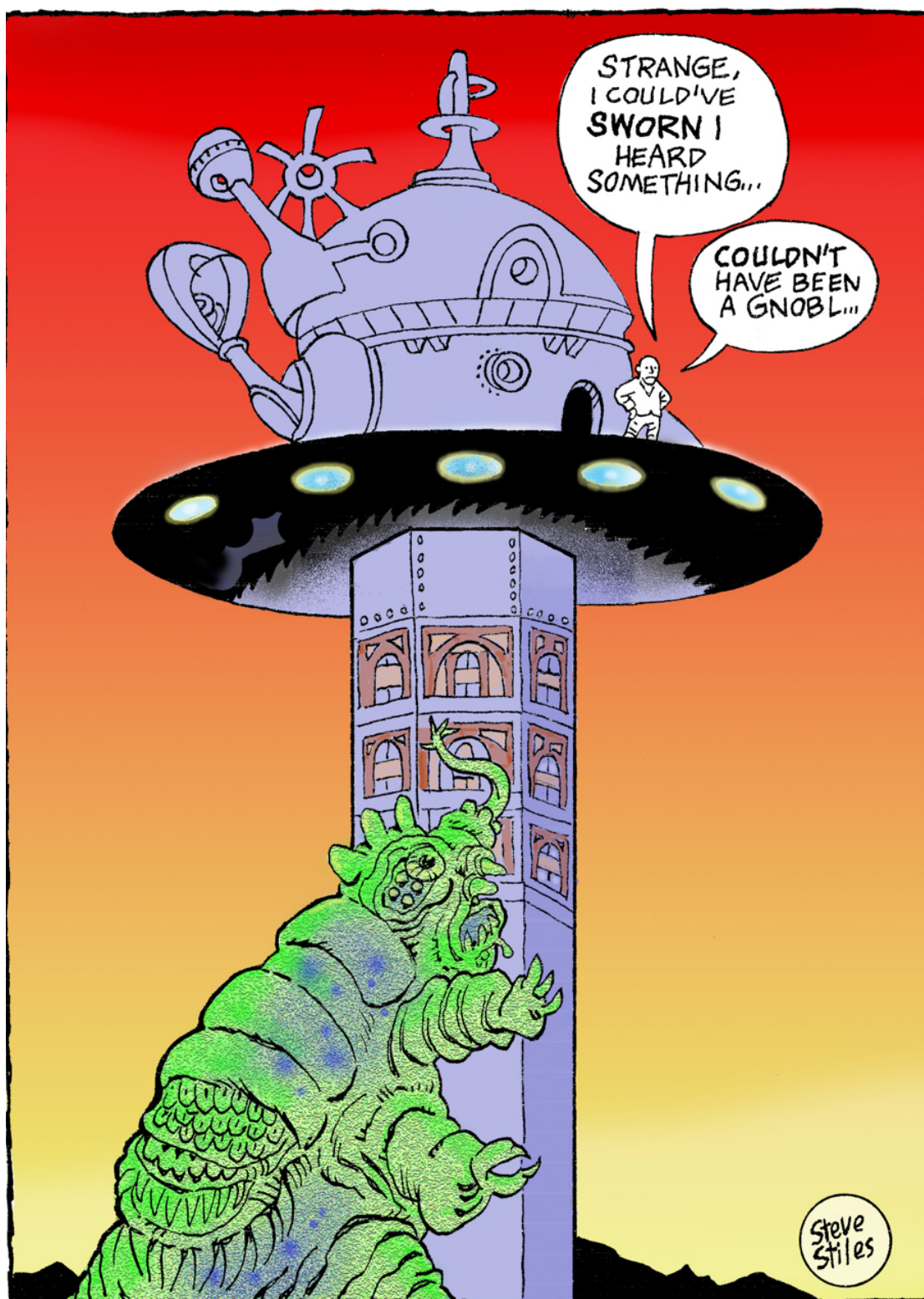


# SF COMMENTARY 90

November 2015

68 pages

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CASEY WOLF  
RAY WOOD  
MARTIN MORSE  
WOOSTER  
AND MANY OTHERS



Cover: Steve Stiles

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I must be talking to my friends

# Continuum 11

I had joined this year's Continuum (**Continuum 11**, 6–9 June 2015, Ether Centre, Melbourne) at the close of last year's because of the general air of fizziness and inner delight that I felt during 2014's event. However, much of the pleasure of that convention was a result of the way the facilities at the International Hotel allowed people to meet lots of other people. My heart sank when I heard that this year's Continuum would return to the Ether Centre. It has some mingling room in the lobby area near the registration desk, but few seats for people who simply want to catch up with other people.

