendance. Three lectures given on 'A Whirlwind Tour of Australia' in 1992 cover her motivations for writing, while there are accounts of the writing of several of her books, including *Changeover* (1970) and *The Merlin Conspiracy* (2003).

She says, 'I think I write the kind of books I do because the world suddenly went mad when I was five years old', reflecting her troubled childhood in the 1940s and the personal and physical neglect by her parents. She comments, 'I suppose there always is a bad mother or two in there somewhere' and 'My father was extraordinarily mean'. In Cumbria, Wynne Jones's sister Isobel was once smacked by Beatrix Potter for swinging on her garden gate. Wynne Jones says, 'She hated children, too.' Wynne Jones's experiences clearly developed her empathy, in her fiction, with childhood angsts and dysfunctional families. Above all, *Reflections* reaffirms the importance of good writing for children.

Lands of Ice and Fire

by Jonathan Roberts (HarperCollins; \$49.99)

Lands of Ice and Fire, a series of maps by English journalist Jonathan Roberts, comes in a boxed compendium and provides cartographic detail of the series, including a map of the 'known world joining the lands of the Seven

Kingdoms and the lands across the Narrow Sea'.

***J. R. R. Tolkien: The Making of a Legend* by Colin Duriez (Lion; \$16.99)**

Building on the success of *The Hobbit*'s movie release, Lion Books has been quick off the mark to bring out the well-priced *J. R. R. Tolkien: The Making of a Legend* by Colin Duriez, a prolific writer on both Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. Duriez does not pretend to break new scholarly ground, but has written an accessible and lively commentary on Tolkien's life and times that will be of interest not only to Tolkien fans but also to a general readership.

***The Power of Tolkien's Prose* by Steve Walker (Palgrave; \$42)**

Professor Steve Walker's *The Power of Tolkien's Prose* is a more scholarly and ground-breaking text. Walker focuses on Tolkien's prose style and language, arguing that an understanding of his writing style and stylistic secrets enhances a deeper understanding of the text. He vigorously disputes the view of Tolkien being 'a great storyteller and a bad writer'.

***The Hobbits* by Lynnette Porter (Tauris; 280 pp.; \$29.95)**

American professor Lynnette Porter specialises in books on popular culture. In *The Hobbits*, Porter documents not only Tolkien's hobbits, especially Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, but also their interpretation by other creators, such as artists, musicians, writers, directors, and choreographers. While radio, television, film, and stage references dominate, Porter ranges widely to include video games and even 1970s Tolkien calendars. Porter's book is probably best suited for diehard Tolkien fans, as she exhaustively demonstrates how the hobbits continues to be interpreted to audiences.

***There and Back Again* by Mark Atherton (Tauris; 306 pp.; \$44.95)**

Oxford academic Mark Atherton, in *There and Back Again*, provides a detailed examination of the origins of *The Hobbit*, through biographical, historical, geographical, and literary analyses. Atherton builds on previous Tolkien scholarship to provide a fresh and readable analysis which will be of particular value as the first *Hobbit* film appears.

***The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* edited by Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Ashgate; 558 pp.; \$178.20)**

The Ashgate articles range from the classical world to the present day and cover a wide geographical spectrum ranging from Japan to Mexico. Thus, the 21 essays, largely from American and British academics, cover topics such as the water deity Mami Wata in Africa; the

monstrous in the Islamic visual tradition and the Maya 'cosmic monster' as a political and religious symbol.

Ashgate is a work of considerable erudition and scholarship, suitably footnoted and indexed. Ranging over art history, religious studies, literature, classics, history, anthropology and cultural studies, The *Ashgate Research Companion* reflects the truly multidisciplinary nature of the topic. It also takes an innovative sociological approach, linking, for instance, disability studies with the social history of monstrosity. It's a book, ultimately however, for dipping into rather than continuous reading. Its price probably ensures that it will be mainly available in libraries, where it will become an essential academic reference source for the 'monstrous'.

Gothicka

by Victoria Nelson (Harvard University Press; 352 pp.; \$39.95)

For her book *Gothicka*, American academic Victoria Nelson has given the subtitle *Vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural*. Harvard University Press clearly sees the topic as one that meets both commercial and academic targets. Nelson believes that the boom in interest in her subject matter, reflected in the success of Dan Brown's and Stephenie Meyer's books, constitutes a 'new Gothic' revival.

Nelson sees the late eighteenth-century Gothic as a counterpoint to the Enlightenment. She believes the contemporary Gothic is throwing off the 'dark supernaturalism it inherited from its eighteenth-century ancestor' and is taking a 'surprising new turn towards the light', even though this light seems to be coming from zombies, vampires, and werewolves. Today's Gothic has 'fashioned its monsters into heroes and its devils into angels'.

Nelson ranges widely, covering novels from authors such as H. P. Lovecraft, Anne Rice, and Stephen King; films from directors such as Guillermo del Toro; and graphic novels from authors such as Mike Mignola. There is much in Nelson's text that is open to debate, making it an ideal book for university courses on the Gothic past and present.

They Suck, They Bite, They Eat, They Kill

by Joni Richards Bodart (Scarecrow Press; 268 pp.; \$69.95)

Joni Richards Bodart's *They Suck, They Bite, They Eat, They Kill*, subtitled *The Psychological Meaning of Supernatural Monsters in Young Adult Fiction*, is essentially a monster mash documenting books that appeal to an American teenage readership. Bodart focuses on six different monsters: vampires, shape-shifters, killer unicorns, zombies, evil angels, and demons. Each of Bodart's four main sections covers the particular topic, followed by an examination of specific subject books, such as Melissa de la Cruz's *Blue Blood* and Charlie Higson's 'The Enemy' series.

Bodart comes from an American library school background, and her book is clearly intended for public and school libraries in America and teenage readers for

whom monsters have an affinity. Bodart says, 'Supernatural creatures are constructs and tools that teens can use to understand themselves and their worlds better and help them make the decisions that will guide them through those worlds ... feeling like an outsider is a common experience for a teen'.

Once Upon a Time in Oz

edited by Julianne Schultz and Carmel Bird (Griffith Review 42; 263 pp.; \$27.99)

Albert Einstein, when asked how to make children intelligent, once said, 'If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairytales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairytales.' Everyone should therefore seek out issue 42 of the *Griffith Review*, *Once Upon A Time In Oz*.

Julianne Schultz and Carmel Bird hold up 'an enchanted mirror to explore the role of fairy and folk tales across cultures in this country, and create new ones'. The edition was finalised during the recent election campaign. Schulz notes, therefore, 'It is scarcely surprising that those shaping the public debate, and those commenting on it, unwittingly defaulted to the embedded language of fairy tales ... No one actually used the language of evil stepmothers, wolves or avenging princes, but a campaign where the pitch was reduced to a handful of words only made sense if the subtext, of



culturally embedded stories, was understood.'

Graphically, this is seen in a portfolio of full-page colour cartoons by the *Australian Financial Review*'s David Rowe, which places *Alice in Wonderland* into the latest election campaign. 'Down the Abbott Hole' features Joe Hockey as the 'JabberHockey' and Julia Gillard as Alice.

The print contributions are a mixture of fiction, poetry, essay, and memoir. In the fiction, classic stories from the Brothers Grimm are suitably updated. Marion Halligan and Cate Kennedy both spin off the Bluebeard fable. Halligan has her innocent bride uncover the appalling secret, in a 'A Castle in Toorak', of her Gatsby-like IT Prince. In 'A Glimpse of Paradise', Cate Kennedy's main character may have disturbed the past when attempting to plant a gift tree secretly in her lover's garden. In 'Snow White and the Child Soldier', Ali Alizadeh's Hassan is a tragic Somalian 'prince' as he saves his princess from a gang of Australian party rapists.

In the essay section, Kate Forsyth extrapolates from her own real-life early childhood crisis, 'I was only a child when I faced death for the first time', and documents the impact this had on her life and subsequent writing, while Michelle Law covers the troubled relationship between her Chinese father and Malaysian mother and their counterpoint to 'happily ever after' marriages.

This latest issue of the *Griffith Review* confirms its position as Australia's most stimulating literary journal.

The Irresistible Fairy Tale

by Jack Zipes (Princeton University Press; 235 pp.; \$39.95)

Underpinning a lot of fantasy are the traditions of the fairy tale, both oral and print. Professor Jack Zipes, in *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, establishes a greater link with the social and natural sciences to explain the appeal of the fairy tale. Zipes put fairy tales centre stage in Western culture in a series of chapters that focus on lesser known stories and authors. Zipes shows how fairy tales mutate to ensure that the stories remain relevant to contemporary audiences, such as the feminist overturning of the traditional patriarchal fairy tales in new interpretations of stories such as 'Little Red Riding Hood'. *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* will appeal to both the academic and the general reader.

Books about movies

Shock Value

by Jason Zinoman (Duckworth; 274 pp.; \$39.99)

Shock Value traces the American 'new horror' films from the late 1960s through the next decade. Ground-breaking films such as Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*, Brian De Palma's *Carrie*, William Friedkin's *The Exorcist*, and George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* still influence the genre today. Zinoman, a regular contributor to *The New York Times*, says these new directors made horror films 'more graphic, fiercely realistic and morally ambiguous and dug deeper into social taboos'. Zinoman, through primary research and interviews with key play-

ers, unearths much new material and reclaims the work of 'dysfunctional genius' Dan O'Bannon, until now perhaps best remembered for the original script of *Alien*.

British Trash Cinema

by I. Q. Hunter (Palgrave; 219 pp.; \$39.95)

Hunter, a Reader in Film Studies at De Montfort University, Leicester, notes that his book 'began with dreams of slave girls'. He thus builds on the 1967 Hammer film of that title to analyse low-budget exploitation films from the 1950s through to current straight-to-DVD horror, SF, and sexploitation movies such as *Kill Keith* (2012) and *Strippers vs Werewolves* (2012). Trash is a word interpreted widely to include mainstream 'bad' films and some works of directors such as Ken Russell and Derek Jarman. Hunter delivers a fascinating broad academic survey, based on interviews and archival research on a most unusual cultural topic, and concludes that 'psychotronic' films are 'candidates for cult reappraisal'.

100 Science Fiction Films

by Barry Grant (Palgrave; 216 pp.; \$34.95)

Canadian academic Barry Keith Grant is a prolific film critic. *100 Science Fiction Films*, the latest in the British Film Institute's illustrated 'Screen Guides' series, begins with the Soviet film *Aelita* (1924), and concludes with *Zardoz* (1974). His entries begin with Georges Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) and conclude with the *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012). As with all 'best' selections, readers can quibble about inclusions and exclusions, but all the major classics are included, such as Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). Grant's introduction places the movies into an informed genre context before commentaries on the individual film.

British Gothic Cinema

by Barry Forshaw (Palgrave; 227 pp.; \$39)

British cultural historian and commentator Barry Forshaw provides a readable, wide-ranging, study of the British public's long love affair with the horror film, exemplified by the success of Hammer films from the 1950s to the 1980s. Forshaw also documents Hammer's film competitors, British Gothic TV, and the recent resurgence of British Gothic films, including *The Woman in Black*. It's surprising that Forshaw overlooks the movies of Ken Russell, while the iconic 1973 film *The Wicker Man* deserves more than just over half a page. Nonetheless, Forshaw covers a wide field in an essential companion to the British Film Institute's current film festival, *Gothic: The Dark Heart of Film*.

Books about television

Inside HBO's Games of Thrones

by Bryan Cogman (Gollancz; \$45)

George R. R. Martin may have been intrigued that his

HBO TV series *Game of Thrones* was the internet's most-pirated TV show of 2012. One episode of the series racked up 4,280,000 illegal global downloads, slightly more than its estimated US television audience.

Fans can enjoy Bryan Cogman's *Inside HBO's Game of Thrones*, which provides a lavishly illustrated guide to the characters, histories, and background, as well as a Preface by Martin and interviews with the cast and crew.

Trueblood

edited by Brigid Cherry (Tauris; 213 pp.; \$29.95)

Trueblood, subtitled *Investigating Vampires and Southern Gothic*, spins off Alan Ball's cult *True Blood* HBO TV series, which, in turn, derives from Charlaine Harris's bestselling 'Southern Vampire' mysteries. Cherry, a senior lecturer in Communication, Culture, and Creative Arts, defines the *Trueblood* world as a 'tele-fantasy straddling between Gothic horror and paranormal romance'. Her 11 academic contributors examine representations of sexuality, race relations, and social class within the wider contexts of the making of the series, its main characters, and its cult fan status. *Trueblood* is clearly intended for those many fans, but also for the burgeoning university courses in this area.

Star Trek. The Visual Dictionary

by Paul Ruditis (Dorling Kindersley; 96 pp.; \$29.99)

There are innumerable guides to the *Star Trek* universe. Paul Ruditis's *Visual Dictionary*, subtitled *The Ultimate Guide to Characters, Aliens, and Technology*, is a large-format illustrated guide, primarily aimed at a young adult readership. This colourful guide to the characters and artefacts of *Star Trek* will appeal, however, to a wide audience. John de Lancie, who played Q in the series, writes in his foreword that *Star Trek* is 'an invitation to dream, and wonder and ask, "what if?"'. The numerous characters covered from the various *Star Trek* series and by Ruditis will undoubtedly inspire many to boldly go forth and buy this book.

Inside the Tardis: The Worlds of Doctor Who: A Cultural History

by James Chapman (Tauris; 372 pp.; \$34)

Behind the Sofa: Celebrity Memories of Dr Who

edited by Steve Berry (Gollancz; 226 pp.; \$22.99)

Doctor Who: The Vault: Treasures from the First 50 Years

by Marcus Hearn (BBC Books; 320 pp.; \$59.95)

Doctor Who: The Doctor: His Lives and Times

by James Goss and Steve Tribe (BBC Books; 256 pp.; \$49.95)

New Dimensions of Doctor Who

edited by Matt Hills (Tauris; 240 pp.; \$29.95)

Who Is Who? The Philosophy of Dr Who

by Kevin S. Decker (Tauris; 243 pp.; \$34.95)

'I'm the Doctor. I'm a Time Lord. I'm from the planet Gallifrey in the Constellation of Kasterborous. I'm 903 years old, and I'm the man who's gonna save your lives and all six billion people on the planet below. You got a problem with that?' These words, spoken by David Tennant in the 2007 episode 'Voyage of the Damned', constitute almost a duty statement for Doctor Who.

Doctor Who has been called the world's longest-running television SF series, and it may even be the longest-running popular drama TV series other than soap operas. 23 November 2013 marks 50 years since the BBC aired the first episode 'An Unearthly Child', written by Australian author Anthony Coburn. It was Coburn's idea for the TARDIS to resemble a police box after seeing one on Wimbledon Common. Interestingly, the BBC was challenged over the copyright of the TARDIS by Coburn's son Stef.

23 November 1963 was, however, the day after President Kennedy's assassination. Initial audience reaction was thus muted, and the first episode had to be repeated. One critic called the new program a mix of H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* and a space age *Old Curiosity Shop*. Certainly the first Doctor Who, William Hartnell, resembled a Dickensian figure. The arrival of the Daleks in February 1964 led to viewing figures rising to over 10 million per episode.

Terry Pratchett, in his introduction to *Behind the Sofa: Celebrity Memories of Doctor Who*, says 'I was there at the beginning', that is, watching the first episode. As indeed was this reviewer, viewing it at Liverpool University's Derby Hall. *Behind The Sofa* brings together over 150 memories of *Doctor Who* from actors, directors, and celebrity fans. Contributors include Bernard Cribbins, Neil Gaiman, Jonathan Ross, Rick Wakeman, and Hugh Bonneville.

Pratchett calls *Doctor Who* 'a part of the DNA of Great Britain'. The history of the series, up to the end of 2012, is well documented by Professor James Chapman in an update of his 2006 history, *Inside the Tardis*. Chapman's analysis, based on extensive access to the BBC archives, includes coverage of each Doctor and his series, and the differing viewpoints of the writers and directors, now called 'showrunners'. Chapman, who also covers the *Doctor Who* spin offs, *Torchwood* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, deliberately adopts an anti-theoretical approach, in contrast to some of the essays in Matt Hills' collection *New Dimensions of Doctor Who*.

Chapman believes the success of *Doctor Who* is due, in large measure, to its ability to renew and refresh its format, particularly in the regeneration of the lead character, which stretches from William Hartnell to Peter Capaldi. All *Doctor Who* fans have their favourite Doctor. This reviewer would put David Tennant first, with Tom Baker second. The first incarnations of the Doctor, Hartnell, Patrick Troughton, and Jon Pertwee, all assumed, according to Chapman, the 'manner of a harassed, well-educated district officer'.

This mould was well and truly broken with the arrival of Tom Baker, the longest-serving Doctor, with his ever-growing long scarf and love of jelly babies. Baker says

'having been brought up a Catholic, the idea of disappearing and reappearing, of miraculous events, strange voices and all the other mad things about *Doctor Who* seemed totally natural to me'.

Doctor Who had mixed fortunes in the 1980s before the show was cancelled in December 1989. Michael Grade, the former Controller of BBC1, a long-time critic of the show, comments, in his contribution to *Behind the Sofa*, 'I killed the bastard! because the show was ghastly, it was pathetic ... it lost its way. It was waiting for Russell T. Davies.'

Davies, of course, revived the series with great success in 2005. His first doctor, Christopher Ecclestone's blunt 'Have a go if yer 'ard enough' approach was succeeded by a warmer and more emotional *Doctor Who* in David Tennant. Matt Smith's Doctor was more zany, perhaps reflecting the changed creative settings of Davies' successor, Steven Moffat, and his seemingly never-ending narrative arcs.

A lavish coffee table book from the BBC, Marcus Hearn's *The Vault*, provides a cornucopia of *Doctor Who* history and memorabilia, including unpublished material from the BBC archive and private collectors. Hearn takes the reader on a well-informed textual journey from 1963 to 2013, supplemented by numerous colour and black-and-white illustrations of costumes, set designs, letters, and scripts, as well as characters and scenes from the series. If there's one Christmas gift for *Doctor Who* fans, this is it.

James Goss and Steve Tribe have an extensive *Doctor Who* lineage in writing and fandom, which they put to good use in *The Doctor: His Lives and Times*. Goss and Tribe assiduously follow the *Doctor Who* trail, but it is their behind-the-scenes coverage, through numerous short interviews, termed 'brief encounters', with writers, actors, and support crew, that gives it a fresh appeal. Look out for World Wide Web inventor Sir Tim Berners-Lee on the 1966 episodes of 'The War Machines', Neil Gaiman on 'The Tomb of the Cybermen', and Bernard Cribbins on the Daleks.

James Chapman says since the 2006 edition of *Inside the Tardis*, 'the field of *Doctor Who* scholarship has expanded almost as fast as the universe itself'. The books by Hills and Decker attest to that scholarship, although some of the essays included in *New Dimensions of Doctor Who* wander into some arcane corridors of academic scholarship. Hills, Professor of Film and TV Studies at Aberystwyth University, brings together 11 contributors, nearly all of whom are academics at British universities, teaching and researching cultural and media studies.

One of the problems is that the authors fall between writing for an academic reward system, with consequent disciplinary insularity, and a popular readership. Thus, Ross Garner, 'In Remembering Sarah Jane', produces a piece replete with phrases such as 'the world of a television program can be considered as an intradigetic allusion that opens up space for nostalgia to enter into reading positions' and that 'the embodied presence' of Elisabeth Sladen, as Sarah Jane, gave the fans 'ontological security'. Melissa Beattie follows the *Doctor Who* experience through the 'Commodification of Cardiff Bay', while David Butler covers 'Multiculturalism, Monsters, and Music in New Doctor Who'.

Kevin S. Decker, Director of the Philosophy Department at Eastern Washington University, argues *Who is Who* is the first in-depth philosophical investigation of *Doctor Who* in popular culture. Decker examines issues, such as truth and knowledge, science and religion, space and time, and good and evil with appropriate references to philosophers, such as Hegel, Kant, and Heidegger. Adopting a wide brief, Decker also dips into novels, comic strips, and audio recordings, as he discusses regeneration and how quantum theory affects our understanding of time travel. One thing is certain: time will never stand still for *Doctor Who*.

***The Doctor's Monsters: Meanings of the Monstrous in Doctor Who*
by Graham Sleight (Tauris; 225 pp.; \$29.95)**

Graham Sleight is a British SF author, editor, and critic whose analysis of the 'monstrous in *Doctor Who*' covers the entire history of *Doctor Who* from 1963 to the present day. Sleight defines the monstrous as the 'personification of one human trait to the exclusion of all others', although the other books under review would tend to favour a much wider interpretation. The Daleks, Cybermen, and other *Doctor Who* favourites, such as the Weeping Angels, the Sycorax, and the Sontarans have taken 'humanity's desire for war to the exclusion of all else'.

Sleight, who asserts 'the portrayal of monsters in *Doctor Who* can often be taken as a kind of moral parable', also recognises the historical lineage of many of the monsters, with the writers 'pulling in tropes from outside and transforming them ... *Doctor Who*, like so many of its monsters is an omnivore'. A comment that clearly applies to the genre as a whole, with monsters and the monstrous being increasingly digested in many cultures.

British science fiction

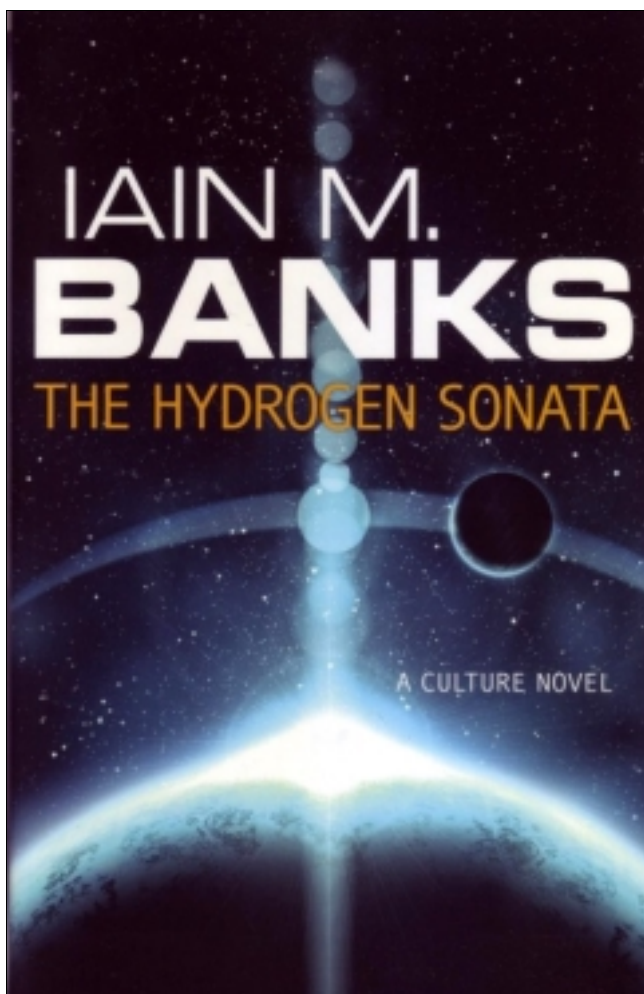
The Uninvited

by Liz Jensen (Bloomsbury; 307 pp.; \$29.99)

Liz Jensen, who has been nominated for the Orange Prize for Fiction three times, is one of an increasing number of British authors whose writing crosses several genres. Jensen's seven novels to date, which include *The Rapture*, *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*, and *Egg Dancing*, have

ranged across crime, magic realism, and science fiction.