I could hardly skip Continuum 11 altogether, because **Mariann MacNamara**, administrator of the **Peter MacNamara Award** (for lifetime achievement in Australian SF), had asked me to hand over in person this year's trophy to **Merv Binns**. The award had been given originally at Swancon (the national convention) in Perth at Easter, but Merv and Helena could not be there. **Grant Watson** had brought the trophy back from Perth. He handed it over to me on the steps of State Library, and the little plinth arrived from Mariann a week ago. I asked the Continuum committee if I could make the presentation during the Opening Ceremony, and Liz Barr said I could, so I was there, and Merv and Helena turned up, and everything went very well. I made a short speech based on a paragraph in Mariann's citation, and Merv looked very pleased, accepted the trophy and plinth and made an even shorter speech, and then we could get on with socialising in the lobby. **Ted McArdle** took a photo of the presentation. Helena also took photos of the event.

The Friday night of Continuum is traditionally the best attended event of the convention, as anybody, not just members of the convention, can attend for the price

of a 'gold coin'. For the only time during the convention one can gain some idea of who has turned up (except for those West Australians who take the red-eye jet to arrive on Saturday morning).

I had promised **Gillian Polack** I would travel in from Greensborough the next morning for her slide show presentation of her GUFF trip from last year. She showed a small number of photos of British fans. Most of her pics were of events at a large convention in Croatia that she attended. She had been one of three international guests of honour. She and the other two had been accompanied by translators, who also acted as gofers. A Croatian seaside city in the middle of summer looks very attractive for a holiday, let alone a convention.

The good news is that Gillian has written a 45,000-word report, which will be published with photos. The bad news is that, unless something further happens, it will appear only as an e-book. Which would be okay if it also appears as a PDF, in which case I can print it at home. Otherwise, I won't be reading it. (I had always thought that fan fund candidates were required to produce a full printed report that one could put on the shelf for posterity, but there have been exceptions, such as Irwin Hirsh's slide show of his report.)

Gillian is usually one of these people always seen hurtling off in another direction at a convention, but on Saturday **Roman Orszanski** and I managed to persuade her to have lunch with us. **Erika Lacey**, ex-ANZAPAn in town from Townsville, also took part in the expedition. Eventually we navigated our way to Floor 3 through the baffling entrails of the new Emporium complex (from which Ted McArdle had just escaped), and found very satisfying Malaysian-style food at the Chinta Ria, one of the many small restaurants in the Cafe Complex.

I went home to resume indexing, but was so tired that I slept for two hours. On the train home I finally leafed through the Continuum Program Book. There I found, to my horror, that somebody had put me down to take part in a panel on 'The History of Australian SF' at 10 the next morning. A few weeks before, I had been asked about setting up such a panel, but after I said that I had no time to organise it, I had heard no more. Not that I could have reached the convention on a Sunday morning by 10 a.m. Our train service can only be described as erratic on Sunday mornings.

Through the wonders of the Internet I did manage to alert Stephanie, of the committee, and also **Terry Frost**, who was the other person on the panel. Last I heard, he had roped in Roman as the other committee member. Roman said that the panel went well, with quite a few people in the audience. (At 10 in the morning? The mind boggles.)

The other event I had promised to attend was the **Australian Science Fiction Foundation panel**, 2 p.m., Monday afternoon, in the hour before the Closing Ceremony. I would have thought this the worst possible time to be given a panel. However,

Merv Binns (L.) receives his Peter MacNamara Award at Continuum 11 from Bruce Gillespie (r.) on behalf of Mariann and Pat MacNamara. (Photo: Ted McArdle.)





quite a few people were still around, even many interstate people I would have expected to be heading home. Few of them attended our panel, which is one of the best organised I've been to. Two of the panelists have been with the Foundation since the beginning: **Carey Handfield** and **Cath Ortlieb**. **Rose Mitchell** has returned to the organising committee after some years away, and **LynC** has joined us in recent years.

I've reprinted here two of the presentations. Carey Handfield's coverage of the first 10 years of the Foundation contains many surprises, and LynC's presentation sums up everything we are doing now. Cath, speaking from notes, gave a Secretary's viewpoint — especially the way she has to field peculiar requests from the internet. Cath bears most of the week-by-week workload of the committee, including the publication of *The Instrumentality*.

Rose Mitchell presented some ideas of possible future activities of the Foundation. These include a great extension of the Foundation's membership, which seems possible after a year in which she and LynC doubled it.

Most of us in the audience were present or past members of the Foundation — except one. A young bloke, he described how much he had enjoyed Continuum, especially when compared with soulless commercial conventions such as SupaNova. ('Yesterday I actually did game-playing with one of my favourite authors! This blew my mind.') After the panel, I discovered that his name is **Nick**, and that he seems to get the point of

fandom in a way many members of Continuum never do.

Roman and I went upstairs to the Cocoon Bar, a place I had only once ever discovered during three or four Continuum conventions held at the Ether Centre. I had hoped to find people to talk to. A huge number of Convention dead-dog-partiers had already formed a circle of chairs, which seemed impossible to invade. However, suddenly nobody seemed to want to talk to me, so I went home.

That ending to the convention was a bit depressing, but not nearly as depressing as the announcement at the Closing Ceremony that next year's Continuum will cover everything *except* print media! (Are there any literate people left who are actually interested in science fiction? Will I ever again be able to attend a real SF convention?) That makes it likely there will be no events worth attending, so I didn't join Continuum 12 for 2016. Perhaps Continuum 13 (or whatever it's called), the 2017 National Convention to be held in Melbourne, will be worth returning to.

I went home to finish compiling yet another index, read a book (the new translation of the Strugatsky Brothers' *Hard to Be a God*), and watch *The Imitation Game*, a very powerful film about the life, work, and terrible fate of Alan Turing, starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Keira Knightley. The director's/scriptwriter's commentary is nearly as interesting as the film itself.

— **Bruce Gillespie**, 10 June 2015

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## LynC

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## The Australian Science Fiction Foundation: What we do now

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**The Australian Science Fiction Foundation** was established in 1976 to carry on the work of Aussiecon, the first Australian World Science Fiction Convention, which was held in Melbourne in 1975, 40 years ago. That convention made a small profit, and we see The Foundation as being custodians of that money in perpetuity.

We endeavour to encourage the creation and appreciation of science fiction in Australia through our activities. Most of these activities are low profile, such as being a go-to for information on various SF-related matters. We don't promise to walk around with Encyclopaedias in our head, but we do try our best to help. Maybe Cath Ortlieb can give some examples of the things people ask us.

I'm told we have also sponsored writers workshops in the past. I know of only one, but then, I have only been around in fandom since 1976, starting in university fandom at that time, and not really venturing out onto the national scene for a few more years. Carey will talk about some of the more unusual things we have been asked to do, and done with, the money under our custodianship.

For many years we have also provided seed money, as

a loan, for the National Science Fiction Convention (the Natcon). For many years we were the only source for such funds, but then Western Australia and Victoria both established their own organisations, which were able to take on this role within their own communities. This facility is still available, and still being made use of by those communities without such organisations backing them. It is a loan, though. We are not made of unlimited funds, and can't afford to just give money away. To date, every loan has been paid back, often with generous extras attached. We are very grateful for any convention which is willing and capable of doing that.

We also sponsor two awards.

The **A. Bertram Chandler Award for Lifetime Achievement** in Australian Science Fiction honours **A. Bertram Chandler**, who died in 1984. Bert was born in Britain, but moved to Australia in the 1950s. He was a ship's captain on the Australian coastal route until he retired, and was 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.

The first Chandler Award was presented in 1992, 23 years ago, to Van Ikin. Since it is not awarded every year, there are only 17 subsequent winners. These 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, Danny Oz, and this year, **Donna Maree Hanson**.

Details of why each of these were considered worthy winners can be found on our website, where the full citations are available.

Nominations for the Chandler Award are always open. Just drop a note to the Secretary at our email address. Every year we gather to discuss those nominated and make a decision whether to (a) award it, and (b) the person on our current list who is most deserving.

The other award we sponsor is **The Norma K. Hemming Award**.

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. Born in Britain also, she migrated here at the age of 20, and published many short stories and plays before dying of breast cancer, aged only 31. ‘The Matriarchy of Renouk’ was staged at Aussiecon 4, which also saw the inaugural award go posthumously to **Maria Quinn** for *Gene Thieves*.

The **Norma K. Hemming Award** is a jury award for excellence in the exploration of themes of race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability in SF. The jury, while appointed by the ASFF, is completely independent of our organisation.

This year the jury chose to give the award to **Paddy O’Reilly** for her speculative fiction novel *The Wonders*, published by Affirm Press in July 2014. The judges also awarded an Honourable Mention to *The Female Factory*, a collection of stories by **Lisa L. Hannett** and **Angela Slatter**, published by Twelfth Planet Press in November 2014.

Incidentally, that makes two years running that Twelfth Planet Press has received an honourable mention for a collection of short stories; one of the previous year’s honourable mentions going to Kirstyn McDermott for *Caution: Contains Small Parts*. The other honourable mention, last year, went to Catherine Jinks for *A Very Unusual Pursuit*.

Again, full details of each award can be found on our

website. The front Hemming Award page shows only the winners, but if you drill down to the winner, you will also find full details of all the honourable mentions.