Jensen has acknowledged the influence of John Wyndham and J. G. Ballard's 'catastrophe' novels in *The Uninvited*, which is marketed as 'part psychological thriller, part dystopian nightmare'. Hesketh Lock, her main character and 'honest narrator', is an anthropology-trained investigator of corporate failures. Asperger's syndrome renders him emotionally neutral in his deliberations, but also makes personal relationships difficult. Hesketh acknowledges his lack of 'people skills', while his estranged partner accuses him of being 'a robot



made of meat’.

Lock is investigating the mysterious deaths, apparently suicides, of three business leaders, in Taiwan, Sweden, and Dubai. What links these deaths and how do they relate to a series of coldblooded murders in which children start killing their families? Hesketh’s personal and corporate lives become intertwined as his seven-year-old stepson Freddy becomes a key player in the global maelstrom.

The children, driven by mysterious and often unexplained Gaia-like forces, must halt ‘the juggernaut at the brink of the abyss’. Jensen uses Chinese, Scandinavian, Celtic, and Arabic folklore in highlighting the fact that children ‘aren’t kids any more. They’re freaks from some other planet’. Jensen evokes, for example, the Chinese spirits of the dead, who ‘pour out from Hell, demanding food and appeasement, and wreaking havoc’.

Jensen is warning of the dangers in running down the planet’s finite resources and the dark future we’re creating for our children if we continue to embrace ‘this age of materialism’. This message resonates in the dramatic conclusion, which emphasises if history is to ‘change direction, it must first come to a stop’.

The Testament of Jessie Lamb

by Jane Rogers (Canongate; 308 pp; \$19.99)

British author Jane Rogers won the 2012 Arthur C. Clarke Award for best SF novel with *The Testament of Jessie Lamb*, her first venture into the genre. A deadly virus,

MDS (maternal death syndrome), kills women in pregnancy. The only hope for the future is for young women under 17, ‘Sleeping Beauties’, to be placed in an induced coma to give birth. Babies survive but the women die. Sixteen-year-old Jessie wants to volunteer for the program but her research scientist father is opposed. Is Jessie a sacrificial lamb or asserting her rights as an adult to decide her fate? Rogers delivers a powerful and thought-provoking story.

The Hydrogen Sonata

by Iain M. Banks (Orbit; 517 pp.; \$29.99)

Iain Banks’ ‘Culture’ novels have become one of the benchmarks of modern science fiction. Twenty-five years after the first novel, *Consider Phlebas* (1987), comes the ninth in the series, *The Hydrogen Sonata*. The Gzilt civilisation have decided to enter ‘Sublimation’ and abandon the material world and physical reality. It seems. However, that the Gzilt government is taking a major secret with them which only the oldest living man in the Culture can reveal through contact with a Gzilt woman. Such an outline only scratches the surface of a stimulating and complex ride in which Banks’s underlying themes have much to say about the nature of morality and truth.

Great North Road

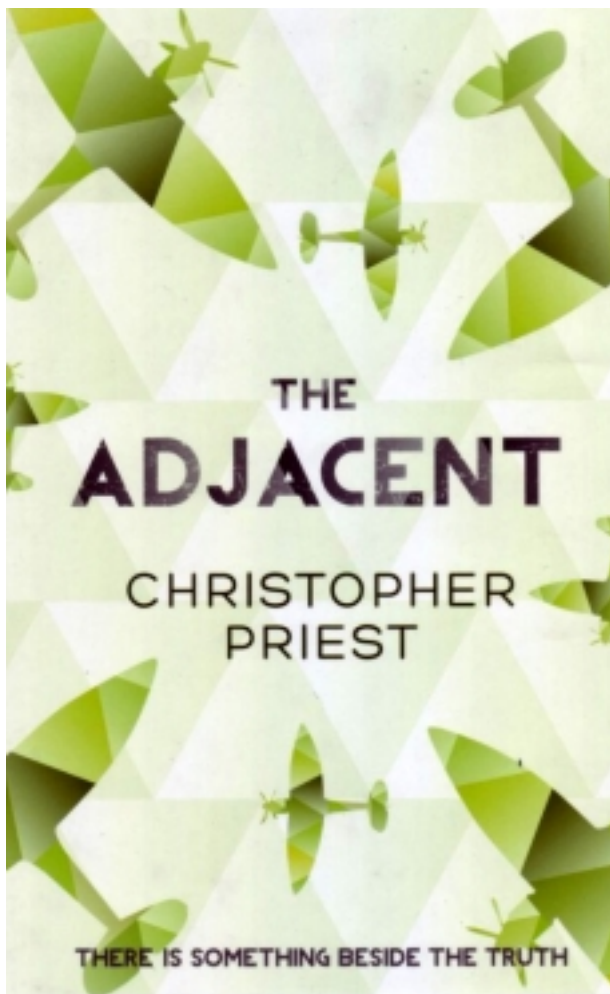
by Peter F. Hamilton (Macmillan; 1087 pp.; \$29.99)

Peter Hamilton is not known for the brevity of his books, and *Great North Road* is no exception, but this has not prevented him from becoming Britain’s bestselling SF novelist. A murder of a wealthy clone in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 2142 is a carbon copy of one 20 years before. The convicted killer always claimed that the original deaths were committed in an alien attack, and now she and the Human Defence Agency must seek answers on the tropical planet of St Libra. *Great North Road* is an intriguing story of two halves, with multiple plot lines and vividly imagined world building, but would have benefited from editorial pruning.

The Adjacent

by Christopher Priest (Gollancz; 419 pp.; \$29.99)

Christopher Priest, named in the 1983 in the Granta ‘Best Young English Novelists’, continues to produce thought-provoking novels that fall under the mainstream literary radar. *The Adjacent* again features his Dream Archipelago location and a recurrent blurring of reality. The novel opens in another future world scarred by climate change, with the Islamic Republic of Great Britain attacked by terrorists. The narrative then abruptly backtracks to the First World War, where a magician seeks to make Allied aircraft invisible. All the subsequent fictional and chronological twists reflect love and war through ‘adjacent’ quantum dimensions. Whatever else one says about Priest in terms of narrative consistency, his capacity for invention remains undiminished.



Jack Glass

by Adam Roberts (Gollancz; 372 pp.; \$29.99)

Adam Roberts suffers, unlike Hamilton and Banks, in public recognition perhaps because each of his novels is so completely different from the one before. *Jack Glass*, subtitled *The Story of a Murderer*, is Roberts' homage to the Golden Age of SF and Crime, which most would take to be the 1930s and 1940s. There is more of a link, however, to the 1950s and the novels of Alfred Bester. Roberts places his self-confessed murderer, Jack Glass, in three separate mysteries on an Earth that is the home of the rich. The majority of people, the 'Sumpolloi', live in 'shanty bubbles' in space. Roberts supplements his satisfying mystery with linguistic inventiveness and wry humour.

Doctor Who: Harvest Of Time

by Alastair Reynolds (BBC Books; 365 pp.; \$39.95)

Noted SF writer Alastair Reynolds follows his British colleagues Michael Moorcock and Stephen Baxter in contributing to the BBC *Doctor Who* book series. Reynolds takes as his background the 1970s TV episodes featuring Jon Pertwee, Jo Grant, the Master, and the Brigadier. Reynolds explores the interaction of time and memory against the framework of the Doctor and the Master and their collective fight against the invasion of a crab-like alien race, the Sild. The two Time Lords are, however,



only reaping the consequences of their own particular harvesting of time. Reynolds effectively juxtaposes the commonplace of the 1970s present against a far cosmic future.

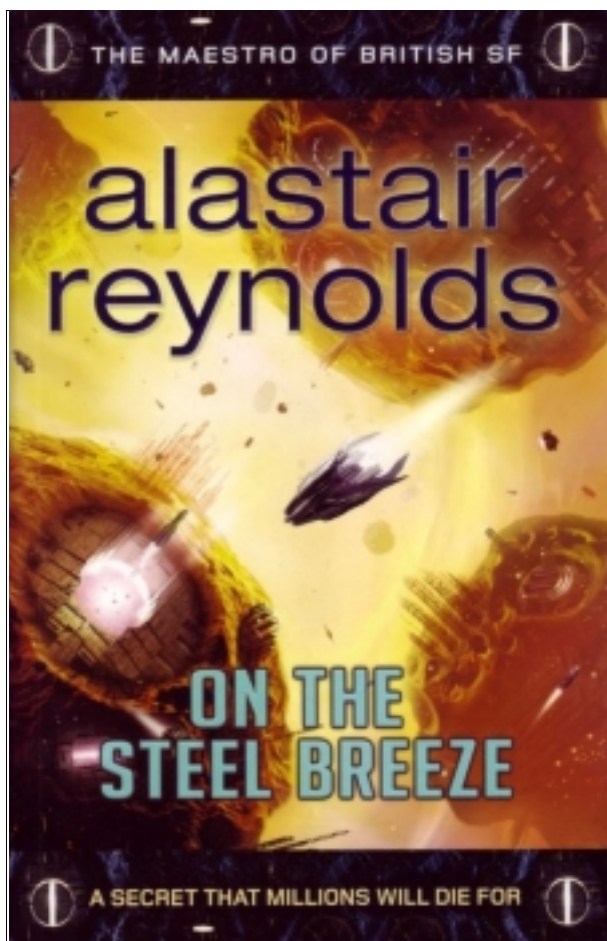
2121

by Susan Greenfield (Head of Zeus; 393 pp.; \$27.99)

Can scientists write science fiction? The works of Fred Hoyle, Isaac Asimov, Carl Sagan, Alastair Reynolds, and Gregory Benford would clearly indicate that they can. Baroness Susan Greenfield, former Director of London's Royal Institution, however, lets the side down with her debut novel *2121*.

Greenfield's future world is divided between two groups, the Neo-Puritan and the Neo-Platonic, the 'N-Ps', and the unimaginatively titled the 'Others'. The N-Ps are ascetic intellectuals, conveniently segregated by mountains from the hedonistic 'Others', whose lives have been dramatically changed by invasive 'screen' technologies, drugs, and implants. When an N-Ps envoy, the unconvincingly named Fred, is sent to study the Others, he becomes increasingly estranged from the N-Ps as he becomes emotionally involved with individual Others.

2121 often reads more like a lecture than a novel, as Greenfield expounds her well-known concerns, such as 'mind change', the deleterious effect of internet use on young minds, and the links between computer use and



obesity. Greenfield wants a debate on where society is going: 'What do we want people to do? To be? We've never asked this before.' Many surely have? Greenfield's constant references to the problems of contemporary society slow the plotline, itself burdened by characterisation that verges on caricature.

The Best of All Possible Worlds

by Karen Lord (Jo Fletcher; 325 pp.; \$29.99)

Superior world building is to be found in Barbados-born Karen Lord's second novel, *The Best of All Possible Worlds*, set in the Ursula Le Guin tradition of diverse societies in which conflicting viewpoints and cultures have to be reconciled. A devastating bio-attack on the planet Sadiri has forced the largely male Sadirian refugees to travel to the remote planet of Cygnus Beta.

The intellectual Sadirians appear emotionless because of their telepathic capabilities. The Sadiri representative, Dllenahkh, is certainly inscrutable compared to his Cygnus Beta government contact, Grace Delarua, a mid-thirties biotechnician. The task of ensuring the best of all possible worlds, and integrating the Sadirians, is played out against the evolving emotional relationship between Dllenahkh and Delarua, a relationship that ultimately resembles more those found in Jane Austen than in Le Guin.



On the Steel Breeze

by Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz; 483 pp.; \$29.99)

On the Steel Breeze, the sequel to *Blue Remembered Earth*, is set over a thousand years in the future. Both books follow members of the wealthy African Akinya family who are involved in journeys both within and beyond the solar system. In this second volume, massive interstellar holoships are now en route to an Earth-like planet with a mysterious alien construct. The long journey allows Reynolds, like SF authors before him, to explore how colonists survive the traumas of an intergenerational voyage. Reynolds also continues his examination of humanity's increasingly troubled relationship with the AI intelligence 'the Mechanism'. This is an intriguing novel of exploration on several levels.

The Mammoth Book of Time Travel SF

edited by Mike Ashley (Robinson; 535 pp.; \$12.99)

Mike Ashley, a renowned SF anthologist, brings together 25 time travel short stories in his latest collection. The all-reprint stories include Australian authors Damien Broderick, David Lake, and Sean McMullen. This is not a cutting-edge collection, nor is there space for detailed explanation of time travel concepts, but it is extremely well priced. Standout stories include Christopher Priest's 'Palely Loitering', Robert Silverberg's 'Needle in a Timestack', Ian Watson's 'The Very Slow Time Machine', and David Masson's 1965 classic 'Traveller's

Rest', in which Masson brilliantly critiques, through his own World War II experience, the horrors of war through an individual, 'H', played out in a time-dilated landscape.

US science fiction

The Dog Stars

by Peter Heller (Headline; 313 pp.; \$29.99)

American author Peter Heller's first novel, *The Dog Stars*, sees most of the world's population wiped out from a mutated flu virus. Heller's main character, Hig, lives alone with his dog protected by an ex-Navy Seal with a 'shoot first and ask questions later' policy towards strangers. The claustrophobic focus changes in the second half of the book, as Hig's flight in his small Cessna plane not only brings danger, but a hope that life and love might be rekindled, even in a disintegrated world. *The Dog Stars* is a dark, yet warm, often poetic, and ultimately moving novel of human survival.

The Raven's Gift

by Don Rearden (Text; 279 pp.; \$29.99)

The Raven's Gift won the Alaskan Novel of the Year in 2011. Reardon's main character John arrives with his wife in a small Alaskan village, but then a devastating avian epidemic sweeps through and kills everyone in the region except John and two women, one elderly and one young and blind. Their quest for survival is placed firmly in an Alaskan Yup'ik setting, which allows Reardon to reflect on the problems faced by remote indigenous communities. The tension of their travels across the Alaskan wilderness to seek safety is lessened somewhat by narrative flashbacks, but overall *The Raven's Gift* flies high in the apocalyptic SF skies.

Wool

by Hugh Howey (Century; 563 pp.; \$29.95)

Wool, which began life as a 50-page Kindle e-story in 2011, has been labelled the SF version of *Fifty Shades of Grey* in terms of self-publishing success. Howey, however, is a far more accomplished writer than E. L. James. His future world is a rigidly controlled underground silo society of 150 floors, the earth's surface being 'an uninhabitable wasteland'. Capital punishment entails being sent outside to clean the surface camera lenses before a slow death in the poisoned atmosphere. Howey's strengths include a pacy narrative and fully realised main characters, who both seek to maintain and challenge the traditions of their society throughout five gripping sections.

Dust

by Hugh Howey (Century; 408 pp.; \$29.95)

Hugh Howey's 'Silo' trilogy has become a publishing phenomenon, after his self-published e-books went viral and Random House picked up the series. *Dust*, which completes the trilogy begun with *Wool* and *Shift*, con-

tinues the story of underground silo populations far below the surface of a devastated Earth. In *Dust*, the story alternates between Silos 1 and 18, where Juliette, one of Howey's lead characters, tries, not always successfully, as mayor, to take her silo forward and maybe upwards. Howey dramatically mirrors current issues, such as competition for scarce resources and the struggles between haves and the have-nots, as the silos compete to decide humanity's future.

The Humans

by Matt Haig (Canongate; 294 pp.; \$27.99)

Earth viewed from an alien perspective is an SF staple. *The Humans* is, however, not SF, but rather a wry, poignant observation of what it is to be human. Andrew Martin, an insensitive Cambridge University mathematics professor, has solved the Riemann Hypothesis, the key to accessing the universe. An alarmed extraterrestrial civilisation dispatches a Spock-like alien to Earth to occupy Martin's body and to kill anyone aware of the discovery. The new Andrew, however, finds his task increasingly difficult as he warms to Martin's estranged family and the human condition. *The Humans* is a heartwarming and inventive novel.

Shaman

by Kim Stanley Robinson (Orbit; 458 pp.; \$29.99)

Kim Stanley Robinson's *Shaman*, a prehistoric ice age fantasy, is a much more realistic saga than Jean Auel's *Clan of the Cave Bear* series. Robinson's excessive detail, however, while demonstrating scientific and historical authenticity, often slows down the narrative pace. Robinson's main character, the young apprentice shaman Loon, initially naked, weaponless, and without resources, sets off on an almost Aboriginal-like 'wandering', a traumatic rite of passage, that matures him both personally and physically. Human life is decidedly writ small in *Shaman*, yet Loon's courage stands out. Robinson also delivers a powerful environmental message from his alternate world.

Australian science fiction

The Hunt for Pierre Jnr.

by David Henley (Harper; 409 pp.; \$27.99)

Psi powers are exhibited in *The Hunt for Pierre Jnr.*, the first book in a trilogy by Australian author David Henley. Henley's world of 2159 has been devastated by the 'dark age' of climate change, although technology has been able to improve conditions for the survivors. The Weave, a future version of the internet, has increased personal interconnectivity, but even more dramatic interconnections are emerging through individuals with significant telepathic and telekinetic powers.

Government quarantines such people wherever possible, but the hunt is on for an eight-year-old boy with such powerful psi capabilities that the whole of humanity

could be in danger. Henley explores questions, underneath his fast-paced narrative, of the nature of privacy and the rights of the individual, from intrusive technology on the one hand to the development of psi powers on the other. Henley is another name to watch, but in the next two volumes he would benefit from a stricter editorial guidelines as to the number of characters and plot lines.

Canadian science fiction

Triggers

by Robert J. Sawyer (Gollancz; 342 pp.; \$32.99)

Canadian author Robert Sawyer follows the commercial success of his *Flashforward* book and TV series with another blockbuster full of ideas, but again limited in characterisation. Two separate attacks on both the President and the White House become intertwined with a scientific experiment in the President's hospital that triggers mental linkages. Apart from the huge scientific implications of this embryonic group memory, this also raises major security concerns as to who can access the President's classified information. The major narrative problem is that Sawyer seems unclear as to whether *Triggers* is a novel of political intrigue or an SF gestalt novel with an idealistic conclusion.

British fantasy

The Woman Who Died A Lot

by Jasper Fforde (Hodder; 384 pp.; \$29.99)

Jasper Fforde's writing is always an eclectic mix of genre, notably humour, SF, and crime. His first novel *The Eyre Affair* (2001), featuring his 'literary detective' Thursday Next, was an immediate bestseller. Of his ten subsequent novels, six have been in the 'Thursday Next' series. The latest instalment, *The Woman Who Died A Lot*, is dedicated to 'All the librarians that have ever been [and] ever will be'. This will undoubtedly ensure even more library purchases.

Thursday is recovering from a near-fatal assassination attempt. She now walks with a stick, has limited mobility in her left arm, and often suffers from double vision. She returns to Fforde's favourite town, Swindon, as Chief Librarian. But this is no conventional library. In Thursday's world, librarians are much feared, and paid more than doctors and lawyers.

The Library special operatives recently shot dead a book thief, but since it was within the library boundaries it was 'justifiable lethal force'. Thursday is also expected to 'review the rules regarding spine bending and turning over the corner of the pages', which 'open the floodgates to poor reading etiquette and a downward spiral to the collapse of civilisation'.

Thursday, apart from her physical problems, keeps finding she's not herself, being replaced by simulacra produced by the dastardly Goliath Corporation. It takes all the skills of Thursday's husband Landen to identify and destroy the increasingly sophisticated androids. And

when she is herself, her nonexistent daughter Jenny is still with her as an implanted mindworm and needs to be purged.

With the Time Chronoguards disbanded, Thursday's son Friday learns his future, as a sort of redundancy package, and that he will kill someone within a week. Tuesday, Thursday's teenage daughter, meanwhile, races against time to prevent a deity 'smiting' Swindon into oblivion. Fforde's considerable worldwide fan base know what to expect, and will relish another outpouring of zany comic invention. Librarians everywhere will empathise and perhaps rejoice.

Communion Town

by Sam Thompson (Fourth Estate; 280 pp.; \$29.99)

Communion Town, long-listed for the Man Booker Prize, is the debut novel of Oxford academic Sam Thompson. It is not a novel in the conventional sense. Its subtitle 'A City in Ten Chapters' highlights that it is a collection of short stories set in a strange, almost timeless, city, albeit with elements of London, New York, and Oxford.

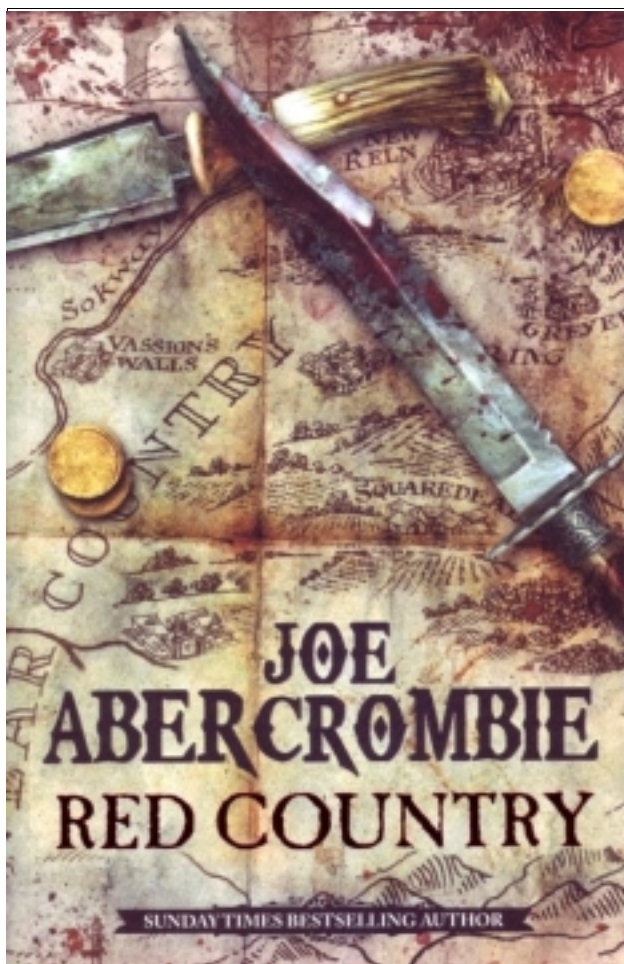
Thompson says, it is 'The story of a city which — like any city — looks different to each person who lives there. The book is full of narrative gaps into which the reader is invited or lured: it asks you to do a lot of the work of imagining and storytelling, because, in the end, when you read it the city belongs to you and its tales are yours to invent'.