Many national conventions also hold an **amateur short story competition**. While there are many short story competitions around Australia throughout the year, our writers traditionally do poorly in mainstream competitions, being regarded as too genre. This is the only amateur competition for speculative fiction. If the Natcon is running the competition, and if they so desire, we sponsor the competition.

We also provide central banking facilities for the four Fan Funds which have Australian administrators. This avoids the inconvenience and expense of them having to set up new bank accounts each time their administrators change.

The funds are:

- **DUFF (Down Under Fan Fund)**, strengthening links between Australian/New Zealand and North American science fiction fans
- **FFANZ (Fan Fund for Australia and New Zealand)**, fostering links between New Zealand and Australian fans
- **GUFF (Get Up-and-over Fan Fund)**, giving European and Australasian fans a presence at each other’s top science fiction convention, be it the Natcon, a Worldcon, or the Eastercon
- and **NAFF (National Australia Fan Fund)**, helping Australian fans from interstate attend the Australian National science fiction convention (the Natcon).

How can you help? Please join us. Any member of our committee will accept the form and money. If renewing, we don’t need the form, but a paper note will help to jog our memories and ensure your renewal is processed. We are only asking \$A20.00.

**For details, please visit our website  
[www.asff.org.au](http://www.asff.org.au)**

**Or contact our administrative secretary  
Cath Ortlieb at  
P.O. Box 215, Forest Hill Vic 3131.**

**Email address:  
[asffsecretary@optusnet.com.au](mailto:asffsecretary@optusnet.com.au)**

— LynC, June 2015

# Carey Handfield

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## The Australian Science Fiction Foundation: The first 10 years

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**What follows is an article I wrote in 1986 following Aussiecon II.**

Following recent discussions about the Aussiecon II financial statement and the Australian Science Fiction Foundation Co-Operative Limited, I felt it was time to write an article on the Foundation and its activities over the past 10 years, to let people know the major contribution it has made to Australian science fiction and fandom.

The Foundation was formed in June 1976, largely following the success of Aussiecon I and the writers' workshop held with Ursula Le Guin in 1975. It was not formed, as some people have suggested, to take over the surplus from Aussiecon I (although it did get the balance of the Aussiecon funds several years later), but for a couple of other reasons.

Following Aussiecon I it was felt that there was a need for an 'official'-type organisation that could be used to apply for grants to government bodies for science fiction-related activities (in particular writers' workshops) — such an organisation having limited liability. Although the initial focus was on writers' workshops, the Foundation's activities were not limited to this area, as will be shown below.

The Foundation's first workshop was held at Monash University in Melbourne early in 1977. It was highly successful, and had George Turner, Christopher Priest, and Vonda McIntyre as writers in residence. It involved several months of hard work by the Foundation, and was financed largely by a grant from the Literature Board of the Australia Council. In addition to the workshop there was a convention held in Melbourne — Monoclave — plus talks to the Nova Mob and visits by Chris and Vonda to other cities.

The Foundation gave financial and administrative assistance to a writers' workshop run by Petrina Smith in Sydney in 1979 with Terry Carr and George Turner as

writers in residence. Grants were also given to Jeff Harris in Adelaide for several mini-workshops.

One area on which the Foundation was active was giving loans to a number of conventions that needed start-up funds. These included Monoclave, Strinecon, two Melbourne Eastercons, Syncon 79 (\$500), two Adelaide cons, plus Cinecon and Funcon.

Other activities included:

- producing several issues of *The Instrumentality*, the Foundation newsletter
- running a radio program on SF on Melbourne's 3ZZZ
- sponsoring and running short story competitions in conjunction with the 17th Australian SF Convention and Aussiecon II
- financial assistance to *Australian Science Fiction News*
- grants to promote Australian SF at Seacon 1979 in Brighton, England
- support for the Australia in '83 Worldcon bid
- publishing the *Australian SF Calendar* in 1981
- preservation of the Aussiecon I videotapes.

From late 1981 onwards, the Foundation's main activity was running the Melbourne in '85 bid, and then Aussiecon II, the 43rd World Science Fiction Convention.

The success of the Foundation has been due largely to the people who worked for it over the years, including Peter Darling, Peter Miller, David Grigg, Christine Asby, Derrick Ashby, Carey Handfield, Kitty Vigo, Rob Gerand, Paul Stevens, Merv Binns, Don Ashby, Robin Johnson, and John Foyster. In particular, there is one person who has made a major contribution to the Foundation: Peter Darling, who has been secretary for most of the Foundation's existence.

— Carey Handfield

**Originally written in 1986; reprinted 7 June 2015**

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## The Enjoyable Interruptions report

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During the second half of this year I have been hoping to settle down to finish *SF Commentary* 90 and 91. But wouldn't you know it? Various clients kept sending me indexes to compile. Nothing wrong with that, once the money rolls in, but suddenly I found I hadn't touched a fanzine page for four weeks. Much the same thing happened in July. Finished issues of *SFCs* 90 and 91 seemed

tantalisingly close — until a client I had not heard from three years sent me a 580-page book to index, and a client from whom I had not heard for two years sent me a 720-page book to index.

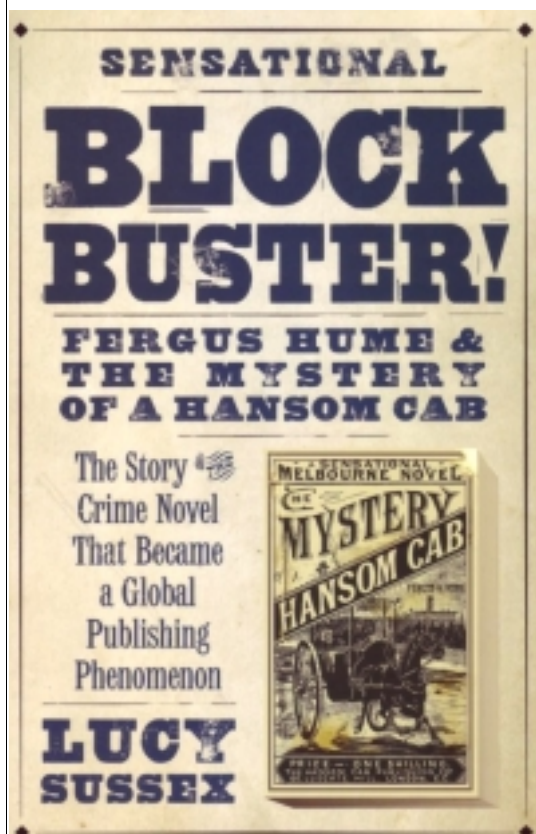
And there have been other, much more enjoyable interruptions.

In March, I received an email from **Angus Taylor** from

Canada. Who is Angus Taylor? you say. In the early seventies, he was a fairly well-known member of Toronto fandom. He was also a person who wrote articles about Philip K. Dick (especially *Philip K. Dick and the Umbrella of Light*, TK Graphics, 1975), so we became correspondents. When I was visiting Toronto in September 1973, after Torcon 2 had finished Angus showed me around the town. One evening, we set off to take a look at the new movie starring Woody Allen, *Play It Again, Sam*. It was showing at the Roxy for 99 cents a ticket. When we arrived, the queue stretched half a mile, so we gave up on that idea. After I returned to Australia in February 1974, I kept in touch with Angus. In the middle seventies, he went off to the Netherlands to do post-doctorate work, returned to Canada ... and I no longer heard from him.

In March, Angus emailed to say that he had been visiting his brother in Brisbane for six weeks, and would like to travel to Melbourne to catch up before he returned to Victoria, Canada, where he is a philosophy teacher. He caught the suburban train out to Greensborough, visited Elaine and me and the cats for the afternoon, and had cakes and coffee with us to the legendary Urban Grooves. It was as if 42 years had disappeared. I even recognised Angus when he stepped off the train, although I'm not sure he would have recognised me. (I had hair in 1973.)

On 1 July, **Nova Mob** was cancelled because the Nova Mobbers, plus many other friends, were invited to the launch of **Lucy Sussex's** *Blockbuster!*, her book about the life and career of Fergus Hume and his novel *The Mystery of the Hansom Cab*. Hume's book was a hit in the 1880s, doing quite well here in the Colonies, later selling several hundred thousand copies in Britain, America, and Europe. Lucy became interested in nineteenth-century detective and crime fiction when she was working with

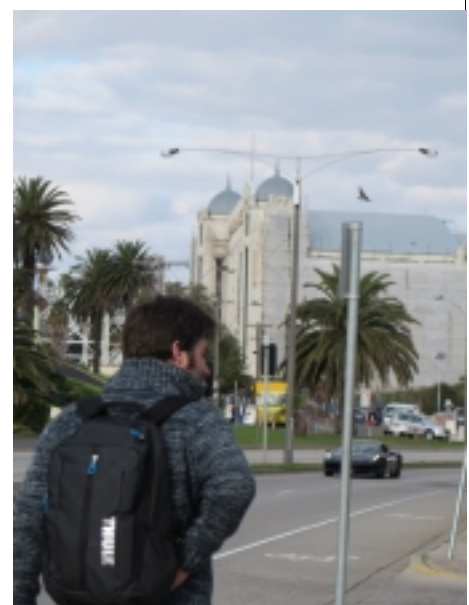


Bruce Gillespie (l.) and Guy Salvidge (r.) striding along St Kilda Pier toward the kiosk up ahead ...



... which was closed ...