Communion Town is marketed as mainstream literature, but has more in common with the speculative fiction of China Miéville, David Mitchell, and Italo Calvino. Thompson's stories have different narrators, topics, and linguistic styles, with characters as diverse and mysterious as the city's locales. It is a city where 'Everyone knows that once dark has fallen you don't go out again before morning'.

The first chapter follows the arrival of two asylum seekers, a woman and her son. The unknown Kafkaesque narrator, who tells their story, 'You won't have seen me, but I've kept a discreet eye on your progress', relates their struggle to adjust and survive in a literally 'monstrous' environment. In 'The Song of Serelight Fair', a young part-time musician, earning money by pulling a rickshaw, like the students who transport conference delegates around Oxford, has an affair with a rich girl student, but her intentions are decidedly Frankensteinian.

Other chapters include surreal parodies of Sherlock Holmes, in 'The Significant City of Lazarus Glass', and Philip Marlowe in 'Gallathea'. Thompson's private eye, who operates out of a rundown office with 'a defunct air-conditioning unit in the corner, waiting for the end of the world', is hired by a beautiful young woman to find her when she goes missing in the future. Thompson pastiches in style. A smile is as 'smooth as Vaseline', eyebrows are 'kissing caterpillars', and a bonfire produces 'gymnasts of smoke somersaulting upward'.

Thompson says he wanted to write in a mixture of genres, 'not only because as a reader I like everything from scrupulous naturalism to weird fantasy, but because that's what a city is like. It's a mosaic of stories that work



by differing sets of rules, and contradict one another even as they interrelate'. Thompson's endings, however, rarely follow the conventions of the genres, as the norm is soon replaced by the fantastic.

Communion Town is a challenging but always stimulating read. It's at times, almost, like a tutorial set for Thompson's brighter students, with its numerous literary references and subtexts. Its many voices ultimately combine, not always in tune, in a Gothic chorus, of considerable literary resonance.

Red Country

by Joe Abercrombie (Gollancz; 453 pp.; \$29.99)

British author Joe Abercrombie excels, like George R. R. Martin, in dark fantasy. *Red Country*, Abercrombie's sixth novel, is his fantasy take on and homage to the classic westerns. Dedicated to Clint Eastwood, there are echoes of *The Searchers* in the plot and *Deadwood* in the dark characterisation, violence, and swearing. A young girl, Shy South, and her step-father, Lamb, return home to find their farm destroyed and Shy's brother and sister kidnapped. Their quest for vengeance leads them to confront hidden secrets as well as hostile races, rugged terrain, and some familiar Abercrombie characters. *Red Country* is red-blooded fantasy at its strongest.

Grimm Tales for Young and Old

by Philip Pullman (Penguin; 406 pp.; \$40)

2012 marks the two hundredth anniversary of the publi-

cation of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's classic fairytale collection, which W. H. Auden described as one of 'the few indispensable, common-property books upon which western culture can be founded'.

Grimm Tales for Young and Old comprises Philip Pullman's 'clear as water' recasting of 50 stories from the original 200-story collection. Alongside familiar stories like 'Hansel and Gretel', 'Rapunzel', 'Snow White', and 'Little Red Riding Hood' are less well-known stories. Pullman writes, 'I chose the stories that appealed to me very strongly because they had a force, a strength and a structural integrity, like "The Robber Bridegroom", "The Three Snake Leaves" and "Hans-my-Hedgehog".'

Pullman explains in his introduction, 'I thought there was no point being fussy about the original text — that's not how the oral tradition works'. Pullman also includes lively re-workings of the short poems, which are notoriously difficult to translate. At the end of each story, Pullman also provides a short commentary on the background and history of each story, thus combining his recasting of the stories with scholarly settings.

Pullman controversially declares, 'There is no psychology in a fairy tale ... The characters have little interior life; their motives are clear and obvious.' Pullman, author of the award-winning 'His Dark Materials' trilogy, thus decries what he calls academic 'sub-Jungian ... ponderous interpretations' of the stories. Such interpretations are 'no more than seeing pleasing patterns in the sparks of a fire'.

To Pullman, 'A good tale moves with dreamlike speed from event to event, pausing only to say as much as is needed and no more.' Pullman's lucid and focused retelling of the stories follows that edict superbly.

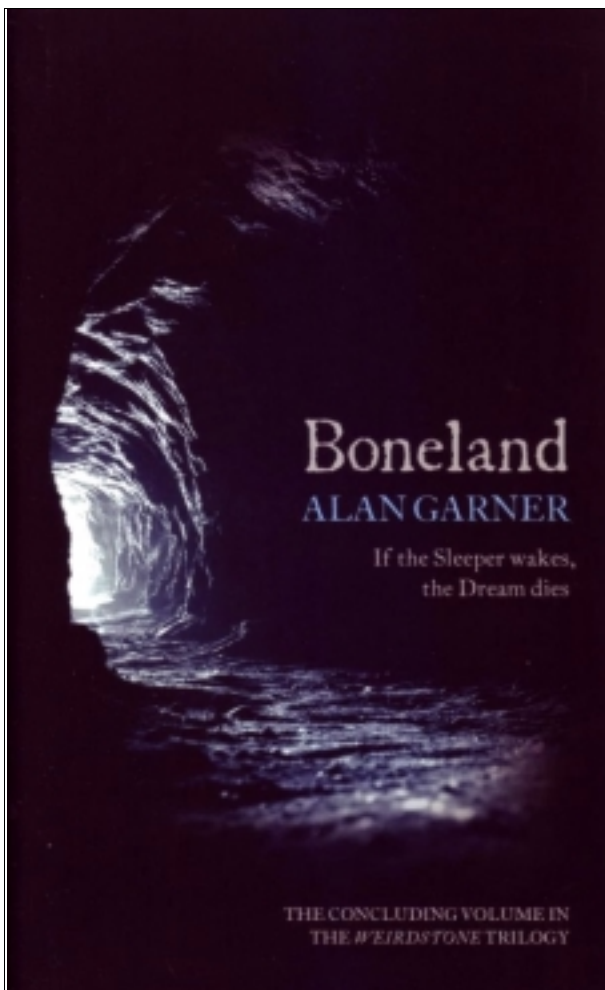
Boneland

by Alan Garner (Fourth Estate; 149 pp.; \$30)

Alan Garner's classic children's books *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) and *The Moon of Gomrath* (1963) now conclude, nearly 50 years later, in the decidedly adult novel *Boneland*. New readers will find it almost impossible to appreciate *Boneland* without reading the first two books, and even Garner fans may need to revisit them to make full sense of the newly titled 'Weirdstone trilogy'.

At the beginning of the trilogy, Colin and Susan, child twins, live at Alderley Edge, where Garner lives. Here reality intertwines with ancient myths and the seemingly magical. At the start of *Boneland*, Colin, now a renowned astrophysicist at Jodrell Bank, is so self-absorbed and emotionally crippled that he is the edge of a breakdown. He can remember everything that has happened to him since the age of 13, but has no memories of the years before. He thinks he once had a sister Susan and searches for her in the stars, particularly the Pleiades. On one level, *Boneland* is Colin's search for both for his sister and his sanity, while at the same time he is linked shaman-like to maintaining the balance of the world, as perhaps Susan does the universe.

Boneland's often cryptic and pared-back prose, obscure dialogue, and numerous allusions, notably to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, don't make it an easy read. *Boneland* is an intricate fictional labyrinth, elliptically exploring the human psyche, our relationship with the



landscape, and the connectivity of time. An adult novel, written nearly 50 years after the first two books for children were published, is an unusual way to bring a story to conclusion, but it is ultimately well worth the wait, even if re-readings will be needed to peel back the rich yet unsettling layers.

The City

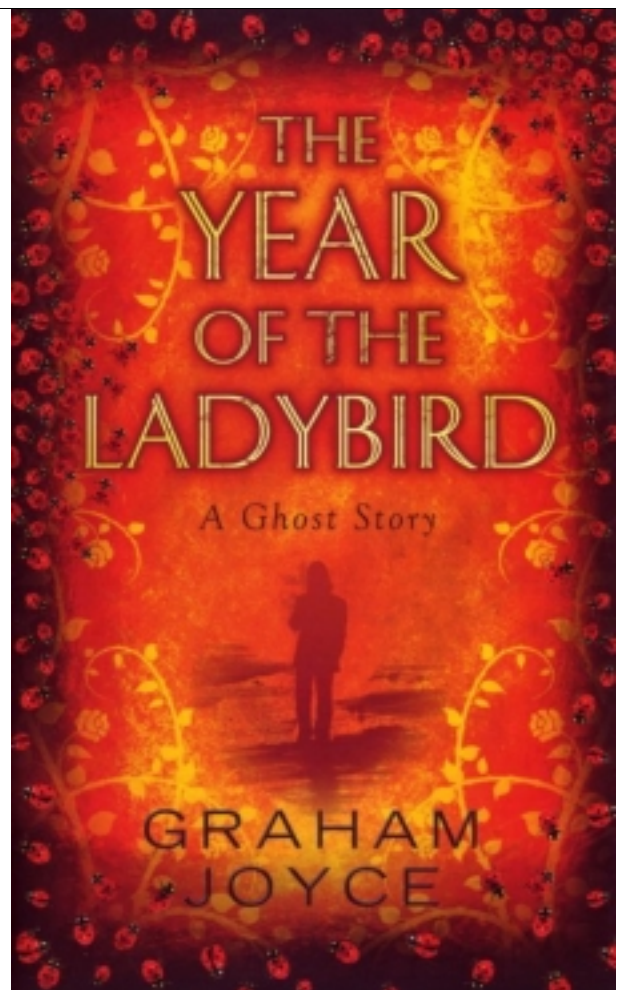
by Stella Gemmell (Bantam; 557 pp.; \$32.95)

Stella Gemmell, the wife of the late British fantasy writer David Gemmell, follows in his fighting fantasy tradition with her debut novel *The City*, depicted as a Gormenghast-type multilayered labyrinth. It is ruled despotically by a largely unseen emperor, the 'Immortal', whose hold on power must be challenged if a long war is to be stopped and an oppressed society relieved. In typical fantasy tradition, hopes initially focus on one man, a general fallen out of favour with the emperor. Gemmell, after a slow explanatory start, creates a believable complex city, with a dark underbelly, and a plotline in which honour, loyalty, revenge, and retribution are juxtaposed.

The Fall of Arthur

by J. R. R. Tolkien, edited by Christopher Tolkien (HarperCollins; 233 pp.; \$29.99)

Christopher Tolkien, now in his late 80s, has been mining his father's manuscript archive with great diligence and scholarship for the last three decades.



Christopher Tolkien argues that the 40-page Arthurian poem *The Fall of Arthur*, divided into five cantos, was written between 1931 and the end of 1934. Tolkien clearly intended to finish it, but work on *The Hobbit*, published in 1937, and later, *The Lord of the Rings* prevented its completion. Christopher Tolkien clearly regrets this fact, unusually chastising his father for 'one of the most grievous of his many abandonments'.

Humphrey Carpenter, in his 1981 Tolkien biography, commented that the poem does 'not touch on the Grail but began an individual rendering of the *Morte d'Arthur*, in which the king and Gawain go to war in "Saxon lands" but are summoned home by news of Mordred's treachery'.

Arthur is loyal to the old Britain, but his is 'a falling world'. Canto Five of the poem is headed 'Of the setting of the sun at Romeril'. Tolkien may here be reflecting on the setting of the sun on the Edwardian world in the trenches of World War I: 'The blood spending that he best treasured/the lives losing that he loved dearest /there friends should fall and the flower wither/... The death and darkness, doom of mortals.'

Apart from the intrinsic interest of the poem, it is the links to the *The Silmarillion* and the 'Lord of the Rings' legendarium that attract. Thus, with Arthur facing dangers from the Saxon raiders, these lines resonate with Middle-earth: 'The endless East in anger woke/and black thunder born in dungeons/under mountains of menace moved above them/Halting doubtful there on high saw they/wan horsemen wild in windy clouds/gray

and monstrous grimly riding/shadow-helmed to war, shapes disastrous'. No wonder Christopher Tolkien wanted *The Fall of Arthur* completed.

The Year of the Ladybird

by Graham Joyce (Gollancz; 265 pp.; \$29.99)

Graham Joyce's *The Year of the Ladybird*, subtitled *A Ghost Story*, sees a young student, David, employed in a Skegness holiday camp in the hot summer of 1976. This is no Hi-Di-Hi holiday camp, however, as undercurrents swirl of National Front racism, sexual intrigue, and corruption. David, who was abandoned at Skegness by his father at the age of three, is troubled by visions of a man and a young boy on the beach who then mysteriously disappear. It is clear that the past must be exorcised before David's future can be resolved. Joyce superbly transcends the boundaries between the normal and the supernatural.

Blood Song

by Anthony Ryan (Orbit; 582 pp.; \$29.99)

Blood Song, the first in Ryan's 'Raven's Shadow' trilogy, was initially self-published in 2011, selling 30,000 e-books, thus causing it to be picked for print publication. The first volume begins the story of an important prisoner of war, Vaelin, about to be executed in a quasi-European late medieval kingdom. As a young boy, Vaelin was recruited into a religious order where children are meant to fight and die for 'the Faith'. Vaelin's story, told to a chronicler, allows for a single coherent narrative voice. Ryan probes varying religious belief systems and wars in a strong fantasy debut, even if for some readers it may be the second coming.

The Long War

by Terry Pratchett and Stephen Baxter (Gollancz; 441 pp.; \$45)

The Long War is the second book in Pratchett and Baxter's 'Long Earth' series, in which innumerable parallel earths are accessed via a rather unscientific 'stepping' device. Reminiscent of Philip Jose Farmer's 'Riverworld' series, the books suffer in narrative tightness from the multiplicity of worlds and story lines, although they certainly don't lack for imaginative flair. Pratchett and Baxter explore humanity's vibrant, but rather disruptive, place in their universes, as well as satirising contemporary topics, especially religion and politics. Once again, the story line ends on a cliffhanger, with the series looking as if it will have a long publishing life on this particular Earth.

Whispers Underground

by Ben Aaronovitch (Gollancz; 418 pp.; \$29.95)

Harry Potter has added greatly to the popularity of the fantasy genre. *Whispers Underground* by Ben Aaronovitch is the third volume in a series originally marketed, 'What if Harry Potter grew up and joined the Fuzz?' This is a series best begun with the first book in order to follow

the development of the main characters, especially wizard-in-training Peter Grant and his sidekick, PC Leslie May, who fight supernatural evil in London's urban settings. The present volume sees many of the events taking place in London's underground system, with suitable Morlockian references. The novel's comic undertones are well juxtaposed with the realistic investigation of a VIP murder.

US fantasy

Mr Penumbra's 24-Hour Book Store

by Robin Sloan (Text; 288 pp.; \$29.99)

Robin Sloan is a 32-year-old former Twitter manager and self-described 'media inventor'. *Mr Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore*, which began as a 6000-word story published in the Kindle Store in 2009, has the potential to become a cult classic.

San Francisco web designer Clay Jannon has been made redundant from NewBagel, as a 'result of the great food-chain contraction that swept through America in the early twenty-first century, leaving bankrupt burger chains and shuttered sushi empires in its wake'. He takes on the graveyard night shift in a cluttered secondhand bookshop, run by the mysterious Mr Penumbra, and located next to a strip club in a seedy part of San Francisco.

Clay soon becomes aware that the main nighttime patrons are those who only borrow typographically encoded books from the 'Waybacklist' area of the shop. Intrigued, Clay enlists his high-tech friends, especially Kat, a data visualisation whiz at Google, to bring their technological expertise and company computing power to try to crack the codes. Their investigations lead them to 'The Fellowship of the Unbroken Spine', a 500-year-old secret society of black-robed bibliophiles, who meet in New York. The Fellowship is dedicated to unlocking the codex vitae left by printer Aldus Manutius in the late fifteenth century. Maybe, just maybe, it will reveal the secret of immortality.

Sloan has said in an interview that one of his aims was to link new and old technologies, and that the book will simply be replaced by new media, rather everything 'all piles up together in a big chaotic colorful heap'. Clay's quest is similarly colourful and delightfully chaotic, as Sloan leads the reader along mysterious bookish and digital pathways.

Mr Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore is an inventive Da Vinci Code bibliophilic romp. Do visit Mr Penumbra's 'tall skinny bookstore' and enjoy Robin Sloan's intriguing biblioverse.

Vampires in the Lemon Grove

by Karen Russell (Chatto & Windus; 245 pp.; \$32.95)

Vampires in the Lemon Grove, Karen Russell's second short story collection, follows her Pulitzer Prize-nominated debut novel, *Swamplandia!* (2011). Russell's subject matter is not easy to describe. Some critics have called her

writing magic realism, but it's much quirkier and darker, as reality unravels in stories filtered through dreams and terrors. In many ways, her short stories resemble those of Australian writers such as Margo Lanagan, Lucy Sussex, and Canberra's Kaaron Warren.

Russell's eight stories in *Vampires* are superbly eclectic. The title story follows two reformed vampires in Sorrento attempting to assuage their 'throbbing fangs' with the juice of lemons, 'a vampire's analgesic'. Russell thought her story was 'going to be a funny, and maybe pretty obvious, parable about addiction — but then the love story part of it, that was a surprise to me'.

In 'The Barn at the End of Our Term', 11 former American presidents are reincarnated as horses and bicker about their predicament and presidencies. Woodrow Wilson, for example, still believes he can restore peace to the world, while Dwight Eisenhower is in complete denial, believing, 'the Secret Service has found some way to hide me here', until he can 'return to my body and resume governance of this country'.

'Reeling for Empire' features another dramatic transformation, one in which women workers in a turn-of-the-century Japanese silk factory mutate into human silkworms. Russell here reflects on the tyranny of sweatshops and how female individuality can be suppressed in society.

'The Seagull Army Descends on Strong Beach, 1979' begins as a simple tale of teenage angst. This dramatically changes when Nal, 'fourteen and looking for excuses to have extreme feelings about himself', finds a tree hollow in which seagulls, 'cosmic scavengers', have deposited artefacts from the future.

In the longest and most powerful story, 'The New Veterans', Beverley, a lonely middle-aged massage therapist, finds her life dramatically changed when she treats an Iraq war veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder. Her massage unlocks his huge back tattoo, depicting a 2009 'death day' in the Iraq war. The veteran seems to be recovering, but is it because Beverley has increasingly become involved in that day's traumatic events? She may be able to change history, but will it be at a cost to herself?

Russell's short stories, full of cathartic magic and elegant prose, confirm her as one of America's best young writers.

Magician's End

by Raymond Feist (Harper; 638 pp.; \$39.99)

Magician's End, the concluding volume of Feist's best-selling 'Riftwar' fantasy cycle, began with *Magician* in 1983. Since then the series has sold over 15 million copies of 30 books, as Feist follows a young boy, Pug, and his personal and magical growth. The narrative quality has varied over the series, but the concluding volume will not disappoint the myriad of Feist fans, even though too many characters are reclaimed to reach the end-game. Feist says, Pug 'fully appreciates what must be done and the sacrifices required to end the struggle ... with the forces behind all the madness inflicted on Pug and his allies over the years'.

Alif The Unseen

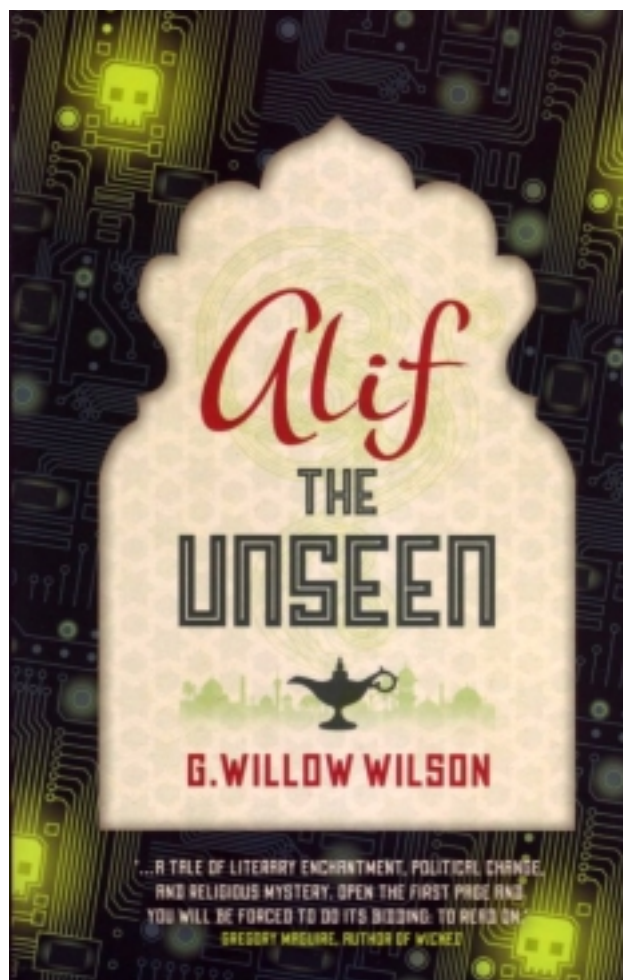
by G. Willow Wilson (Allen & Unwin; 433 pp.; \$29.99)

G. Willow Wilson, an American-born journalist, has lived for a number of years in the Middle East and has converted to Islam. In *Alif the Unseen*, she provides an intriguing mixture of fantasy, mystery, magic, and the social networks of the Arab Spring. Alif, a young Arab-Indian computer hacker, forced to flee the security forces, takes refuge with the world-weary Djinn, who informs him that his old book *The Thousand and One Days* contains 'Secret knowledge disguised as stories'. Wilson, steeped in the culture of the Middle East, provides an unusual and intriguing fantasy narrative within realistic political settings.

A Memory of Light

by Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson (Orbit; \$35)

Another fantasy blockbuster, both in sales and size, comes in Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson's *A Memory of Light*. Jordan's mammoth 'The Wheel of Time' series was left unfinished when Jordan died in 2007, although he left notes with his widow. Sanderson has used these in *The Gathering Storm* (2009), *Towers of Midnight* (2010), and now the fourteenth and final book, *A Memory of Light*, which has rocketed into global bestseller lists. This last novel needs to be seen in the context of the whole, but Jordan fans will know what to expect, with





almost incessant epic battles, whose intensity is occasionally overwhelming.