... so we set off toward the Palais Theatre (shown) on the St Kilda Foreshore, heading for cakes and coffee in Acland Street. (Photos: Naomi.)





Stephen Knight on his book, so it was appropriate that Stephen should conducted the book launch as an interview with Lucy at Readers Feast in Melbourne. I had bought her book already at Continuum at the beginning of June, so did not line up for an autograph. Also, we wanted to catch up with our friend Dora Levakis, who had painted Lucy's portrait last year.

It's been a cold winter, but on one of the few slightly warmer days in July, I met **Guy Salvidge** and his partner **Naomi** under the clocks at Flinders Street Station. Guy wrote the long article about Philip K. Dick that appeared in *SF Commentary* a year or two ago. He has also written reviews for me, and has published three novels, two of which I've read (*Yellowcake Springs* and *Yellowcake Summer*). Guy's gone off science fiction at the moment, but he brought with him from Western Australia a feast of interesting observations and thoughts. The three of us ate lunch at the Spaghetti Tree, at the top of Bourke Street, then caught a tram to St Kilda. It was good bracing weather, so we walked out on the St Kilda Pier (but the kiosk was closed), then back along the shore to Luna Park. As far as I can remember, I visited Luna Park most recently more than 30 years ago, when it looked rather rundown. Since then, most of the rides have been upgraded and repainted — except the Scenic Railway, parts of which are still being rebuilt. Guy and Naomi had had their hearts set on riding the Scenic Railway, but had to settle for the Enterprise Centrifuge instead. I doubted that I would survive such an experience, so I sat there taking care of their bags. Luna Park was full of hurtling kids, all enjoying themselves and not crouched over mobile phones.

At the end of the afternoon we became snared by one of the famous Acland Street cake shops, where optimistic diets go to die. Of course we had cakes and coffee — at half the price charged by Greensborough cafes for much inferior cakes.

The following night, Elaine and I took the train out to Carnegie's Rosstown Hotel to celebrate a combined birthday party. Officially it was **Merv Binns'** 81st birthday, but **Dick Jenssen** was celebrating his 80th birthday the same week. Earlier in the year **Lee Harding** had celebrated his 78th birthday, **Bill Wright** his 76th, and **Race Mathews** his 80th. In 1952, Race, Lee, Dick, and Merv, with a few other people, formed the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. Other people at the gathering included mere youngsters, such as Elaine and me, and **David Russell** and **Stephen Campbell**, who had travelled from Warrnambool, and people a bit older than us, such as **Robin Johnson**, nearly arrived back in Victoria after many years in Tasmania, **Peter Kemp** (also 80 this year) and his wife **Tanya**, and **Truda Straede**. For the first time in nearly a year we caught up with **Race** and **Iola Mathews**, both still very busy. Race has now become Dr Dr Mathews, having added a D.Theol. to his PhD. We travelled back to Melbourne by train with David, Stephen, and Robin.

The following night I ate at **Ciao** restaurant before taking the tram up to 100 Sydney Road, Coburg, the hall of St Augustine's Anglican Church, which became the current meeting place of the **Melbourne Science Fiction Club**, after it was forced to leave the St David's venue in West Brunswick. Usually I will avoid the Annual General



Robin Johnson (80) and Merv Binns, enjoying his 81st birthday celebration. (Photo: Helena Binns.)



Who would believe that these three sat around a table in 1952 planning the formation of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club? Merv Binns (L.), Dick Jenssen (centre), and Lee Harding (slightly younger) (r.) (Photo: Helena Binns.)



(l. to r.) Robin Johnson; Iola Mathews; Race Mathews (co-founder of the Melbourne SF Club in 1952, who turned 80 this year); and Bruce Gillespie. (Photo: Helena Binns.)

Meeting of any organisation, but I felt the need to attend this particular meeting. A proposition had been placed before the meeting that the Club should close completely. The mere possibility that the club might close after 64 years brought out the troops — or as many as can be summoned these days. There were 25 voting members of the meeting. **Alison Barton**, club President,



Stephen Campbell, not quite the youngest at the table. That honour probably went to David Russell, also from Warrnambool. (Photo: Helena Binns.)

managed the meeting superbly, despite a conflict between two motions. Should the Club close, or should we vote to close in a year's time if next year's AGM ratifies the motion? Despite some strong arguments for both motions, both lost. Should we, however, maintain the weekly meeting schedule? A proposition to change to monthly meetings passed unanimously. Which is when I went slightly crazy. If I did not have to turn up to meetings *weekly* (which is difficult when living in Greensborough) but only *monthly*, I could participate in the club's activities. When there was a call for volunteers to become part of the Committee, I found myself putting up my hand. The new committee is President: **Alison Barton**; Vice-President: **Bruce Gillespie**; Secretary: **Claire McDonald-Sims**; Treasurer: **Mark Ford**; and **Eva Stein** and **Ted McArdle** (*Ethel the Aardvark* editor) as the other committee members. The first meeting date of the new schedule was the third Friday of August.

The only other committees I've ever consented to join were the Aussiecon 1 committee from 1973 to 1975, the Meteor Inc. Board since Meteor began, and the Australian SF Foundation Board since I was invited to join a few years ago.

The next day, **Murray** and **Natalie MacLachlan** visited us at Greensborough to install a new Sangean Digital/Internet radio. However, we haven't sorted out all the problems of running it yet.

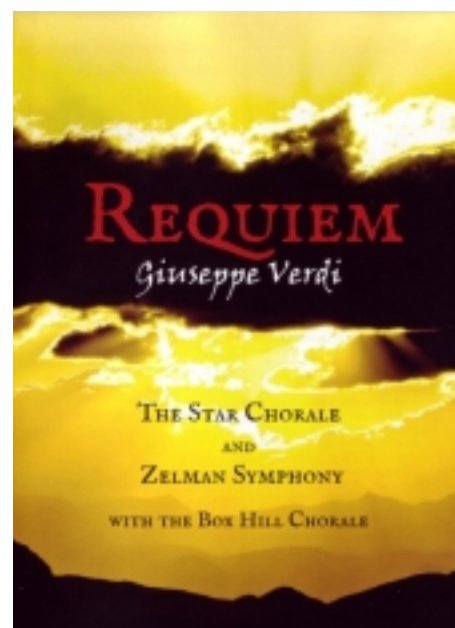
Meanwhile, I was invited by **Barbara Selvay**, whom I had first met at Publications Branch in 1971, to a social gathering at her place to honour the 77th birthday of **Malcolm McHarg**, who provided me with most of my freelance editing work between late 1974 and the end of 1976. I met Malcolm because Barbara told me that he

was a management consultant who might need an editor/writer. She knew Malcolm because she had gone to teachers' college with **Julie**, Malcolm's first wife. (Julie died of breast cancer almost exactly 20 years ago.) When I met Malcolm and Julie, they would take me out to dinner at various Carlton restaurants, accompanied by their children **Fraser** (who was then seven) and **Justine** (then five). At the birthday party on 20 July, Fraser arrived with his wife **Melissa** and their two daughters, the oldest of whom is just finishing secondary school. I last met Fraser at Slow Glass Books in Northcote; he has long since been a customer of Justin Ackroyd's. He and his wife have been fans of board games for many years, and Melissa is currently finishing a PhD about the culture of board games.

Two of Barbara's other friends were there. I discovered late in the night that **John Smith's** father was **Bernard Smith**, Australia's most famous art historian.

It was a night of good wines and good yarns, many of them told by Malcolm, who has done much since he and Julie went to Sydney in the early 1980s. I don't often get to drink really good wine these days. After Fraser had dropped his family home, he was kind enough to drive me to Greensborough.

The final bit of excitement for the month has already been covered well by **David Grigg** in the August mailing of ANZAPA. It's all his fault that Elaine and I attended the performance of Verdi's *Requiem* on the afternoon of 26 July at the Melbourne Town Hall. When David and Sue's daughter **Catherine** was a student at Methodist Ladies College, David became a member of the **Star Chorale**, a choir organised by the school's music head, **Jane Elton Brown**. Every year the Chorale puts on a major production, usually in the hall at MLC, with imported soloists. This year they went for broke ... or they could have been declared broke. A 200-voice choir was formed from the Star Chorale and the **Box Hill Chorale**, with the **Zelman Symphony** providing the orchestra. These people were not paid, but the four soloists, imported from the Australian Opera, were paid. And the Melbourne Town Hall had to be paid for. The whole shebang had to draw at least 1200 paying customers to retrieve its



costs. Fortunately, every person on stage seemed to have lots of relatives and friends, so the Melbourne Town Hall was full. The soloists were uniformly good singers (which was a relief, because I once experienced a performance of the Verdi *Requiem* with a wobbly soprano voice). The

choir was fabulous. And most of the orchestra were wonderful, although there were a few shaky entrances.

— Bruce Gillespie, 31 July 2015

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# Lost in action

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Murray Moore

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Art Widner 1917–2015:

The Art Widner who I knew was always old

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**Bruce Gillespie:** Art Widner has left us at the age of 97. The cancer that he overcame when he was 80 finally caught up with him. Many of us in fandom had hoped to attend his 100th birthday, but instead some fans were able to attend in June this year his memorial service in Gualala, California. I've lost count of the number of times he visited Melbourne, including his visit to Aussiecon III in 1985, his DUFF trip (1991), a trip in 2003 when Bill Wright took us to High Tea at the Windsor, his trip to Aussiecon 4 in 2010, and his visit only two years ago, when he caught up with fans over dinner then travelled by tram to a meeting of the Nova Mob. Wise, witty, experienced — Art Widner was great company, and he never took himself too seriously.