Obsidian and Blood

by Aliette de Bodard (Angry Robot; \$19.99)

Obsidian and Blood by Aliette de Bodard is an omnibus volume bringing together her dark fantasy novels set in the Aztec Empire: *Servant of the Underworld*, *Harbinger of the Storm*, and *Master of the House of Darts*. The main character, Acatl, the 'High Priest for the Dead' in the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan, has to maintain a blood-thirsty balance in this world and the next. Strong characterisation and attention to historical detail make this a most unusual fantasy series, where the struggle for ultimate power is a constant theme.

Throne of the Crescent Moon

by Saladin Ahmed (Gollancz; \$29.99)

Saladin Ahmed's debut novel *Throne of the Crescent Moon* mixes an Arabian Nights theme with supernatural mystery in another exotic location. Dr Adoulla Makhslood, an ageing 'ghul-hunter', assisted by his young, naïve, and conservative assistant Raseed, reluctantly investigates a murder in the city of Dhamsawaat, which drags them into the dangerous politics of the Crescent Moon Kingdoms. A traditional fantasy plot is enlivened by the characterisation of the grumpy Dr Adoulla.

Australian fantasy

The Year's Best Australian Fantasy and Horror

edited by Liz Grzyb and Talie Helene
(Ticonderoga; \$35)

Good Australian storytelling and writing can be found in abundance in *The Year's Best Australian Fantasy and Horror*, edited by Liz Grzyb and Talie Helene. This latest compilation brings together 32 fantasy and horror short stories from 2011, a total of over 150,000 words. Authors include Canberra's Maxine McArthur with 'The Soul of the Machine' and Kaaron Warren with 'All You Can Do Is Breathe'. Other contributors include the late Sara Douglass, Lucy Sussex, and Simon Brown. The only criticism of this well-selected collection is that fantasy and horror fans often constitute different reader segments. Nonetheless, the size of the collection and its valuable critical summations will provide enough for the fans of both genres.

Dreaming of Zhou Gong

by Traci Harding (Harper; 601 pp.; \$29.95)

Australian author Traci Harding has achieved considerable sales success with her historical fantasy novels, expounded in a direct narrative style. Harding's latest trilogy, of which *Dreaming* is the first volume, is set circa 1046 BC in China, 'before any of the major religions had taken hold there — pagan China — as it were'. The noble Ji brothers are keen to bring down the bloodthirsty Shang regime, but they need help from the Wu, a female shaman holy order. The enigmatic and beautiful Hudan and her 'tigress sister' Huxin join forces, but they all soon learn that they will have more dangers to confront than simply the Emperor.

Winter Be My Shield

by Jo Spurrier (Harper; 458 pp.; \$29.99)

Australian author Jo Spurrier makes her debut with *Winter Be My Shield*, the first book of the 'Children of the Black Sun' trilogy. The main character Sierra is enslaved by the evil mage Kell. Sierra derives her power from the suffering of others, such as when Kell deliberately tortures prisoners. When Sierra escapes from her captivity and flees across a wintry countryside, she has to come to terms with the origins of her power and what price she is willing to pay for her freedom. Spurrier, in a promising fantasy debut with a suitable cliffhanger ending, does not shirk the dark side in order to pose general questions about repression and prejudice in contemporary society.

The Shadow Heir

by Katie Taylor (Harper; 408 pp.; \$29.99)

Canberra author Katie Taylor's *The Shadow Heir* is the first volume in her new trilogy, 'The Risen Sun'. Taylor says, 'It's intended for someone who read the first three books [her 'Fallen Moon' trilogy] but you can start here.' Taylor's trademark griffins again feature in a story that

follows Laela Redguard, left homeless after the death of her foster father, and her attempt to find her place in the Northern Land. Laela is a feisty character, albeit with an unusual vocabulary, whose 'rude, coarse, brave and unimaginative' and non-magical attributes will certainly appeal to Taylor's steadily increasing fanbase.

Stormdancer

by Jay Kristoff (Tor; 451 pp.; \$29.99)

Griffins, aka 'thunder-tigers' feature in Australian author's (Jay Kristoff) debut *Stormdancer*, the first book in the 'Lotus War' series. A young girl, Yukiko, confronts the powerful Shogun empire and, in the classic tradition of fantasy, finds she has a hidden power, which may enable her to shake the empire's foundations. Kristoff's feudal dystopian steampunk world, with its decaying toxic environment and political oppression, is another imaginative fantasy framework.

Vengeance

by Ian Irvine (Orbit; 535 pp.; \$32.99)

Rebellion

by Ian Irvine (Orbit; 480 pp.; \$32.99)

Australian author Ian Irvine is well known for his fantasy and SF novels. His latest trilogy, 'The Tainted Realm', has seen two volumes published in quick succession,

Vengeance and *Rebellion*. Irvine reflects, 'I've long been fascinated by the ways that seizing or maintaining political power can undermine the legitimacy of a realm. For instance in Australia, the current Gillard government is constantly being white-anted because of the way its previous prime minister was overthrown. Malcolm Fraser's government 30 years ago also suffered from the way the previous Whitlam government was deposed.'

He thus portrays 'a nation, scarred by a deep sense of national guilt about its own origins, that now faces a resurgent enemy it has no idea how to fight', juxtaposing the brutally colonised nation of Cythe and their oppressors the Hightspallers. Irvine establishes his settings in considerable detail, but once his two main characters, Tali, an escaped slave girl, and Rix, a disgraced heir, come together, the pace picks up in their quest to seek justice.

Canadian fantasy

Among Others

by Jo Walton (Tom Doherty; \$24)

Jo Walton's multiple-award-winning fantasy novel is *Among Others*. Walton says, 'It's a fantasy novel, but it's drawing on autobiographical material.' Walton's main character and narrator, Morweena, known as Mori, is a young disabled Welsh girl at boarding school in the late 1970s, but here we are far from Harry Potter territory.

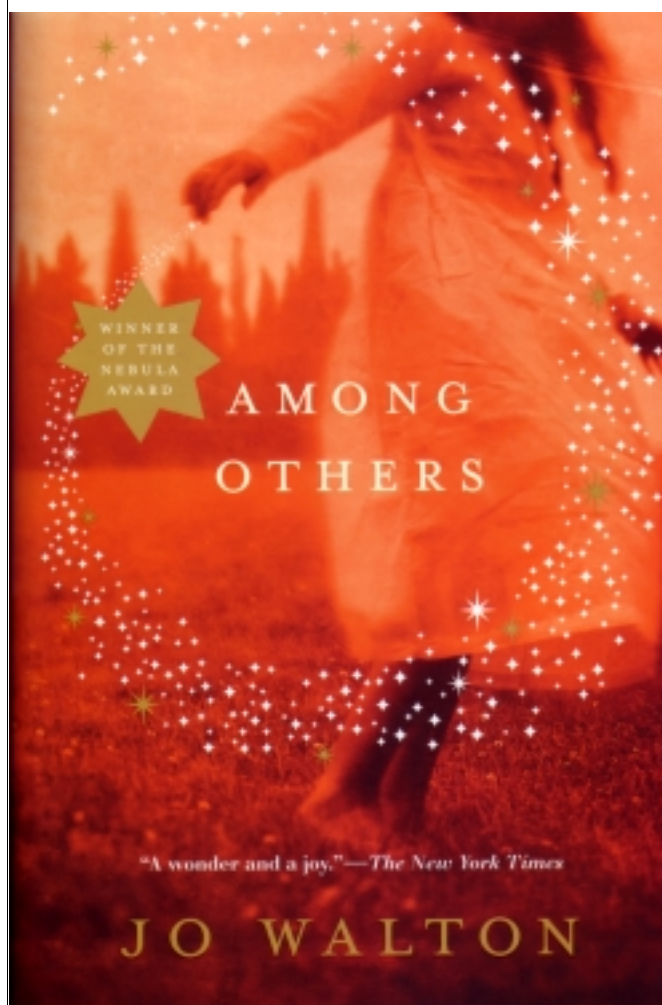
Mori, crippled in the car accident in which she lost her twin sister Morween, might or might not be able to see fairies, but it's the real world that takes centre stage. Mori, estranged from her family, takes refuge in books, not least SF and fantasy. This allows Walton to give an appreciative overview of the classic texts of the genres, while at the same time providing a moving and enthralling account of a young girl finding her identity in two worlds.

French fantasy

The Iron King

by Maurice Druon (Harper; \$29.99)

Publishers have been quick to capitalise on George R. R. Martin's global popularity, not only reprinting his early SF books, but also reprinting works that purport to be in the 'Game of Thrones' tradition. Thus, Maurice Druon's *The Iron King* has a quote from Martin stating that it is 'the original Game of Thrones'. *The Iron King*, the first of the seven-part French 'Accursed Kings' series, was first published in English in 1956. Martin says, the story line of fourteenth-century French 'Iron kings and strangled queens, battles and betrayals, lies and lust' reveals that the 'Starks and the Lannisters have nothing on the Capets and Plantagenets'.



Alternate history

The House of Rumour

by Jake Arnott (Sceptre; 403 pp.; \$29.99)

Jake Arnott is well known for his crime novels such as *The Long Firm*. In *The House of Rumour*, he moves to SF, as it's 'all about speculation'. Arnott's speculation is indeed innovative, creating an alternative history of the twentieth century, which features, among others, Rudolph Hess, Ian Fleming, and Aleister Crowley, as well as the Tarot Arcana and quantum physics. The novel begins in 2011, when an ageing SF writer reads an obituary of a former British Intelligence officer who was involved in the interrogation of Nazi leader Hess. From this base, Arnott launches an often bewildering, but always absorbing, journey across the twentieth century, both real and fictional.

Dominion

by C. J. Sansom (Mantle; 593 pp.; \$27.99)

British bestselling author C. J. Sansom has achieved almost Hilary Mantel status with his Matthew Shardlake 'Tudor' series. In *Dominion*, he has decided to take a break from the sixteenth century by tackling the 'what-if' scenario of Britain making peace with Germany in 1940. Other authors, such as Len Deighton with *SS-GB* and Robert Harris with *Fatherland*, have explored that area; the World War II alternative history bar has been set high.

Lord Halifax, who becomes Prime Minister in May 1940 instead of Churchill, takes Britain out of the War. By 1952, Britain is a grey, increasingly authoritarian state, subservient to Germany under a Hitler suffering from Parkinson's disease. Germany is still fighting Russia in Siberia but America did not enter the war and has retreated into isolationism. Sansom writes, 'There was no blitz, no Attlee government or welfare state. The world I have created is, I hope, recognisably the early 50s, but warped and twisted and impoverished.'

In 1952, Churchill is in hiding and the titular leader of a resistance movement against Prime Minister Lord Beaverbrook and Sir Oswald Mosley, the Home Secretary. The reimagining of the futures of real political figures is fascinating, although Sansom has come under some criticism in England for his depiction of Beaverbrook as a complicit Prime Minister and Enoch Powell as a pro-Nazi cabinet minister, a depiction that belies their actual World War II efforts.

Sansom tells his story through his central character, David Fitzgerald, a senior civil servant in the Dominions Office dealing with the old British Empire. David naturally keeps secret his half-Jewishness as antisemitism grows in Britain. He is slowly drawn into the resistance movement, becoming involved in the need to gain and protect secret nuclear information held by a former university friend, now imprisoned. David slowly falls under suspicion from a ruthless Gestapo officer, Gunther Hoth, and as the tension mounts, Sansom juxtaposes the fate of David with that of Britain itself.

Dominion is clearly meant also to reflect on current

events in Britain. Sansom says, 'As I wrote the book, the evils of politics based on race and nationalism — its dominant theme — came to the fore again in Europe ... and many people responded, as they had in the 30s, by turning to nationalist solutions.'

Sansom's lengthy focus on David enables reader empathy, but does slow down the narrative pace, while the MacGuffin nuclear secrets plot device is stretched to its limits and lacks conviction, given German probable nuclear developments by 1952. *Dominion*, however, despite its flaws, is a worthy addition to the alternate history fictional corpus and will appeal to a wide range of genre readers.

Osama

by Lavie Tidhar (Solaris; 302 pp.; \$24.99)

South African author Lavie Tidhar explores the post-9/11 global subconscious in *Osama*, which mixes alternative history and crime noir. Joe, a Chandlerian private eye living in an alternate Laos, is hired by a young attractive woman to locate the author of the *Osama* vigilante series of pulp novels, which are set in a world like ours. Joe's travels to Paris and London naturally soon bring danger. Tidhar mixes historical fact and fiction as the two worlds begin to intersect and *Osama* becomes increasingly Kafkaesque and Dickeyan, reflected in Joe's comment, 'How do you know what's real?' *Osama* is imaginative and challenging as it probes the nature of terrorism and human aggression.

The Emperor of All Things

by Paul Witcover (Bantam; 448 pp.; \$32.95)

Paul Witcover's *The Emperor of All Things*, the first volume of a two-book fantasy, has already drawn literary comparisons with the novels of Neal Stephenson and Susanna Clarke. It is 1758, with England in the midst of the Seven Years War with France. A potentially devastating secret weapon, a watch activated by blood, could change the face of the war and even time itself. Daniel Quare, a young Regulator working for the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers, is dragged into a 'clockophony' of adventures in two worlds. Witcover's penchant for historical detail and metaphysical musings often slows the narrative, but Witcover has time on his side in more ways than one.

Wolfhound Century

by Peter Higgins (Gollancz; 303 pp.; \$29.95)

Peter Higgins' debut novel *Wolfhound Century* is set in a totalitarian state resembling post-Bolshevik Russia, but it's also one dramatically affected by the impact of dying 'angels', who have tumbled from space 'out of the night sky like ripened fruit'. *Wolfhound Century* begins a trilogy that transcends genres, mixing alternate history, dark fantasy, SF, and crime noir. Provincial detective Vissarion Lom is sent to investigate terrorism in the capital, Mirgorod, which he soon discovers to be far more corrupt than he ever imagined. *Wolfhound Century* interweaves the fantastic of golems and sentient rain with the

realpolitik of gulags, so it's unfortunate that this first book concludes in narrative mid air.

Plan D

by Simon Urban (Harvill; 514 pp.; \$32.95)

German author Simon Urban's *Plan D* evokes an alternative world close to that of the present day. Urban's Berlin of October 2011 is one in which the Berlin Wall never fell and the German Democratic Republic still exists, although with increasing economic problems and political oppression. When a man is found dead hanging from a gas pipeline, Martin Wegener, a middle-aged detective from the East German Volkspolizei, is delegated to investigate. Initial impressions are that it's a Stasi victim, but Wegener, working with a West German colleague, soon realises that the issues are much deeper and that greater political issues are at play.

Plan D is less about the crime and more about the political backdrop and increasing tensions between the two Germanys. Urban's world-weary main character tries to maintain his personal values within the corruption of a superbly detailed GDR regime. With an impressive mix of alternate history and dystopian world building, Urban scores an A with *Plan D*.

The Windsor Faction

by D. J. Taylor (Chatto & Windus; 373 pp.; \$32.95)

'What if' alternate history books are increasingly popular. Classics that provide alternative scenarios of Britain and Germany in World War II include Len Deighton's *SS:GB*, Robert Harris's *Fatherland*, and C. J. Sansom's *Dominion*.

Now comes D. J. Taylor's *The Windsor Faction*. Mrs Wallis Simpson dies after an appendectomy operation in December 1936, so King Edward VIII remains on the throne. Edward finds solace in the 'King's Party', who encourage Edward's pro-Nazi sympathies as war looms with Germany.

Taylor interweaves real people into his fictional narrative, in the process superbly capturing the political, social, and literary undercurrents of the time. Taylor's non-fiction books, such as *Orwell* and *Bright Young People: The Rise and Fall of a Generation 1918–1940*, provide appropriate literary and historical references to underpin his narrative.

The Windsor Faction begins as Cynthia Kirkpatrick, a young upper-class woman, returns home from Ceylon and takes a job at the arts magazine *Duration*, clearly modelled on Cyril Connolly's magazine *Horizon*. She develops a relationship with a real historical figure, Tyler Kent, a cipher clerk in the US Embassy, with links to extreme right-wing figures, notably Captain Archibald Ramsay, whose real-life antisemitic 'Right Club' is transformed into Taylor's 'King's Party' faction.

Meanwhile, the journalist and novelist Beverley Nichols drafts a pacifist 'King's Speech' for Edward, which is delivered at Christmas 1939, much to the consternation of the government. Taylor's depiction of Nichols' actual historical demi-monde, particularly of

London gay society, is effectively juxtaposed against the official palace protocol.

Soon after her return to England, Cynthia is encouraged by an MI5 girlfriend to report on the activities of the pro-Nazi aristocracy, particularly the Bannister family, whom she knew in Ceylon. Cynthia's attempt to infiltrate the Bannister country house set leads to a dramatic conclusion, with links to real events in May 1940. The secret Anglo-German country house intrigue brings back memories of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*.

The Windsor Faction cleverly blends fact and fiction in an engrossing read. It's Taylor-made to become another classic in the alternate World War II genre.

British horror

The Quickening

by Julie Myerson (Hammer; 278 pp.; \$24.95)

Julie Myerson's *The Quickening* follows Helen Dunmore's *The Greatcoat* and Jeanette Winterson's *The Daylight Gate* in the new Hammer horror series. Myerson's previous novels have featured characters with apparent delusions and hallucinations, so a story about a pregnant woman apparently haunted on a Caribbean honeymoon fits easily into both her creative and the Hammer frameworks.

Myerson has said, 'Ghosts seem to be about death but they're actually about life. I see them as projections of the things that have happened to us or even, sometimes, that will happen to us. For a writer, they're a perfect way of exploring human impulses, thought, feeling and the way our actions can linger and reverberate, affecting ourselves and others'.

The Quickening begins as newlywed and pregnant Rachel finds that her already controlling husband Dan has booked their honeymoon in Antigua without telling her. A horror subtext of the book might well be one of when you realise you have married the wrong person. As soon as the couple arrive at their luxury resort, strange events begin to occur and accelerate after a waitress warns Rachel to leave the island.

There are plot echoes of *Rosemary's Baby* here. The reader is left unsure as to whether Rachel is delusional in what she apparently sees, such as a ghostly figure with 'black dirt on its hands. It had come to the island looking for her'. And what of the motivations of her husband, Dan? Is Rachel correct to be suspicious of him or is he simply concerned about an increasingly unstable wife? As Rachel becomes increasingly paranoid, her only comfort derives from the movements of her baby, a link to the quickening of the title.

When two female staff members are murdered at the luxury resort, the sense of darkness increases, culminating in an abrupt and shocking conclusion. Overall, Myerson's horror creativity falls below that of the Dunmore and Winterson books, but Myerson's short crisp sentences maintain the narrative pace. Overall *The Quickening* certainly ticks the horror boxes, although it may be best to leave it behind before that next trip to a holiday resort.

The Collector of Lost Things

by Jeremy Page (Little Brown; 373 pp.; \$29.99)

British author Jeremy Page says that *The Collector of Lost Things*, set in the middle of the nineteenth century, is 'about obsession, delusion and the environment in an age when the environment was not yet an issue'. Eliot Saxby, a young researcher, is commissioned to investigate the extinction of the Great Auk. He sails in 1845 to the Arctic with a captain and crew, who symbolise the social issues of the time. Saxby is constantly troubled by his part in the earlier drowning death of a young girl. This memory haunts him as he meets on board the beautiful Clara. The present and the past then interact in a dramatic and poignant conclusion.

The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror 23

edited by Stephen Jones (Robinson; 589 pp.; \$12.99)

The latest volume of this now standard anthology mixes its fourteen stories from 2011 with a definitive survey of the horror field. Standouts include Swedish bestselling author John Ajvide Lindqvist's 'The Music of Bengt Karlsson, Murderer', in which a young widower and his son become embroiled, through a piano's notes, with a deceased child killer. Robert Silverberg's Kiplingesque ghost story 'Smithers and the Ghosts of the Thar' sees two British surveyors literally timed out in a far province of nineteenth-century India. Evangeline Walton's post-humously published 'They That Have Wings' follows three soldiers who slowly realise their Cretan hilltop refuge in World War II is far from a safe haven.

Reviver

by Seth Patrick (Macmillan; 409 pp.; \$29.99)

Seth Patrick, an Oxford mathematics graduate, makes a solid multigenre fiction debut in *Reviver*, although it would have benefited from firmer editing. 'Revivers' are able to bring back the recently dead, but only for a very short time. Patrick realistically depicts a near-future society in which reviver evidence can be used to convict murderers. Jonah Miller works as a Reviver in the US Forensic Revival Service, where emotional burnout is common. Miller not only faces earthly threats, including from fanatical religious 'afterlifers', but also from a dark force he finds lurking in one of his revivals, which will ultimately threaten the whole of humanity.

The String Diaries

by Stephen Lloyd Jones (Headline; 406 pp.; \$29.99)

Lloyd Jones is the director of a major London media agency. *The String Diaries*, his debut novel, opens dramatically with Hannah Wilde, a young woman, driving to a remote Welsh farmhouse with her badly wounded husband and her nine-year-old daughter. Hannah and her family are fighting off a mysterious shape-shifting force that has pursued her family for five generations. The narrative is divided between Wales,

Oxford in the 1970s, and Hungary in the nineteenth century, where Hannah's family's troubles began with the supernatural 'Hosszu Eleték'. Jones' characterisation lends reader empathy to Hannah's plight, but the justification for the sustained pursuit and cruelty is less convincing.

Black Sheep

by Susan Hill (Chatto; 135 pp.; \$19.95)

Susan Hill attributes her greatest fiction success, *The Woman in Black*, subsequently transformed into successful stage and film versions, to compiling 'a list of ingredients ... such as with a recipe'. Hill now creates a dark chilling recipe from ingredients within a grim northern England mining village in the early twentieth century. *Black Sheep* follows the tragic story of the Howker family, whose men live and die in the local mine, and whose women are trapped in domestic subservience. The village, divided into Lower, Middle, and Upper Terrace, is almost a version of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Hill's cold horror stems from the historical realities of working class life.



US horror

The Accursed

by Joyce Carol Oates (Fourth Estate; 669 pp.; \$29.99)

Joyce Carol Oates is known not only for the quality of her writing, but also for her prodigious output. *The Accursed* is set on her own Princeton University campus in 1905 and 1906. Oates's novels often include elements of the Gothic and the supernatural, and this one has these in spades. With the bigoted Woodrow Wilson as its head, Princeton's rich white community is afflicted by a mysterious 'curse'. Oates's vampire, one of many campus incursions, is intended as 'representative of class struggle', while elsewhere Oates highlights racism and the subjugation of women. Overall, *The Accursed* suffers from too many sub-plots, but there's no denying its verve and imaginative flair.

The Demonologist

by Andrew Pyper (Orion; 285 pp.; \$29.99)

The Demonologist, Andrew Pyper's seventh novel, sees Columbia University's Professor David Ullman, an expert in demonic literature and John Milton, summoned to Venice to investigate an apparent occult phenomenon. Separated from his wife, he takes his young daughter Tess with him. When Tess falls to her death in a Venetian canal, shouting 'find me', the scene is set for a long quest. Ullman finds clues in Milton's *Paradise Lost* that lead across America to a confrontation with the 'Unnamed', a member of the Satanic Council. Ullman battles demons, both personal and literal, in a book clearly aimed at the Dan Brown *Da Vinci Code* market segment.

NOS4R2

by Joe Hill (Gollancz; 692 pp; \$29.99)

The genes have it. Joe Hill is the son of Stephen King, and the greatest compliment to pay *NOS4R2* is to say that it rivals his father's best work. Vic, a young girl, can access an alternate world. Unfortunately her nemesis, the evil Charlie Manx, can also cross over to what he calls Christmasland, where children he kidnaps find no good cheer awaits them. Vic's struggle takes its toll, especially when, later in her life, her son is kidnapped by Manx, ensuring a contest to the death. Reader empathy with Vic's plight and her gradual loss of innocence is quickly established through Hill's strong characterisation.

The Abominable

by Dan Simmons (Sphere; 663 pp.; \$29.99)

American author Dan Simmons, with 27 novels to his credit, continues his recent literary horror output with *The Abominable*. It's June 1925, a year after Everest climbers Mallory and Irvine have disappeared. Simmons' main character Richard Deacon sets out a year later on Everest with his team on another search. A major narrative

problem is that the first half of *The Abominable* moves at a glacial pace, with overlong scene setting and a plethora of mountaineering detail. Simmons' structural climb improves when he brings together the mysterious yeti, Nazi intrigues, a mountainous fight to the death, and a final twist involving the 1940 Battle of Britain.

Parasite

By Mira Grant (Orbit; 505 pp.; \$19.99)

Mira Grant, the pseudonym of American writer Seanan McGuire, begins a new series with *Parasite*. Sickness and disease have been significantly reduced in 2027 America after a large medical corporation, SymboGen, develops the 'intestinal bodyguard', a genetically engineered tapeworm. The main character, Sal, is revived after a car crash, but retains no memory of her previous life. She finds that SymboGen is concealing the true facts of a mysterious sleepwalking sickness affecting tens of thousands of people. Are the parasites getting a life of their own? Zombies anyone? Grant's original intriguing premise is let down by routine plot development and characterisation.

Swedish horror

Let the Old Dreams Die

by John Ajvide Lindqvist (Text; 453 pp.; \$29.99)

Swedish author John Ajvide Lindqvist gained international bestseller success with *Let The Right One In* (2004), subsequently made into two successful films. The title story of this collection *Let the Old Dreams Die* tangentially continues the story of Oskar and Eli from that novel. A more direct follow-up comes in 'The Final Processing', featuring the zombies from Lindqvist's *Handling The Undead* (2010). 'Border' follows a customs officer with a mysterious gift for detecting smugglers, while in 'Village on the Hill', a mysterious almost Lovecraftian force absorbs the residents of an apartment block. Lindqvist's dark haunting stories, blending horror with an examination of social issues, confirm his title of the Swedish Stephen King.

Young adult

Time Between Us

by Tamara Ireland Stone (Doubleday; 306 pp.; \$21.95)

Time Between Us is an appealing time travel Young Adult debut from Stone, an experienced Silicon Valley public relations professional. Anna, an Evanston high school senior in 1995, is attracted to Bennett, who turns out to be a time traveller from 2012. Bennett is both a baby and a seventeen-year-old in 1995, but don't try to look for an explanation of time travel physics here. Stone writes through Anna's first-person voice. Reader empathy with Anna deepens as her relationship with Bennett grows, and we explore the quandary as to how to sustain their

love over time. *Time Between Us* will appeal to fans of Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife*.

Acid

by Emma Pass (Corgi; 431 pp.; \$17.95)

British librarian Emma Pass's *Acid*, set in a future dystopian and Orwellian Britain, is a strong Young Adult debut novel. Pass says, 'What if you were accused of a crime you couldn't really remember committing?' This is the case for 17-year-old Jenna, who has been imprisoned by ACID (the Agency for Crime Investigation and Defence) for the alleged murder of her parents. Jenna, a decidedly kick-ass main character, is rescued from her high security prison by a rebel group and embarks on a long struggle to clear her name and to topple the government.

Scarlet in the Snow

by Sophie Masson (Random; 318 pp.; \$17.95)

Australian author Sophie Masson's young adult fantasy *Scarlet in the Snow* is inspired by two Russian fairytales, *The Scarlet Flower*, the Russian version of *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Fenist the Falcon*. Masson calls her novel a 'fairytale thriller'. That certainly turns out to be the case. Her feisty heroine Natasha faces challenges from both a witch and the traditional encounter with the 'beast', who demands retribution for destroying his red rose. Masson's imaginatively constructed Russian world provides a rich backdrop to an enchanting mix of magic, romance, and adventure, with Natasha's courage and patience bringing just reward in her journey from adolescence to adulthood.

The Screaming Staircase

by Jonathan Stroud (Doubleday; 453 pp.; \$24.95)

The Screaming Staircase, from bestselling British fantasy author Jonathan Stroud, is an engaging Young Adult novel. We are in an alternative England, where ghosts, with a literally deadly touch, are commonplace. Only the young, with their 'psychic sensitivity', organised into ghostbusting firms, can defeat them. Lockwood and Co comprises the young Anthony Lockwood, his friend George, as 'handsome as a freshly opened tub of margarine', and the narrator Lucy, who is getting fed up with both of them. Their not terribly successful firm gets one last chance when commissioned to exorcise England's most haunted house.

Graphic novels

Fortunately the Milk

by Neil Gaiman (Bloomsbury; 145 pp.; \$17.99)

Cult author Neil Gaiman aims at a young market with *Fortunately, the Milk*, a graphic novella, whose appeal also owes much to the illustrations of Chris Riddell. When a mother goes off to a conference, she tells her husband

not to forget to buy milk for the children's breakfast. Naturally he does. En route to the shops, he is captured by green globby aliens and disturbs the space time continuum. While time stands relatively still for the children, their father's journey includes meeting 'wumpires', a pirate queen, dinosaur galactic police, and Splott, the god of people with short funny names. It's all very silly but nonetheless delightful and inventive.

Steampunk H. G. Wells

illustrated by Zdenko Basic (Running Press; 408 pp.; \$34.99)

Zdenko Basic is a noted illustrator of books, especially for children. He has recently taken to illustrating classic novels and short stories in 'steampunk' style. The steampunk subgenre of SF takes technological aspects of the nineteenth century (the steam) and mixes it with elements of social and political upheaval (the punk). Wells's unabridged tales of time travel and scientific romance, *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, and *The Country of the Blind*, lend themselves superbly to Basic's full-page colour illustrations of flying machines, industrial settings, and strange creatures.

Raven Girl

by Audrey Niffenegger (Jonathan Cape; 80 pp.; \$39.95)

Audrey Niffenegger, whose novel *The Time Traveler's Wife* (2003) sold over seven million copies worldwide, has now returned to her graphic design origins in *Raven Girl*. The basis of a recent ballet at London's Royal Opera House, it tells, with 20 full-page aquatint illustrations, the poignant and occasionally dark story of a postman who falls in love with a raven. Their child, a raven-girl trapped in a human body, grows up caught between two worlds, until a possible solution emerges from an unlikely source. In a haunting and ultimately unsettling book, Niffenegger confirms that the best fairytales are full of transformations.

Memory Palace

by Hari Kunzru (V&A Publishing; 111 pp.; \$27.99)

Hari Kunzru's vision of a future dystopian London, inspired by the global financial crisis, was commissioned as part of a Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition, intertwining the written word and visual interpretation. Kunzru's post-apocalyptic world, devastated by climate change, has all recorded history lost after the 'Magnetization'. The medieval warrior elite want to return to nature, and thus imprison all 'Memorialists' who wish to remember the past. Kunzru's central character, held in solitary confinement, turns his cell into a 'memory palace' by re-creating shards of history on its walls. The accompanying graphics probably worked well in the exhibition, but in book print reproduction they don't live up to Kunzru's taut narrative.

— Colin Steele, November 2013

Michael Bishop

How I both wrote and did not write a horror novel called *The Typing*: An author's afterword, thirty years on

[First published in *New York Review of Science Fiction* 311, July 2014.]

I was thirty-eight years old when *Who Made Stevie Crye?* was guided into print in September 1984 by my stalwart and supportive editor at Arkham House, Jim Turner, to whom I dedicated the novel. That edition boasts 11 startling or beautiful, if not both at once, photo-montage illustrations by J. K. Potter, whose work I had seen in other Arkham House titles, as well as elsewhere, and who to this day enjoys a reputation as the most inventive, idiosyncratic, and meticulous creator of this kind of illustration in the fantasy and horror fields.

So I am especially pleased that this Thirtieth Anniversary Fairwood Press/Kudzu Planet Productions re-release of *Who Made Stevie Crye?* contains — via the artist's

own yeoman search, recovery, and reconstruction efforts — all eleven of Jeff's original illustrations. Honesty prompts me to admit that I find two or three of them very hard to look at, but they all do just what they must, even in black and white, to colour and focus the text. Further, some of the acclaim that this novel received on first publication surely derived from the distinctive aptness of Jeff's work.

Glennray Tutor provided an equally *à propos* wrap-around cover for that volume, but because we never meant to publish an outright facsimile of the Arkham artifact here at Fairwood Press/Kudzu Planet, we commissioned Paul Swenson to do a striking new cover illustration. We also use the same typeface featured in two earlier Fairwood Press reprints of my work, *Brittle Innings* and *Ancient of Days* ... for everything, that is, but

Glennray Tutor's cover for the original Arkham House edition of Michael Bishop's *Who Made Stevie Crye?*



the most blatant narrative fulminations of Stevie Crye's PDE Excelsiter, a malignantly haunted machine.

Not everyone loves this novel. Stephen King hated it, and I would have too had I been the obvious butt of some of its 'satire'. Nor would I have liked the fact that its upstart author used an over-familiar diminutive of my first name in its seemingly boastful title. I called my protagonist Mary Stevenson Crye, to a certain extent at least, after both the famous American short-story writer Mary Flannery O'Connor and the female British poet Stevie Smith, but I would lie if I ever swore that the quasi-disguised reference to King occurred by accident.

Anyone closely examining this new edition will note that *Who Made Stevie Crye?* has two title pages. The first bears the *Stevie* title, the words 'A Novel of the American South', and my byline, whereas the second bears the title *The Typing*, a two-line subtitle ('One Week in the Life of the Madwoman of Wickrath County' and 'A Novel of Contemporary Horror'), and the byline 'A. H. H. Lipscombe', who also provides the fey epigraph that appears before the second title page. (Does this book thus qualify, perhaps, as the literary equivalent of a pack of Doublemint Gum?) Interestingly, as well as disappointingly, neither the 1984 Arkham House edition of *Stevie* nor the 1987 British trade-paperback edition from Headline features my second title page. Today, I can't recall whether Jim Turner nixed it as a needless complication, or if in preparing a new edition of *Stevie* for its appearance as an e-book in 2013 from England's Orion/Gollancz, I belatedly bought into the unusual notion of

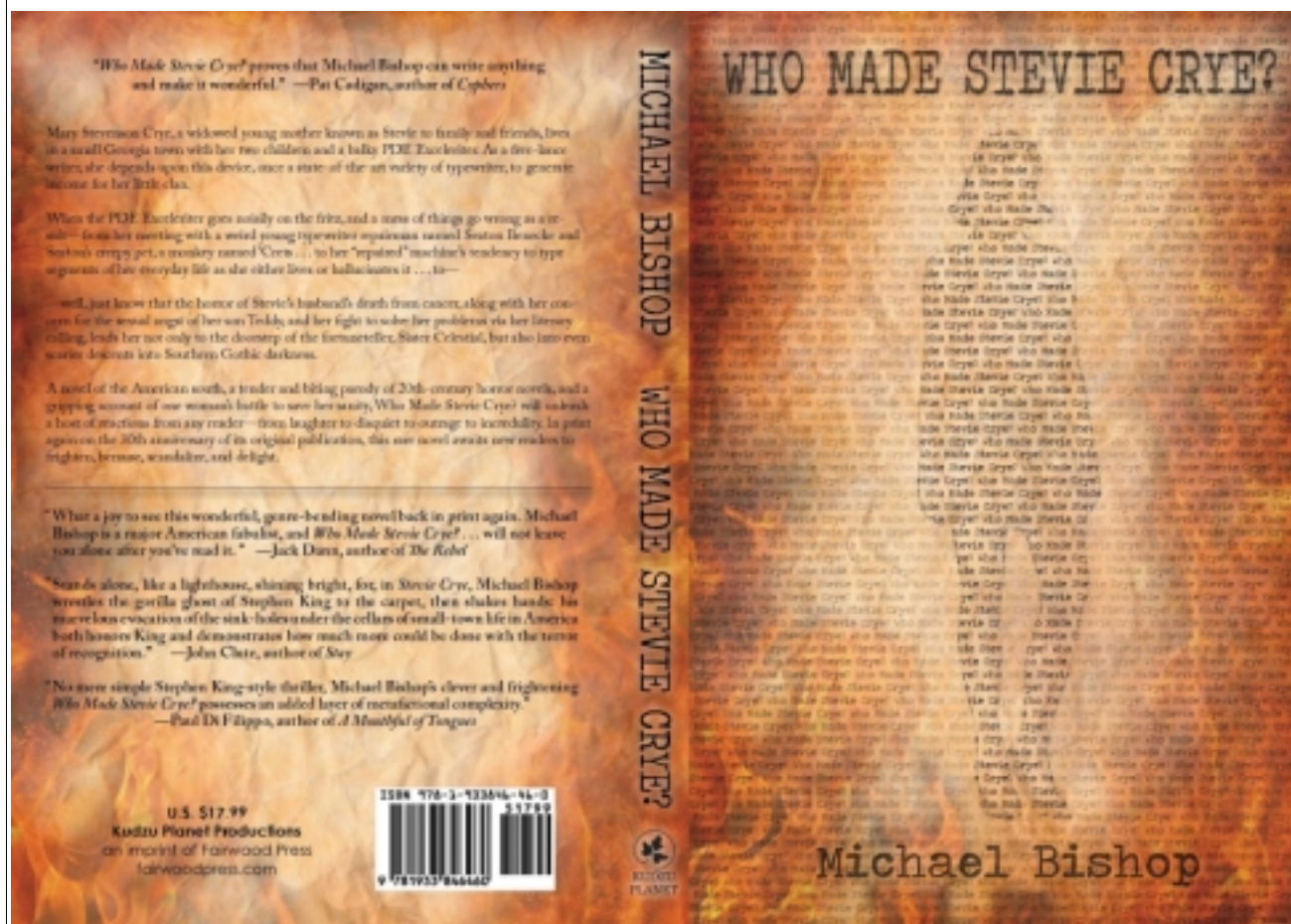
two title pages.

If either of these scenarios is true — where has my memory gone? — I still know whom to credit for my adoption of this apparatus: American science-fictionist Norman Spinrad, whose classic paperback original *The Iron Dream* (Avon, Sept. 1972) is also *Lord of the Swastika: A Science Fiction Novel* by Adolf Hitler. Make of that what you will, but I did have reason to sneak a second title page into *Who Made Stevie Crye?* — a reason as legitimate as Spinrad's assumption of a fictive narrator as unlikely as, well, the evil leader of the German Third Reich.

The 1970s inaugurated a revival of the mass popularity of the horror novel, and the success of the work of Stephen King fed that revival — which lasted well into the 1980s, at least — even if it failed to jumpstart the revival entirely on its own. In fact, I contend that Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* (1967), William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971), Thomas Tryon's *The Other* (1972), and James Herbert's *The Rats* (1974), etc., all played a significant role in the revival.

Although King's first novel, *Carrie*, did not appear until April of 1974, he soon became the popular face of the horror revival with many later bestsellers, including, virtually immediately, *Salem's Lot* (1975), *The Shining* (1977), *The Stand* (1978), *The Dead Zone* (1978), *Firestarter* (1980), and *Cujo* (1981). The list goes on, but one chapter in *The Shining* lifted my nape hairs, palpably and chillingly, on a hot summer night in an un-airconditioned upstairs bedroom in our house here in Georgia, and few other books have ever worked in me so

Paul Swenson's cover of the new edition of *Who Made Stevie Crye?*





Michael Bishop and his zinnias. (Photo: Jeri Bishop.)

startling a physical reaction. (Another, read in exactly the same place, was Herman Wouk's *War and Remembrance*, which, when I perused its roll call of the slain from three torpedo-plane squadrons in a benchmark World War II action, prompted me not to shiver but to weep: a radioman-gunner named John R. Cole from nearby LaGrange appears among the dead from Torpedo Squadron Three off the *U.S.S. Yorktown*.) So I by no means disliked horror as a genre or Stephen King as a writer. In fact, I admired him to the edge of jealousy ... and beyond.

Then, for the *Washington Post Book World*, I reviewed *Cujo*, King's horror novel featuring a rabid St Bernard named after a member of the Symbionese Liberation Army, Willie Wolfe, who had taken the *nom de guerre* 'Kahjoh'; he later reputedly became kidnapped heiress Patricia Hearst's lover. *Cujo* is *not* an ill-conceived or awkward effort, but I had trouble getting past an extended sequence in which the rabid dog holds a mother and her son captive in an automobile. These passages struck me as ripe for parody, and I wanted to write a novel of my own that both produced chills and lightly mocked some of the more predictable conventions of the genre. My primary target was not Stephen King *per se*, but all the wannabe Kings springing up everywhere to cash in on the ineradicable popularity of the horror novel. Of course, I failed to consider, seriously, that I qualified as one of these wannabes.

In addition, I chose to make my central character an ordinary person, in a rather ordinary Southern town, struggling as a single — no, as a *widowed* — mother to support her family through writing, just the sort of 'ordinary' people that King so often chooses as his novels' sympathetic focal points. And, frankly, as a still relatively young man (but one getting longer-toothed every day), what I best knew then was the struggle to create work that would yield income for my own small family (wife Jeri, son Jamie, daughter Stephanie) without bringing literary shame upon my head. That wish and that fear, along with my daily adventures with a balky IBM Selectric, combined to lead me to cast my horror novel as a 'metafiction'. Maybe, by so doing, I could somehow contrive to have my cake and eat it too. (Forgive me, but please see A. H. H. Lipscombe's epigraph in the front matter of this novel.)

In any case, it seemed that in those days every horror

novel had a title that began with the common article *The*. And, if anything, that trend, which, in the English language, cannot be confined to any one genre — *The Tempest*, *The Deerslayer*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *The High and the Mighty*, *The Firm*, etc., etc. — only intensified after *The Shining* appeared, as did the tendency of horror-writing wannabes to turn the titular noun following that titular *The* into gerunds ending in, of course, *-ing*.

I could make quite a long list here, but I must acknowledge that Gary Brandner's werewolf novel *The Howling* appeared the same year as did King's *The Shining* — 1977 — and so we can hardly accuse Brandner of trying to cash in on a successful marketing strategy — *The Titling*, call it — that clearly owed more to King's compelling story than to the words impressed on the novel's face or spine. Still, after *The Shining*, one expected a new 'dark fantasy' entitled *The Glowing*, *The Gleaming*, *The Shimmering*, *The Dazzling*, or even *The Scintillating* to appear almost any day, and we did finally encounter novels yclept *The Homing*, *The Walking*, *The Burning*, and even *The Croning* waiting for us in our bookstores. Not so ubiquitous a trend as I had first assumed, probably because *The Shining* and Stanley Kubrick's killer film of King's novel outshone the early competition by caboodles of kilowatts.

We had lived in Pine Mountain only five years, after my separation from the Air Force in the summer of 1972, and our children were six and four, Jeri was by choice a stay-at-home mother, and I wrote fiction to support us. Because short-story sales were not a well-paying or reliable source of income, I substitute-taught at our local primary and elementary schools, worked as a stringer for the *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, covering county-commission and board-of-education meetings and writing the occasional feature story (including a long piece about the cancer clinic in LaGrange that I cannibalised for *Who Made Stevie Crye?*), and prayed that my early novels — *A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire* (1975), *And Strange at Ecbatan the Trees* (1976), *Stolen Faces* (1977), and *A Little Knowledge* (1977) — would all find publishers overseas to pay me again for work already accomplished. And, as a matter of fact, because of early foreign sales, our financial situation began to improve, without my ever fully escaping from the fear that we were on the brink of bankruptcy.

I might also add that during this period a relatively young man whom we knew, a resident of our own neighborhood, fell victim to cancer. He was diagnosed and, within a matter of only weeks, succumbed to the disease, failing so rapidly that almost everyone acquainted with him suffered the twin blows of disbelief and shock. It was speculated by many that the victim, assuming himself doomed from the beginning, had sped his own demise by surrendering to what he believed inevitable. And adopting this uncharitable take on his death, I loaned it to Mary Stevenson Crye's late husband, Theodore Crye, as the cause for his own disappointingly quick capitulation to cancer. Or, rather, I loaned it to Stevie as the reason she uncharitably assigns Ted for going so fast and abandoning her and their children with scarcely a whimper. So Stevie is flawed because I am flawed, and the concerns that she faces in this novel — which I do regard as a bona fide novel, despite its recurrent metafictional

playfulness — mirrored our concerns, both Jeri's and mine, in these early years of our marriage and child-rearing. So, its many annoyances and failures notwithstanding, I continue to feel fondness for the book to this day, because it reminds me of a difficult time that we did in fact overcome.

What of the other characters in the novel? I suppose that Stevie's children, Teddy and Marella, derive from the fact that the young Bishops had a boy and a girl, in that order, although they were closer together in age than are Stevie's children and come from my imagination, mostly, not just from observation and reportage. I should add, however, that, like Marella, our young Stephanie had a menagerie of stuffed animals in her upstairs bedroom, and that I was absolutely stunned when I first saw Jeff Potter's photo-montage illustration of Marella's trance-driven orchestration of a dance of these creatures, for the child depicted in it resembled our Steph closely enough for even a friend of the family to mistake the two for twins. When I mentioned this fact to Jeff, he kindly sent us the print of this illustration used in *Stevie's* original Arkham House edition. I returned it to him briefly, along with one other, to help him reconstitute the eleven photo-montages that now grace this Fairwood Press/Kudzu Planet Productions edition.

That brings me to Sister Celestial. For the first several years of our long residency in Pine Mountain, every time that we drove to Columbus on state Highway 27, we passed a house, just to the north of Columbus, whose yard boasted a big — indeed, impossible to miss — sign proclaiming the availability of a mighty seeress who would give you hope of finding a lifelong soul-mate and solving your most intractable problems, if only you stopped, parked your car, and dropped in for a reading. To my great shame, I can't recall this woman's fortune-telling name, but I do remember that at least once, and maybe twice or three times, she had the sign repainted to change her identity ... from Sister Sees-All to something like Freda the Fortuneteller. (These are but sad approximations of the 'real' names she worked under.)

I often thought I should stop in to learn for myself exactly what a seeress's establishment looked like and how she conducted a reading, but, strike me mute for my cowardice, I never did so. As a result, 'Sister Celestial', aka Betty Malbon, is an admixture of both my imagination and several African-American women whom I knew as either acquaintances or about-town personalities.

Here, at least, I don't intend to speculate directly on my sources of inspiration for the character Seaton Benecke or his capuchin monkey 'Crets. I'll say only that I believe you will find provocative clues in the text. And, if not, then let those sources remain, as perhaps we all should, a tickling mystery. And thank God that I'm working today on a computer keyboard rather than a PDE Exceleriter, my fictional take on the IBM Selectric that kept me busy for so many years.

In searching out a few online reviews of *Who Made Stevie Crye?*, I came across one that gave the novel its due for a high degree of creepiness, but that also said it felt too long for its substance. (I paraphrase to avoid using this writer's plainspoken pan, 'it dragged in the middle.') Okay, fair enough, even if David Pringle listed

the novel in *Modern Fantasy: The Hundred Best Novels, an English Language Selection, 1947–1987* (Grafton, 1988). But because that online criticism is fair enough, and because I drew that same conclusion a few years ago, I've tightened the text of *Who Made Stevie Crye?* by a few thousand words, without, I hope, gutting it of a single metafictional event crucial to its basic spookiness or to its even more basic humanity, embodied in the indefatigable person of Stevie Crye.

Forgive me for quoting the ending of the novel to you, which, presumably, you've just read (because you'd never read an afterword before you read the novel itself, right?), namely, 'And she went downstairs into the many, many happy days remaining to her in this life, all of which were of her own composition...' Followed, of course, by

T*H*E E*N*D

— Michael Bishop, 24–26 June 2014,
Pine Mountain, Georgia

A necessary postscript

More than two weeks after writing this Afterword, I sent it to my bibliographer, frequent editor, and unfailing friend **Michael Hutchins**, and he replied by noting that although he likes the piece, its 'faux title page [of *The Typing*] was part of the file I sent you on November 5, 2010, which was prepared from an OCR scan of the novel' for the British e-book edition that appeared from Orion Publishing in 2013. Michael quotes himself as saying at that time, 'As you will see, I've had a little fun with the front matter ...' by inserting this second title page into the file. (He also had some fun with the 'Note on the Type' on the last page, just as my publisher, editor, and book designer Patrick Swenson had with 'A NOTE ON THE TYPE (S)' in this new edition. Thanks, Patrick—for everything.)

Michael concedes that he took the text for the second title page directly from the novel (see page 278) and notes that he is pointing out these verifiable facts not to 'get credit or acknowledgment' for conceiving the notion of the second title page, but simply to 'set the story straight' for me. And I know Michael well enough to say that he writes the total truth here. Even so, I've let the text of the Afterword stand as you've just read it for two reasons: to finesse the fact that my publisher Patrick Swenson has incorporated revisions from me several times already (despite our tight schedule) and to dramatize just how far from documentable accuracy our unaided memories can sometimes lead us.

Therefore, I've added this postscript not only to correct one deficiency of unaided memory but also to give Michael Hutchins the credit he unequivocally deserves. Once again, he's set both me and the record straight, this time to benefit a small historical truth and also the moot integrity of my Afterword.

Thanks to you too, Michael — for everything.

— 10 July 2014

Guy Salvidge

***Precious Artifacts: A Philip K. Dick Bibliography* by Henri Wintz and David Hyde (Wide Books 978-1-4781019-4-9; 2012)**

Precious Artifacts: A Philip K. Dick Bibliography is another worthy contribution to the world of PKD appreciation from the mind of David Hyde, a.k.a. Lord Running Clam. Hyde has a long history in the world of PKD fandom; in recent years he ran the inaugural Philip K. Dick Festival in 2010, and he published the essential *Pink Beam: The Philip K. Dick Companion*. This time he's teamed up with Henri Wintz, PKD collector extraordinaire to produce the first bibliography of PKD's novels in more than 15 years. Not just a book for those who actually buy and sell PKD books for profit, *Precious Artifacts* is in fact another long love letter to that greatest and most humane of twentieth century writers: Philip K. Dick.

PKD produced a *lot* of novels in his relatively brief lifetime: 37 novels that have been deemed science fiction, nine that have been deemed mainstream (only one of these, *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, was published during the author's lifetime) plus a handful of lost novels. For information on these lost novels, refer to Lawrence Sutin's essential biography: *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick*. But if you're after information on the various editions of the 46 novels published in the US and UK with the name Philip K. Dick on the cover, as well as the numerous novel collections and various versions and titles that have existed over the years, then you've certainly come to the right place. Wintz and Hyde know what other resources exist in the world of PKD appreciation, so they don't try to reinvent the wheel. *Precious Artifacts* is a worthy and worthwhile addition to your PKD collection, however large or small that might be.

This book is a labour of love, and it's full of the kind of meticulous detail that only a true aficionado (or a pair of them) could produce. *Precious Artifacts* contains a number of supplementary essays, all of which are worth reading. There's a Foreword, two Introductions, Collector's Notes, essays on collecting signed editions of PKD novels and cover art, a brief Biography, a Guide to the Collectible Editions, a Glossary, and a Chronology of PKD's publications. The last of these, the Chronology, I found especially useful given that it is helpfully provided in table form, although personally I'd like to see the lost novels listed here as well.

Those items are just the trimmings, however; the main course is more than 100 pages of bibliographic information on more than 50 publications. The first thing I noticed is that the layout of the pages is exquisite

and, even better, the covers are reproduced in full colour. *All* of them. As mentioned before, the novels are separated into sections for Science Fiction Novels and Mainstream novels, and there are also sections dedicated to Story Collections and Non-Fiction. Personally I would have preferred to see each section organised by order of composition, rather than alphabetically, but that's a small quibble.

What we have here is a wealth of bibliographical information on the US and UK editions, all presented in an easy-to-read format. Wintz and Hyde cannot be praised highly enough for producing this. I predict that in the future *Precious Artifacts* will be just as important a resource for the budding PKD acolyte as Sutin's biography. Why? Because you can figure out what you want to collect in advance, dammit. When I started collecting PKD in 1999, I was limited to the three UK Millennium Masterworks editions that existed at that time, US



Vintage editions of several other titles, and crusty old paperbacks of the rest. If I were starting my PKD adventure now, I'd use *Precious Artifacts* to decide which set of PKD novels I'd like to own, partly on the basis of cover art, but also on which publishers have complete or nearly complete lines of PKD, not to mention cost. I've never liked the covers of the Vintage editions (some of them, like *The Man in the High Castle*, are just awful) and I've always preferred Chris Moore's UK covers, but maybe now I'd just collect the brand new Mariner editions, a line that even includes the one PKD novel I don't own and have never read: *Gather Yourselves Together*. But that's just me.

Maybe you have tons of cash and you want to collect first editions? *Precious Artifacts* can help you. Maybe you've lucked upon what you believe to be a rare edition of a PKD novel that you're weighing up whether to keep or sell? *Precious Artifacts* can help you. Incidentally, my one experience of happening upon a relatively valuable edition of a PKD novel is the Rapp and Whiting hardcover of *Ubik*, which I spied in a secondhand bookstore for \$7 a decade or so back. I sold the book on eBay a few years ago for about \$100, which *Precious Artifacts* tells me might not have been too bad a price. Had it been a first edition of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, however, in perfect condition, it might have been worth many thousands of dollars.

Virtually all of PKD's work is in print at the present time; we are at a high-water mark in his popularity. What, if anything, is out of print? *Deus Irae* (which was written in collaboration with Roger Zelazny) doesn't appear to have had a UK edition in a long time. In the UK, three of PKD's weaker novels have been relegated to *Three Early Novels*, although they remain individually in print in the US. PKD's only novel for children, *Nick and the Glimmung*, was reissued by Subterranean Press in 2008 after its long obscurity, and the same can be said for PKD's only published dramatic work: *Ubik: A Screenplay*. There's the odd PKD novel that has undergone a name change, such as *The Crack in Space*, which is now known as *Cantata-140* in the UK, and *The Unteleported Man* which now goes by the title of *Lies Inc.* As far as I can see, the only one of PKD's science fiction novels to be out of print in 2012 is his collaboration with Ray Nelson, *The Ganymede Takeover*. I knew all of the above already, from more than a decade of ferreting around on the internet and in the pages of various volumes that include bibliographic elements but are not fully fledged bibliographies. The point I'm trying to make here is that the budding PKD collector can save all of that time and effort by referring to this precious artifact, *Precious Artifacts*.

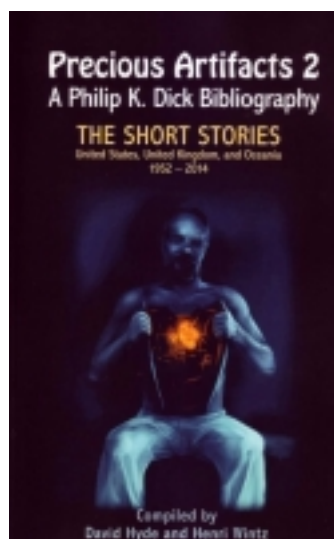
There's more. Over the years several companies have decided, for whatever reason, to gather some of PKD's novels together, most notably in the recent Library of America editions. All of that information is contained here. Once you've collected PKD's science fiction novels, you'll probably want to collect and read the almost-all-never-published-during-his-lifetime mainstream novels. You might decide, as I did, that Gollancz's covers are the most handsome, but then there's the problem of not all of the mainstream novels being available in this line. US publisher Tor can bridge the gap, but then you'll end up as I have with some

mainstream novels in Gollancz and others in Tor. That most elusive of PKD novels, *Gather Yourselves Together*, has just been reissued by Mariner (and I guess I'd better get myself a copy, even though it's reputed to be virtually unreadable), and then there's the problem of *The Broken Bubble*, which isn't available in Gollancz or Tor, and would presumably be out of print at the time of this writing. In that case, the 1991 Paladin edition is probably the cheapest option. As I've tried to illustrate here, these are some of the problems that face the PKD collector, especially collectors like me who desire order in the form of uniform editions (but with stimulating cover art, which rules out Mariner). Here, again, *Precious Artifacts* will be your guide.

Then there's the Story Collections, and it doesn't get any less perplexing there either. You're collecting PKD, so you might as well grab the Collected Stories, right? How complicated can it be? Well, pretty complicated. Refer to pages 116–19 for the details. But hey, Subterranean Press are bringing out several volumes of their 'Complete Stories', aren't they? Unfortunately those editions aren't without their problems either. You might end up going back to the original collections, as I have done, and there again *Precious Artifacts* can show you the best way to go about it.

Finally there's Non Fiction. Item #1 is a strange and beautiful volume called *The Dark Haired Girl*, which I happen to own. Some of the best of that book, however, is collected in the even more useful *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*, which doesn't appear to have been reprinted since 1996. If you wanted to dip into the (in)famous *Exegesis*, you used to have to track down an obscure publication called *In Pursuit of VALIS: Selections from the Exegesis*, but now you can have the extended edition from Harcourt: *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*. And then there's the *Selected Letters of Philip K. Dick* from Underwood-Miller, in six volumes. Published over 15 years. Most of which are now out of print. Sigh. Such is the life of the PKD collector! Imagine how we fared before *Precious Artifacts: A Philip K. Dick Bibliography* came along to light our path.

Editor's note: Since Guy Salvudge wrote the above review, I have received from David Hyde:



Precious Artifacts 2: A Philip K. Dick Bibliography: The Short Stories (United States, United Kingdom, and Oceania 1952–2014)
 compiled by David Hyde and Henri Wintz (Wide Books 978-1-5027256-8-4; 2014)

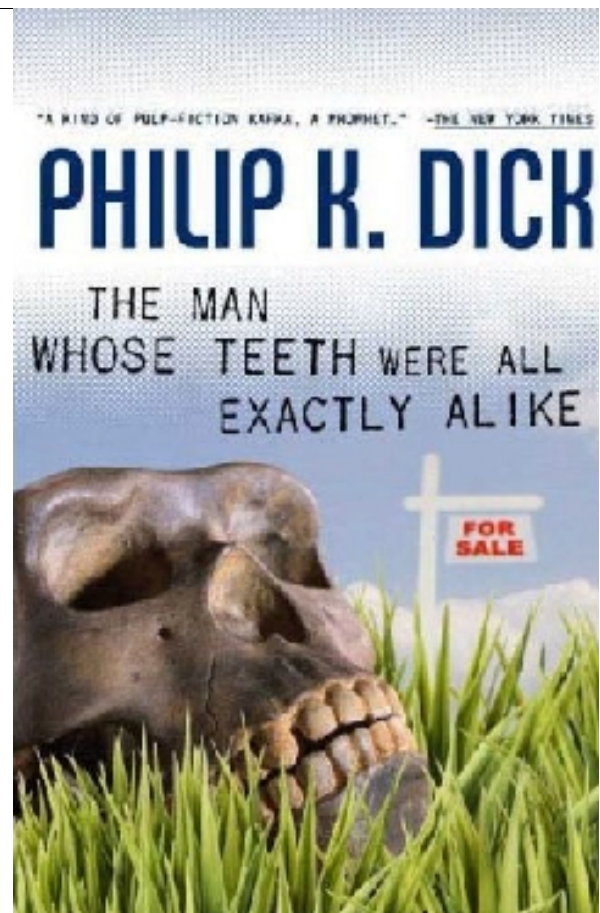
For all the reasons outlined by Guy when reviewing the first volume, the second volume is also highly recommended. It includes the complete publication history of 125 short stories written by Philip K. Dick between 1952 and 1981. It includes details of the stories themselves, the editors who published them, the magazines, anthologies, and collections they appeared in, as well as the artists who illustrated them. It covers not only US and British publications, but also rare publications from Australia and New Zealand.

***The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*
by Philip K. Dick**

Philip K. Dick's mainstream novels, all but one of which remained unpublished until after his death in 1982, are normally regarded as the poor cousins of his science fiction works. To an extent this attitude is justified, but some of his mainstream novels are better than he is normally given credit for. At the time they were written, in the 50s and the early 60s, these novels were seen as too strange and too bleak to be publishable (and too poorly titled: *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*; really, Phil?) But I for one find a lot to like in some of these novels, especially the later ones. *Humpty Dumpty in Oakland* is a fine work, even if it is very despairing, and so is *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike* (henceforth *Teeth*).

This must be the second time I've read *Teeth*, and the first was a decade ago, so I didn't remember a lot about it except that it was really depressing. Well, it's still depressing but not poorly written, despite PKD's sometimes clunky sentence structure. What I noticed this time around was that the book is primarily about the treacherous landscape of gender politics long after World War II but long before second wave feminism. It's a book about the anxieties of masculinity and the manifold ways in which men try to subjugate women: through keeping them jobless in the home; through defining success almost exclusively in career terms; through violence and, if worst comes to worst, through rape. There are some harrowing scenes, but PKD handles this dark material far more adroitly than he had done in the earlier *Voices from the Street*. In short, I think *Teeth* is due for some rehabilitation as a serious work not entirely dissimilar to Richard Yates' *Revolutionary Road*.

PKD almost always used a shifting third person point of view in his novels, and *Teeth* is no exception. Written when the young (31) PKD had had some minor publishing success in the ghetto of science fiction but none at all in the wider marketplace, the novel mirrors many aspects of PKD's life at the time in Marin County, California, alongside third wife Anne (who would write of these years in her excellent memoir *Search for Philip K. Dick 1928-1982*). Here our main characters are two married (but, crucially, childless) couples by the names of Leo and Janet Runcible and Walt and Sherry Dombrosio. According to Anne, these characters are based on real people who lived in Marin County at the time of the novel's composition. Anne and Phil's scholarly disagreement over whether Neanderthals were meat-eaters or vegetarians (Phil contended, wrongly, that they were



vegetarians) even managed to worm its way into *Teeth*.

PKD had this way, even in his supposedly straitlaced mainstream novels, of marrying seemingly unrelated elements into a bizarre but cohesive whole. Only PKD could produce a novel that is on one hand about the angst experienced in childless families, and on the other about a hare-brained scheme to fabricate a Neanderthal finding on US soil as a way of getting back at a hated neighbour, and have it make some kind of sense. *Teeth* weaves together disparate plot strands into a strange but oddly beautiful fabric, including: what it was like for a man to happily work for an advertising company until his wife gets it into her head that she wants a job there too; what it was like to be a Jew, and a relatively successful businessman, in mildly anti-Semitic America; semi-scholarly debate about the origins of the species; the problems of the water supply in Marin County and what fate might have befallen the area's earliest White inhabitants. And it makes sense. *Teeth* is not a nice novel by any means, and it paints a gloomy picture of human relations on a number of levels, but it's a fine novel all the same.

Dead Sea Fruit

by Kaaron Warren

(Ticonderoga Publications 978-0-9806288-6-9; 2010)

Kaaron Warren's collection *Dead Sea Fruit*, which was released by Ticonderoga Publications last year, is quite simply one of the best single-author collections I've read. In his introduction, Lucius Shepard (no slouch in the art of short story writing himself) claims that Warren is

one of the few writers who is both a stylist and a storyteller, and he's right. Some of these stories are not only technically masterful, but emotionally gruelling, horrific, and just plain awesome.

In the title story, 'Dead Sea Fruit', our protagonist is a dentist tasked with visiting the ward of the Pretty Girls, women so weak from anoxeria that 'they don't have the strength to defecate' (p. 21). The fabled Ash Mouth Man seems to be the source of the Pretty Girls' worries, as once he kisses them (and nobody can resist) everything they eat tastes of ashes. Not even our protagonist is immune to the Ash Mouth Man's charm, despite her expertise in oral hygiene.

'Down to the Silver Spirits' is similarly impressive in its treatment of childless, IVF-failure couples who will go to any length to fall pregnant, even if the child within isn't entirely theirs, or even entirely human. Lured by the words of the trickster Maria Maroni and her strange son Hugo, the couples are coaxed below ground to Cairness, the city of the silver spirits. Here I was struck by Warren's seemingly effortless control over the tropes of several genres: science fiction, fantasy, horror, and realistic fiction.

'Cooling the Crows' is urban fantasy, I suppose, but the genre elements are handled far more subtly than they would be in the hands of a lesser writer. Here Geoff is tasked by Management with 'cooling' a certain night-spot that has attracted an unwelcome clientele. He's had his difficulties with certain situations before, and this time it seems he's bitten off more than he can chew, not

least the vampiric Bailey.

'Guarding the Mound' is particularly effective in the way that it weaves fantastic and science fictional elements. Upon losing his family, the diminutive Din is forced to stand watch over the vaguely-Egyptian-seeming Chieftain for all eternity. During this time, Din is given access to the inner worlds of his descendants down the centuries, but the future seems neither transcendental nor enlightening, casting into doubt the usefulness of Din's sacred pact with the dead Chieftain.

I actually had to stop reading 'The Grinding House' at one point, not because I was bored, but because I couldn't go on. Thomas Disch's first novel *The Genocides* springs to mind as something similarly unrelenting in its depiction of the end of humanity through the most disgusting and pitiless of scourges. Worse, no one in this story seems especially to care about that or the dire state of the world they are inhabiting. This novella-length work is the tale of Rab, Nick, Sasha, Bevan and the bone grinder himself, the odious Jeremiah, in their flight from the bone disease that threatens to consume them all. I've read some disturbing stories in the past, and it seems I'm pretty much impervious to actually becoming horrified by horror, but 'The Grinding House' is one of the nastiest things I've had the (mis)fortune to read. Very few writers can match this kind of intensity.

'Sins of the Ancestors', which is new to this collection, is set in a future time where the Department of Unsolved Crime has the authority to put to death the descendants of murderers who were never brought to justice. Yolanda is a woman with a nasty trade: she's paid by rich men to scare them half to death, and subsequently suffers their scorn and abuse. In the course of her attempts to clear her ancestor's name (and her own) of the murder she feels he never committed, Yolanda uncovers the identity of the true murderer, after which point the shoe is very much on the other foot.

And then there's 'Ghost Jail', another emotionally onerous tale set in an unspecified time and place that might be our own unwelcome future. In it, the beggar woman Rashmilla sells peas at funerals, but her real strength is in subduing the vicious ghosts that seem to hover everywhere. Lisa is a journalist with a belief in free speech and the power of Selena, a DJ with the gumption to say all the things that Lisa is too afraid to write. Things turn sour when Lisa pushes the local Police Chief too far, after which she is consigned to the ghost-ridden Cewa Flats, where not even Rashmilla can save her.

Dead Sea Fruit came as a complete surprise to me. I expect every single author collection published in this country to be good, but not *this* good. You owe it to yourself to give *Dead Sea Fruit* your full attention if you haven't already.

The Last Days of Kali Yuga

by Paul Haines

(Brimstone Press 978-0-9805677-1-7; 2011)

I only met Paul Haines the one time, at the launch of his third collection of stories, *The Last Days of Kali Yuga*, at Swancon in 2011. He was a sick man, very gaunt, and as it turned out he had less than a year to live before cancer claimed him. I was at the launch because I'd read and



very much enjoyed Haines' earlier collection, *Slice of Life*. I knew about his health battles and I wanted to tell him how much I'd enjoyed that collection and to get him to sign a copy of what turned out to be his last book.

Haines warned me when he signed my copy of this book that the material was dark and perhaps disturbing in nature. It guess it says as much about me as it does of him, but I didn't find anything particularly objectionable in these pages, although it's true that some stories were very provocative. The writer Haines reminds me of most is M. John Harrison, whose work is similarly sardonic and sometimes vicious. A number of recurrent themes run through many of Haines' stories, including but not limited to: the pressures and angst of urban living; sexual frustration and jealousy; and the cycle of seemingly inevitable violence. The author pulls few if any punches in his depiction of the more sordid side of life, and he keeps us close to the edge as readers. William S. Burroughs once said that 'writing should have the immediacy and danger of bullfighting'; Paul Haines was certainly a writer whose work fits that bill.

Aside from his story 'Wives', Haines' work is not speculative in the ordinary sense. His is a dark horror of a type I would not normally read, but some of his work is so precise that one must admire the craftsmanship. *The Last Days of Kali Yuga* also contains afterwords to each story, which often shed light onto the background of each of the pieces. Because these stories span about a decade in terms of composition, we also gain an insight into Haines' development as a writer.

The first story in this collection that really got my

attention was 'Her Collection of Intimacy', which is a perfect blend of sexual tension and horror. The structure and especially the ending are immaculate, and this is the kind of story one must immediately read again upon finishing it.

Many of Haines' stories concern the blurring of dream and reality, in which characters vacillate between skepticism and belief. 'Festival of Colour' is an impressive example of such a tale.

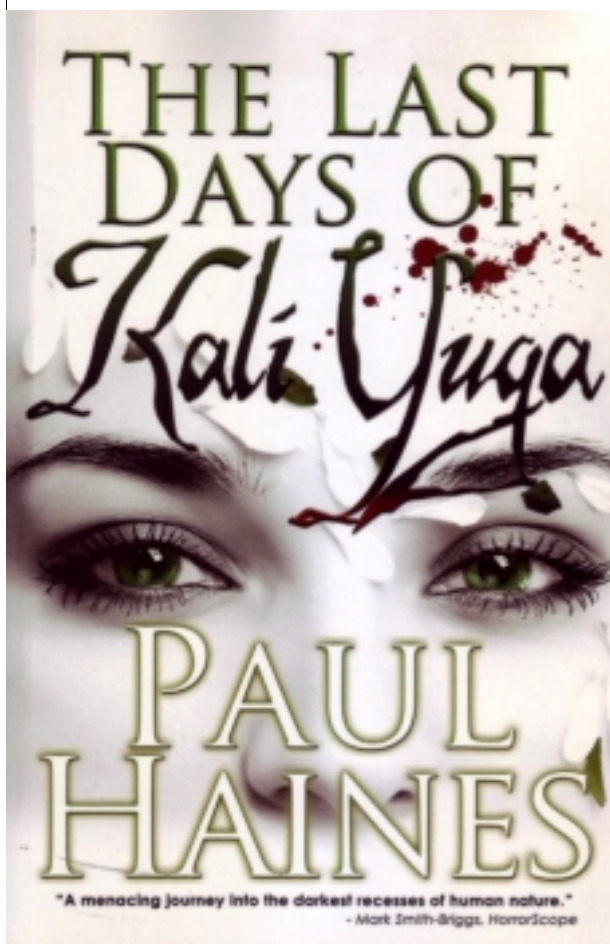
Similarly impressive are 'I've Seen the Man' and 'Taniwha, Swim With Me', although the author claims the latter to be 'Haines by numbers' in his afterword. While it's true that this story contains all of Haines' usual themes, notably here the fundamental 'dis-ease' of the life of the urban dweller, it is still an effective and unsettling piece. A less ambitious writer than Haines might have reworked the basic material in this story again and again over the course of an entire career.

The last two stories in this volume, 'Wives' and 'The Past is a Bridge Best Left Burned', are quite possibly the best. The novella-length 'Wives' is Haines' only attempt to fully flesh out an SF future, and it's a nasty future indeed. In some unspecified post-apocalyptic future Australia, girls and women are seldom seen in country areas, such as the town of 'Shepp' where our protagonist Jimbo lives. Most women exist in a state of enslavement to the Cartel, a shady, Mafia-like organisation that incarcerates and sells women to those who can pay the piper. As the unfortunate Wazza discovers, much to his detriment, the Cartel will go to great lengths to protect their property. Throughout the story, we follow Jimbo on his quest to obtain a wife and, later, a child. Haines subverts pretty much every social norm you might care to mention, including the parameters of heterosexuality, the entrapping nature of patriarchy, and the biological boundary between man and woman. 'Wives' is dark, violent and brutal.

'The Past is a Bridge Best Left Burned' is a fitting finale to this volume. Self-consciously autobiographical, and yet subtly playful in its interrogation of the nature of dream and reality, it is an extraordinary tour de force. Consisting of many short, often apparently unrelated, sections that seem to mirror the narrator's confusion, 'The Past is a Bridge Best Left Burned' takes us on a journey through past and present times, in New Zealand and Australia. There were a couple of serendipitous associations I made while reading this story. First, Melbourne's West Gate Bridge features prominently here, and I crossed this bridge for the first time on a bus at 2 a.m. a matter of hours after completing the story (in the outside lane, no less). Second, I couldn't believe my eyes when I read Haines' reference to a classic PC adventure game, *Star Control 2*, a game I know and love well.

'The Past is a Bridge Best Left Burned' is one of Haines' most powerful works, and the ending is truly surreal and transformative. Here is an artist at the height of his powers, even if (as we learn in the afterword) this story took many years to write.

I'm glad that I went to Swancon in 2011 and that I attended the launch of *The Last Days of Kali Yuga*. My record of attending cons and launches is not a good one, but, for once, I actually turned up. I'm glad, too, that Paul read an earlier version of this review when it was



originally published on my blog. But I am deeply saddened by the man's passing at the age of 41, leaving behind a wife and young daughter. In his final months, I became an avid reader of his LiveJournal blog, which is still online today. Some of his posts, like 'The End of My Writing Career', written just a few months before the end, make for haunting reading.

Paul Haines left a legacy of excellence in dark writing that was formally acknowledged by the re-naming of the Australian Shadows Award for Long Fiction as the Paul Haines Shadows Award for Long Fiction in 2013. Though he didn't live to write the full body of work, he would no doubt have produced, Haines left us with two outstanding collections, *Slice of Life* and *The Last Days of Kali Yuga*. He showed us the way forward.

— Guy Salvidge, 18 May 2011, revised 25 April 2015

***The Girl With No Hands and Other Tales*
by Angela Slatter
(Ticonderoga 978-0-9806288-8-3; 2010)**

Angela Slatter has written and published a great deal of stories in the 'reloaded fairytale' genre in recent years, many of which are collected in this volume from Ticonderoga and also in *Sourdough* from Tartarus Press. *The Girl With No Hands and Other Tales* won the Aurealis Award in 2010 for Best Collection, and it's not hard to see why. Slatter reworks a host of traditional fairytales, many of which will be familiar to all but some which are more obscure, putting a fresh, feminist slant on these already macabre offerings.

'Bluebeard' is told from the perspective of Lily, the daughter of the girlfriend of a wealthy banker, Davide. Lily isn't impressed with her mother's subordination to Davide, and as it turns out they're all in more danger than they first realise. There's a locked room hiding a nasty secret, a devilish mother, and no Prince Charming required to save the day. 'Bluebeard' cleverly inverts the premise of this familiar fairytale, leaving the reader scrambling to discover the source of the murders.

'The Jacaranda Wife' is an Australian version of the Selkie myths, in which James Willoughby finds a white-skinned, violet-eyed woman asleep under the jacaranda tree in his garden. Set in the 1840s, this story sees James all too happy to take this strange, mute woman for his wife, despite the warnings of the Indigenous workers on his farmstead. Jealous of his new wife's affinity for the jacaranda tree, and fearful that she will disappear back into it, James orders all such trees in the area cut down, but one stubborn tree remains standing.

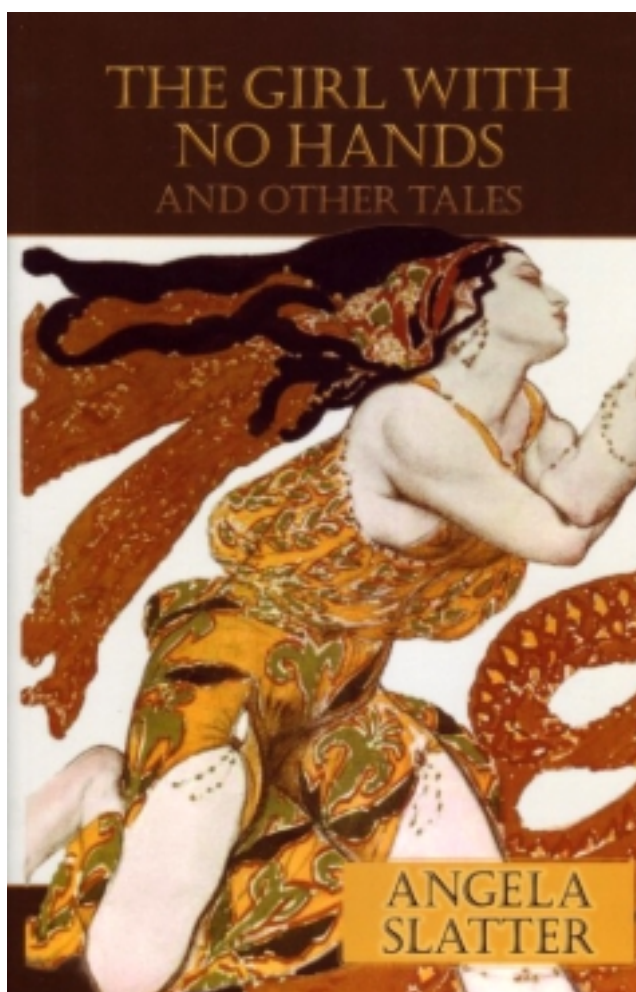
'Red Skein' reworks the ubiquitous Red Riding Hood myth, empowering Matilda by making her more than capable of defending herself in the forest. The story also focuses on the relationship between the young girl and her grandmother, who is here decidedly not enfeebled. Similarly, 'The Little Match Girl' empowers the ordinarily pathetic match girl from Hans Christian Andersen's story by making her fully grown and with the ability to choose her own end.

'The Dead Ones Don't Hurt You' is one of the few contemporary tales in *The Girl With No Hands* and, initially at least, it is also written in one of the lightest

tones in the volume. After a string of abusive relationships, Melanie bites the bullet and orders a EZ-Boy, an 'ever-faithful Zombie Boyfriend' (p. 140). The zombie, whom she calls Billy, is perfectly docile, all too happy to clean Melanie's house during the day and, as she boasts, 'never complains about, y'know, eating at the Y' (p. 142). Billy's passivity and his failure to interpret ambiguous instructions turn Melanie from abused to abuser, and that's *before* the appearance of an EZ-Girl.

'Light as Mist, Heavy as Hope' is a retelling of 'Rumpelstilzkin'. In it, Alice is brought to the attention of an impoverished king when her father boasts of her skill in weaving straw into gold. Alice is also in danger of being molested by her widowed father, due to her resemblance to her mother. In the castle, the girl is forced to attempt the impossible task under threat of strangulation, but a mysterious helper comes to her rescue. On the first two nights, Alice is able to pay the extortionist with her mother's jewellery, but on the third, only her as-yet-unconceived child will suffice. Alice is forced to desecrate her mother's grave to escape this unwanted fate.

The title story, 'The Girl With No Hands', is a particularly gruesome yarn in which the greedy Miller trades 'whatever is sitting in [his] backyard' (p. 180) with the Devil in exchange for unimaginable wealth. Unfortunately, the Miller finds his daughter, Madchen, in the backyard when he returns home, and thus begins a rapid fall from grace for all concerned. Madchen's mother, Hilde, vainly tries to stop her daughter from becoming



the Devil's bride, and the odious Miller chops off the girl's hands at the Devil's request in response. Madchen flees and eventually marries a king, but her new-found happiness is again imperilled by the Devil's trickery.

The Girl With No Hands and Other Tales is a collection of intelligent, lusciously written fairytales with modern sensibilities. In these pages, our heroines almost never bow before the might of their often-boorish fathers and husbands, and the resulting fare makes for highly entertaining reading.

Epilogue

edited by Tehani Wessely

(Fablecroft 978-0-9807770-5-8; 2012)

Epilogue is published by Fablecroft Publishing, an Australian small speculative fiction press that specialises in themed SF anthologies. For this volume, editor Tehani Wessely has chosen a strong cast of notable Australian writers as well as one stray Swede, Kaia Landelius. Originally titled 'Apocalypse Hope', *Epilogue* asks 'what happens after the apocalypse?' Many of the stories herein have an optimistic bent to uplift us from the all-too-dystopian world we live in. *Epilogue* is professionally presented, and features commanding cover art from Amanda Rainey, whose work adorns plenty of Australian SF and fantasy covers these days. With *Epilogue*, Fablecroft firmly establishes itself alongside Twelfth Planet Press and Ticonderoga Publications at the forefront of Australian speculative fiction publishing.

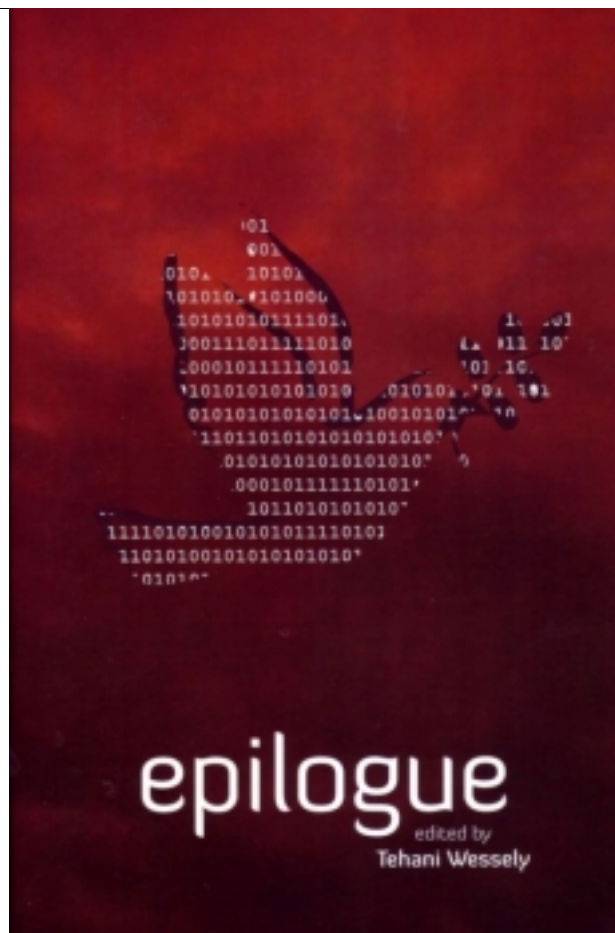
Thoraiya Dyer's 'Sleeping Beauty', which opens proceedings, features an apocalypse in progress, which our voracious protagonist can survive but not prevent. Rather enigmatic in style, Dyer's brief tale is nevertheless atmospheric and exceedingly well written.

Jo Anderton's 'A Memory Trapped in Light' is rather different but equally impressive. Isola and Ruby are sisters living in a nightmare future of Legate Drones, Pionic Flares, Shards, imprisoned children, ancient laser cannons, and the Crust. Channelling SF films such as *The Matrix* and Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*, as well as the classic SF stories that underpin those works, Anderton has constructed an exuberant and positively traditional SF story with strong female central characters, something that rarely featured in the Golden Age imagination. There's a paucity of genuine science fiction in the Australian scene currently, but the work of Jo Anderton would appear to be a significant exception.

Lyn Battersby's 'Time and Tide' is an elegant and endearing time travel narrative featuring three characters: a woman, Pauline; her teenage son, Sean; and the mysterious Michael. In a series of brief snapshots, we follow Pauline across different realities and varied occupations. In one she is a prostitute and in another a nun, but in the main narrative she's a scientist. Something has gone wrong with time, of course, and setting things straight proves rather troublesome.

'The Fletcher Test' by Dirk Flinthart pits computer whiz Anneke against a computer virus named Kali. Most of the story is a series of conversations between the simulacrum and its would-be executioner, and things spin in an unexpected direction at the end.

Stephanie Gunn's 'Ghosts' is another impressive



offering in a now rarely seen SF subgenre: life in an underground shelter after the bomb. Nadya and Mater are teenagers who have the mixed blessing of being fertile in a world where women give birth to genetic monsters and there are no doctors. Nadya's father insists that she produce an offspring with Mater, but she has a different goal in mind. Visceral and concrete, like the bunker featured herein, 'Ghosts' is among my favourite stories in *Epilogue*.

Lighter in tone, but just as well constructed, is Kaia Landelius' 'Sleepers'. Inhabiting some strange corner of the well-worn zombie subgenre, Landelius' tale manages to do something slightly different with familiar material. Much bashing of the 'sleepers', with baseball bats and hockey sticks, ensues.

There's something desolate about the rural Australian landscape that naturally lends itself to post-apocalyptic fiction. Jason Nahrung's 'The Mornington Ride' reminds me a little of the late Paul Haines' novella 'Wives', and both are fine works. Here our unnamed protagonist is fleeing from his boss, the murderous Johnny Stroud, who insists on killing a family of 'reffos' who steal and eat a calf. Interspersed with this back story is what happens next, as our protagonist trades his rifle and his nag for shelter, and then some medicine for passage to the aptly named Hopetoun on the train of the story's title. 'The Mornington Ride' is my favourite story in *Epilogue*.

In my view, *Epilogue* as a whole succeeds in achieving its stated aim of finding hope after the apocalypse. It's a testament to the strength of the Australian speculative fiction field these days that's there not one weak story in

the anthology, even if there were a few I personally didn't enjoy as much as those described above. The future of our civilisation might appear grim, but I daresay that the immediate future of independent speculative fiction writing and publishing in Australia looks significantly rosier.

Love in Vain

by Lewis Shiner

(Ticonderoga Publications 978-0-9803531-0-5; 2009)

Lewis Shiner is known to me as one of the early cyberpunk authors, but his collection *Love In Vain* isn't cyberpunk. It's not even science fiction for the most part. It is, however, very good. Published by Ticonderoga in 2009, this collection of nearly two dozen stories showcases Shiner's abilities at lengths ranging from flash fiction to novelette. Personally I found his longer works more interesting, not least the newer, previously uncollected 'Perfidia'.

In 'Perfidia', Frank Delacorte, a collector with a penchant for eBay auctions, stumbles on a highly irregular recording of a Glenn Miller song. In his attempt to unravel the mystery, Frank travels to Paris to trace the recording back to its original owner. Meanwhile, Frank's father, who had been one of the American soldiers who liberated the Dachau concentration camp at the end of World War II, lies dying in a US hospital. Shiner's depiction of Paris circa 2000 is particularly atmospheric, and the story of Miller's last tape is original and engaging. My only complaint is that the story ended long before I would like it to, which I guess is a compliment to Shiner's technique, given that 'Perfidia' is around 50 pages in length.

'Love in Vain' features the first of this collection's failed marriage narratives. Dave McKenna is an Assistant DA given the task of interviewing Charlie, a convict who has confessed to far more murders than he could ever have possibly committed. He even admits to made-up murders, but oddly enough many of the facts he provides turn out to be true. Dave has problems of his own, primarily his tenuous relationship with his wife Alice. Dave's old friend Jack tries to lift him from his funk by taking him to see an old flame, Kristi Spector, who is now an exotic dancer, but nothing much seems to help. Jack explains: 'There's things you don't want in your head. Once they get in there, you're not the same any more' (p. 61). Dave's personal problems, coupled with the stress of dealing with the unreliable Charlie, begin to loosen his grip on reality, and by the end of the story Dave is poised to lose more than just his home and marriage.

'Scales' features a female narrator with relationship problems of her own. Her marriage to Richard having hit rocky ground, she becomes increasingly concerned as her husband begins to behave erratically. The problem seems to be one of Richard's students, Lili, who appears to have a particularly insidious hold over him.

Having finally had enough of her husband's cheating, she makes off with their infant daughter, Emily, but as with most breakups, it's not as straightforward as that. Here Shiner verges on the territory of the fantastic, as Lili seems to be not only an adulteress, but perhaps not wholly human.

Fathers come in for a bit of a beating in *Love In Vain*, and 'Match' is the purest example of this. Fathers in these stories are generally aged, inflexible, and cruel, but the son in 'Match' isn't much nicer himself. Tennis provides the arena for a clash of wills between the frail and disapproving father and the absent, ungrateful son. The son wins the battle on the day, but loses the war as the father suffers his latest mini heart attack. 'Match' is a good example of the emotional power of Shiner's writing, which here as elsewhere is typically devoid of literary flourishes.

Another powerful realist tale is 'Dirty Work', in which a down-and-out type falls in with an ex-school mate of his, Dennis. Dennis has made good for himself in the world, and is now working as a lawyer getting rapists off their charges, even if some of the proceeds do seem to find their way up his nose. Dennis gives our protagonist a job trailing Lane Rochelle, an alleged rape victim. Feeling bad about the whole thing, but entirely too poor to contemplate knocking the money back, he starts following Lane around with a minimum of stealth. Perhaps significantly, 'Dirty Work' is one of the few stories in *Love In Vain* where the protagonist is fairly happily married. Things turn nasty when the rapist Javier turns up at Lane's house, but both he and our protagonist get their just deserts.

'Primes' is just as good as the stories described above, and it's one of the few in this collection to contain science fictional elements. As Shiner explains in his Afterword, many of his stories are about failure: failure in relationships, failure at work, failure at life. In 'Primes', Nick returns home from work to discover that not only is his house now occupied by his wife's dead former husband, but also that he has been made redundant at work by a cosmic occurrence on the grandest of scales. Two parallel universes seem to have merged into one, doubling the world's population in an instant. This soon has disastrous consequences, and poor old Nick loses pretty much everything in the reshuffle that follows.

There are other kinds of stories in *Love In Vain*, and most of them are better than decent. The shorter works tended not to appeal to me as much as those described above, but there is one historical ghost story, 'Gold', which I found quite evocative. Famous personages like Elvis Presley, Nikola Tesla, and Lee Harvey Oswald feature in the shorter fantasies, and many of Shiner's tales revolve around rock and roll in one way or another. 'Jeff Beck' was my favourite of these. This is my way of saying that Shiner is a versatile writer whose work is likely to appeal to a variety of audiences, and thus you're likely to find something to like here, too.

— Guy Salvidge 2011–2012

Gillian Polack

Lavinia disempowered

Lavinia

by Ursula Le Guin

(Orion Books 978 0 575 08459 9; 2009)

Books by Ursula Le Guin are always a pleasure to read, even the lesser books. They are not always a perfect pleasure to review, however, because I find myself comparing them with each other and saying to myself ‘She did better in another work.’ This is a real problem, because that other work was probably a great literary classic. This review is going to be full of criticisms, but let me be very clear up front, just because *Lavinia* is not one of Le Guin’s best books, doesn’t make it a bad book. It’s a very good book indeed, despite its faults. It’s just not going to transmute into a classic in that miraculous way several of Le Guin’s books have done.

Some of the reasons I like it less than some of her other books are reasons that won’t matter to all readers, so I’ll explain them here. If they don’t worry you in theory, then you’ll find *Lavinia* an exceptional book rather than a very good book indeed. None of them affect my opinions about Le Guin’s prose style or the particular feel that marks her stories.

Right from the beginning, I felt compelled to make notes about *Lavinia*. This isn’t my habit with review books. Normally I read from beginning to end, and then I stop to think. There is a feel to this novel, a bit philosophical in tone, almost educational, that made it feel right to take notes. Most of the notes I’ve left behind. They littered my reading like dead leaves, but didn’t say anything substantial except that, in places, *Lavinia* feels educational — that much of Le Guin’s approach was explained as if seen by Lavinia herself, peering forwards in time.

Lavinia is the story of the wife of Aeneas: his last wife, after the fall of Troy and after his voyages. It’s the least interesting bit of the Aeneid, in theory, but in reality, it’s the whole reason the Aeneid was written. It provides a heroic ancestry for Rome, a link with doomed Troy.

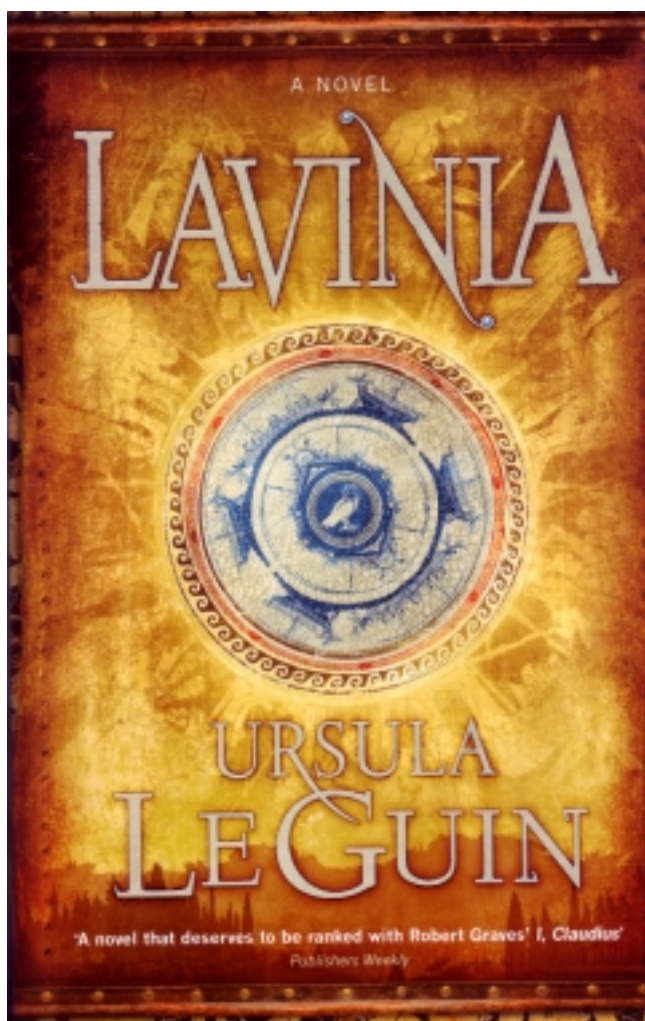
Ursula Le Guin plays on this idea, by pointing out that the woman Lavinia was nothing more than a footnote or an afterthought, and showing Lavinia herself reacting to this notion. She plays tag with Lavinia’s idea of her own reality, plays tag with Virgil, and even gives a polite nod to Dante at times. I loved this, but I wondered every now and again what it would be like if I were not acquainted with the history of Rome. Perhaps everyone is, and I’m worrying over a nonexistent problem. I’m not sure that this is a good first book on the subject. While Le Guin tells the full story of Aeneas by the end of the novel, she tells it so non-linearly that it would be much easier to read with some understanding of the subject before-

hand. Lavinia’s life is in order, but Aeneas’s is backwards and inside out. It’s very much a re-telling, rather than a telling.

While the story of Lavinia’s life is told in order, Lavinia herself is not fixed firmly in time. We enter her mind as she wonders about it. Mostly, this is a lovely conceit and works well. However, this makes for a slow beginning. The first 30 pages or so are very graceful and stately, but very leisurely, and give no idea of the pace of the rest of the novel.

Lavinia is crucial to the Aeneas legend, as Le Guin tells it. Aeneas didn’t found anything: he married into an established family. It was Lavinia who brought rulership and it’s Lavinia who tells us the tale. I love this idea.

What I liked less was how Lavinia is portrayed. She is mostly very passive, even when, as queen, she would have had rather more responsibility than the domestic. While



Le Guin talks about the different phases in Lavinia's life, in reality, she goes from being under the thumb of her mother, to under the thumb of her husband, to being under the thumb of her stepson. While this explains (to some degree) the decisions she makes near the end of the novel, it means we hear her talking in the way a woman in command does, but not actually demonstrating that command. She consistently takes a child's role, and this frustrated me. I wanted to see her grow and change as her roles grew and changed.

What I like most about the book is the way it caters to my inner historian. Lavinia explains all the reasons she's adrift in time and not quite sure if she's real or a passing shadow in a poet's eye. She's her own universal translator. Lavinia's clear realisation of this helped me turn

off my inner critic and stop looking for errors. Thus only a very few struck me.

I was annoyed occasionally by a confusion of names. Sometimes Le Guin refers to 'Roman' and 'Italian', for instance, before either existed, and to the month of June. These inconsistencies and references to modern labels should have been edited out, and could have been, as more appropriate terms were also used.

This is a lovely (if flawed) human rendition of an old tale. There is some beautiful lyricism and some interesting thought. It's not, however, as straightforward a read as other recent Le Guin novels. Still, I recommend it and I enjoyed it.

— Gillian Polack, August 2009

Big Fat Fantasies and us:

A look at Chris Wooding's 'Braided Path'

***The Weavers of Saramyr* (The Braided Path Book 1)**
***The Skein of Lament* (The Braided Path Book 2)**
***The Ascendancy Veil* (The Braided Path Book 3)**

In a perfect world, all readers would instantly see the beauty and splendour of our best writers. Works of genius would soar to the top of the lists of best-sellers and would densely populate publishing lists.

In reality, it is the good books rather than the brilliant which get popular acclaim. Publishing lists are dominated currently by Big Fat Fantasies (BFF), time travel, and well-used popular tropes. I am going to explore a BFF sequence, to look at the importance of world construction to the reader's response to a BFF, and why sometimes less good is better for the reader.

This article is not a review; I am not trying to measure these books against others in the sub-genre and inform you how good they are. What I am trying to do is find out how they get where they are going and think about how the reader fits into the equation. Why do we like some books and not others? Why is the calibre of the writing only one quality? It is not 'good' or 'bad' or the opinions of writers and critics; it is not good writing in the sense taught at university that counts here. It is what aspects of the writing work in unexpected ways to cause reader addiction. Why the Harry Potters and the *Da Vinci Codes*?

I could have done the same thing using blockbusters; I didn't. Chris Wooding's series represents the sort of book that a reader will pick off the shelf by cover or by blurb, or because someone said 'This is worth a try.' The trilogy is readily available and being promoted; this is what counts. In fact, it currently represents the bulk of midlist speculative fiction publishing.

BFF's are mostly the fun end of reading. A BFF is expected to have certain elements: a good plot, decent characterisation, a believable world. While it can harbour greater intensity than this, and introduce new ideas

and thoughts to the reader, this is not its prime intent.

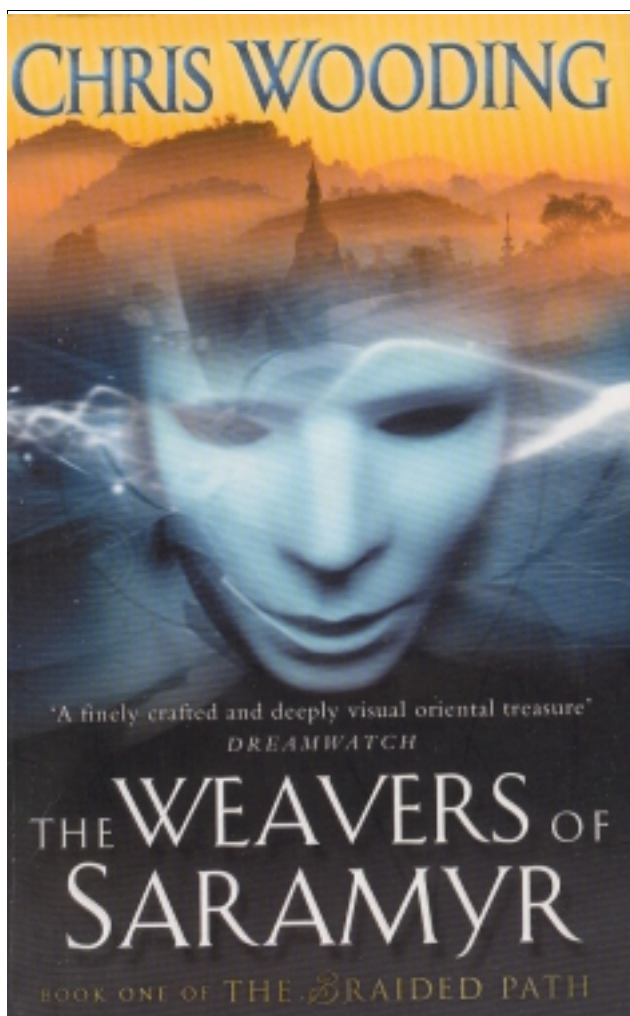
Wooding's trilogy is very typical of BFF in all these respects. The male characters tend to be underdeveloped and the female characters all tend to be spiky, but they are real enough to entice the reader along. The plot rains destruction in all the right places: we know the world is unlikely to end, but we have to wait to find out why and how.

This is the reader compact in the standard BFF: why and how. We know when. We know that, unless the author is particularly clever, volume two in a BFF will lag, but that we need to read it to build up from the small adventure to the cataclysmic conclusion: it links the small world and the universal. And so the BFF compact is complete and readers are happy.

The vast majority of fantasy novels operate using the same assumptions and similar types of world building. Many use a generic Middle Ages as a base (often following Tolkien), and others use a generic Asian-type society (such as the 'Empire' trilogy by Raymond Feist and Janny Wurtz). All of them call on the familiar and the half-familiar and adapt it to their own worlds; this is the nature of the genre and why we enjoy reading those books.

There is a big difference between a palimpsest fantasy, where our world and the assumptions are visible below the surface if we just look a bit carefully, and fantasy by a skilled artisan or even a master, where our assumptions and our world apparently vanish. This essay uses Wooding's trilogy to examine how the vanishing works or doesn't work, and looks at why so much BFF is really palimpsest fantasy.

The first book of 'The Braided Path' trilogy, *The Weavers of Saramyr*, is very much a BFF. It follows the formula and offers its own interesting twists. The most consistently interesting is the reversal of roles — men are villains and support characters. Men are the self-seekers who put personal gain above the common good. This proves to



be the pattern for the rest of the series, with just a few exceptions. While the gender roles are a bit unusual, the use of Book 1 of a trilogy to set them up and build audience comfort with them is typical of BFF. The first volume is, in fact, typical in many regards. It establishes the world; it establishes the foundations for further plots; it establishes the basic assumptions (such as gender roles) that will be used later.

The world building in *The Weavers of Saramyr* is a bit clunky. It reads almost-familiar, as if Wooding has taken a bit from here and a bit from there. For instance, there are similarities between the political backdrop and that of other orientalising fantasies, such as the Feist/Wurtz trilogy. Another sense of the familiar comes with the magic system including a weave (for example, Melanie Rawn's books, which include weaving magic, using sunlight and moonlight). The strength of the magic system is that the weave is linked clearly into both the unnatural and the natural world, and some social and political ramifications of that weave have been introduced.

The weakness in this first volume is that, instead of the world being introduced organically through characters interacting with it, key elements are just thrown in to announce 'Look! I have built a world and this is my local colour to prove it'. One of the more noticeable examples of this is a comment on the way a shirt is worn (which side crosses on top and which underneath) as indicating a male or female wearer. This is introduced as a comment on one shirt, worn by Kaiku. The com-

ment, as given, was of no relevance to the plot or to character development, and so reads as clunky world-building. A little more fiddling could have shown that even though Kaiku was a tomboy, she was very feminine.

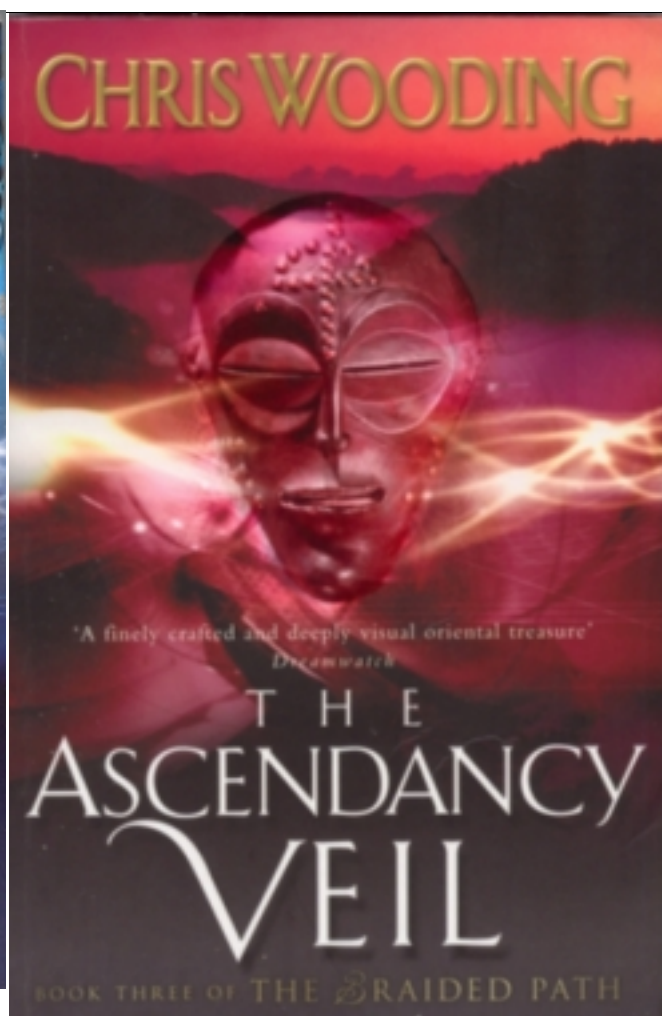
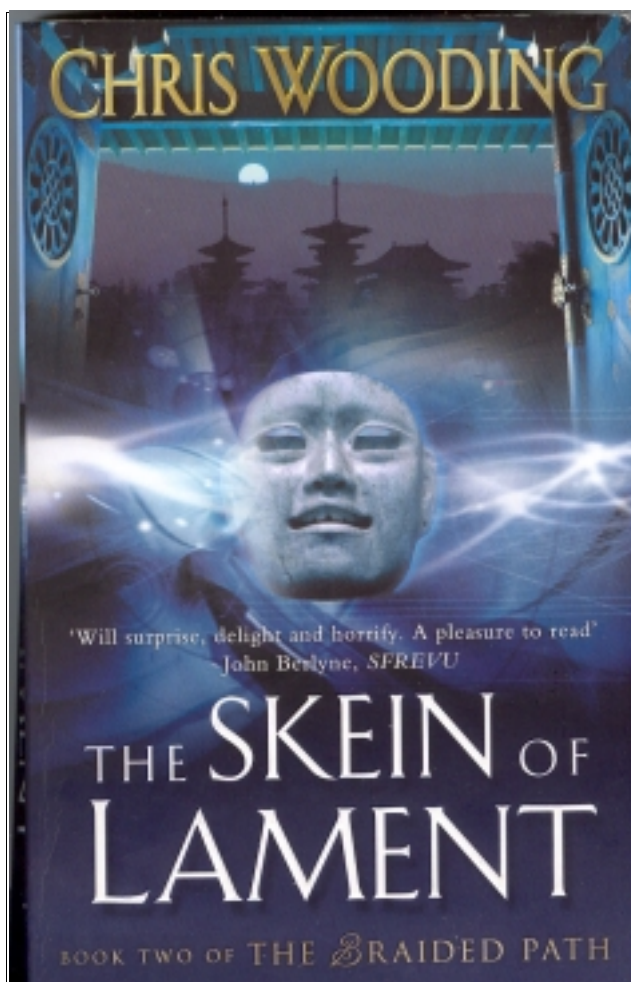
Wooding has put a lot of work in but has no eye for subtleties. Characters will act according to the plot's needs — the minor characters in particular are marked by one or two characteristics — and then by following the plot dynamics rather than coming across as shaping or reacting to circumstances in a natural manner. The society is described as very formal, and time is given in this first book to the structure of the language and how complexities reflect status. Nothing is made of actual language shift in conversation, and stance is only brought in for dramatic reasons (as when Kaiku's friend throws herself on the floor in front of the Empress).

The formal codes are not consistent. Kaiku's friend is given a careful build-up to show that she acts very much within the confines of this formality. In fact, most of her social codes appear to consist of a poker face. For a formal society to operate effectively in a novel like this, the social codes have to be embedded deeply within the structure of the piece and to consistently affect plotting — they need to be normative, not exceptional. (The Feist/Wurtz method is a good example of how this can be done.) When they are exceptional, and plotting and characterisation do not depend on them, the work becomes a palimpsest: it is our culture and our expectations that determine what will happen and how it will affect each character.

The effect of the half-used formal culture in Wooding's book is that the reader gains a sense of a culture that is not quite coherent. Behaviour is modern Western — on the casual side more than anything. Descriptions of behaviour are formal and reflect an old society. This may be intentional, as the society described is one that is in the process of breaking down, but there are no clear repositories of tradition to demonstrate this: all are about equal, including, in several scenes, the Empress and her husband. The underlying text emerges, and that underlying text is our society.

Perhaps the most marked element of this is that the Heir is perfectly alone, yet Kaiku and her best friend have ubiquitous servants. The heir, it must be clear, is only eight; even an extraordinary eight-year-old is likely to have ubiquitous servants as a sign of class. You cannot build up a caste system and have plotlines based on the capacity of servants to mingle in society, and then suddenly leave off this characteristic for the highest ranking in the same social group (and it is very clear that the Empress and her family are merely the highest of the same group). This set of assumptions for interaction appears on and off throughout the three books: the formal modes are thrown in for special effect from time to time, and at other times the modern Western assumptions show through.

It is not only the formal cultures that have this half-finished aspect. In the second volume, *The Skein of Lament*, new cultures are introduced. The main new language is introduced as being very simple with 'no tenses'. How does a language with no tenses indicate time and action?



There is a belief among a certain proportion of fiction writers that an overlay of a culture is sufficient to carry the whole culture in the minds of the reader. In my view, there is a big difference between finding a telling detail that will communicate volumes about the culture and society and save a bunch of explanation (Robert Heinlein's 'the door irised' is probably the most famous example of this) and devising a cultural framework that is overlaid on top of the writer's culture, with explanations of differences. The strength and the weakness of using just an overlay is that it leads to a palimpsest novel. However good the rest of the tale, at odd moments our social assumptions — or our assumptions of what makes a fantasy novel — peer out and remind us that this is fiction.

What is interesting is that, as the series progresses, the clunkiness in the world-building fades. Wooding becomes more comfortable communicating the created world. More of the cultural and social mores are communicated by plot and by character development than by

asides. Characterisation becomes more easily expressed and points of view less strained. Wooding is writing far more from within the created world, and this comes across very strongly to readers. And the world develops as the books develop, so the reader is complicit in that development. The palimpsest is gradually replaced: telling detail becomes less extraneous.

This clunky world-building leading to a palimpsest product, then the palimpsest fading as the world grows, is typical of much of the reasonable BFF out there. Why is it so much loved by the reading public? There are many possible reasons. One possibility is that it is not just the characters that the reader can identify with: it is the developing world the books are set in. The strength of a series starting with a palimpsest reality is obvious. The world is never too alien for comfort, because there is always a little of the reader's reality peeking through until the reader is absorbed, by which time the world of the books is no longer alien.

The Australian Science Fiction Foundation

The Australian Science Fiction Foundation was established in 1976 to carry on the work of Aussiecon, the first Australian World Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne in 1975.

The Foundation encourages the creation and appreciation of science fiction in Australia through its sponsorship of writing workshops and short story competitions, provision of seed loans for national conventions, and the publication of its newsletter *The Instrumentality*.

Our ongoing initiatives include:

The A. Bertram Chandler Award

The A. Bertram Chandler Award for Lifetime Achievement in Australian Science Fiction honours

A. Bertram Chandler. Born in Britain, Chandler moved to Australia in the 1950s. He was a ship's captain on the Australian coastal route until he retired. He has been long regarded as Australia's most important SF writer because of his many SF short stories and novels, many of them set in the Rim Worlds. He died in 1984.

The first Chandler Award was presented in 1992 to Van Ikin. Subsequent winners have been Merv Binns, George Turner, Wynne Whiteford, Grant Stone, Susan Batho (Smith-Clarke), Graham Stone, John Bangsund, John Foyster, Lucy Sussex, Lee Harding, Bruce Gillespie, Rosaleen Love, Damien Broderick, Paul Collins, Richard Harland, Russell B. Farr, and Danny Oz.

Donna Maree Hanson is the 2015 A. Bertram Chandler Award winner.

Nominations for the Chandler Award are always open. Just drop a note to the Secretary at our email address.

The Norma K. Hemming Award

A jury award marking excellence in the exploration of themes of race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability in SF.

Norma Kathleen Hemming (1928–1960) was an Australian fan and author whose work was informed by her experiences as one of the few women active in science fiction in her time.

The 2015 Norma K. Hemming Award was won by Paddy O'Reilly for her speculative fiction novel *The Wonders*, published by Affirm Press in July 2014.

For the 2015 competition, the Judges also awarded an Honourable Mention to the runner-up, a collection of stories by **Lisa L. Hannett and Angela Slatter** titled *The Female Factory*, published by Twelfth Planet Press in November 2014.

Sponsoring amateur SF competitions at the national convention

Since 1992, the Foundation has provided sponsorship funds to the Australian National Science Fiction Convention (The Natcon) to run an Amateur Science Fiction Competition. Originally the competition was for short stories, but may now also encompass work created on digital media (short films or audio productions). We have prepared a set of guidelines that may assist national convention committees in running an amateur SF competition, particularly if they haven't run a competition before.

Supporting the fan funds

Four Fan Funds are using sub-accounts under the ASFF's main bank account to avoid the inconvenience and expense of having to set up new bank accounts each time their administrators change. They are: **DUFF (Down Under Fan Fund)**; **FFANZ (Fan Fund for Australia and New Zealand)**; **GUFF (Get Up-and-over Fan Fund)**; and **NAFF (National Australia Fan Fund)**.

Join the Foundation!

Fees: The annual membership fee is \$A20.00 for both local and overseas members. (Overseas members please send cheques made out in Australian dollars. Electronic Funds Transfer is also available.)

For details, please visit our website www.asff.org.au

Join us by making contact with:

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