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The Art Widner who I knew was always old. I only knew him in this century.

Art and I were roommates during my first Corflu, in Boston, in February of 2001. Art was 83, I reckon, working backward from his 90th birthday in September 2007.

I knew who Art was. Both of us were members of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA) at the time so I had read issues of his FAPazine, *Yhos*.

Art was someone you had to meet to fully appreciate him. Reading his apazines showed him to be intelligent and interesting. In person he was a redwood. (What kind of a tree would I be? A birch or a maple.) Art was thick. A crane would be needed to lift him off the ground. I mean to tell you, he was solid.

His spelling was his own, Widnerese. My memory is that he described his spelling as simplified spelling, but he did not spell simplified and spell spelling as you and I spell these two words.

Art created his own spelling system, an act of creativity that you might expect would be annoying to you and me. The



(l. to r.) Art Widner; John Harvey; Eve Harvey, Aussiecon IV, August 2010. (Photo: Tom Becker.)





**Art Widner Memorial Service, 22 June 2015, Gualala, California.**

**Mike Ward**, who took the photo, does his best to tell us who these people are:

'My best, left to right (no rows, as they are randomly staggered): Dave Nee; David Bratman; Randy Smith; Rich Coad; woman and her husband at the food table: probably relatives or local; name suppressed; Karen Schaffer (facing the camera); Allen Baum; Donya White; man seated: probably relative or friend of the deceased; Magenta Widner; Melissa (Missy) Widner (facing right, holding plate of food); man with curly hair: a relative — one of the Australians, but I don't have his name; man sitting in back: probably Ethan Widner; woman in striped top: a relative; Tom Becker; man in dark shirt; probably a local friend; Alan Rosenthal.'

occasional e-list member did mutter about Art's spelling; me, I had no trouble reading his sentences, with the exception of one spelling, one time, whose equivalent in conventional English eluded me.

I admired Art's good humour. He had opinions about American politics; however, he was not defeated. His attitude was not 'We are all doomed'. I don't recall Art ever getting into a verbal dustup on one of the e-lists, about politics or any other subject. He was welcomed at a convention whenever he made an appearance, partly, to be fair, for being alive.

Art was an outlier in terms of being so healthy at such an advanced age. In May of 2013, almost two years ago, he drove, alone, from his rural home north of San Francisco to Seattle, to attend the 2013 Corflu. Even more of a surprise, to me anyway, in May of last year, I encountered Art in the con suite of the 2014 Corflu hotel. Art had flown from California to Richmond, Virginia, although his age and his prostate cancer were wearing him down.

I admired Art's style of dressing. I too value comfort over appearance. Overalls are as high on the comfort side as you can get; also suspenders and pants.

I envied the custom-built-for-Art octagonal wooden house surrounded by trees in which he lived until a few years ago, outside Gualala, California. I made the excellent decision in 2007 not to attend Worldcon that year in Japan (Yokohama), but instead to attend Eastercon in England in the spring and Art's ninetieth birthday in October.

Art's house was full of paper; stacks of books and

magazines and fanzines, the cliché of a path through paper to get to a comfortable chair. His car was distinctive too, a permanent loan from a grand-daughter, an 'Art' car decorated with Australian Aboriginal designs.

Referring back to Art's driving to Seattle two years ago, whether on the perpetually twisting Pacific Coast Highway or on a conventional, away-from-the-coast highway, recall his age. Reports from California fans suggest — I have no personal experience — that Art drove with enthusiasm. An appropriate bumper sticker for drivers who shared a highway with Art could be 'Methuselah tailgated me'.

I end with an example of Widnerese, dated 2 November 2013, in which Art responds to another e-list member's attempt at Widnerese.

Art: 'May I enroll as Member #3? I didn't intend to stir up this hornet's nest. My mistake was in relapsing to that Old Hypothesis, Fen r Slen, & automatically grok e e cummings type poetry. If Ted finds Advanst Orthograpy tejus, but dublthinx me a quote role model unquote, he knows how tejus (thanx TR) I find ryting Std English. Furthermore, I sez gratuitously, I thot Jofen wd awl dig that Mundania is going thru SNAFU, with Republicans in TARFU mode, well on thr weigh to FUBAR. I like to thro in anakronizms like "weig," just to be meen. Thanx 4 yr attempt @ Widnerese, but U left out a silabl in idiosinkratik & I wd never use "slk" 4 "slack" bcoz illiter-alists wd make a silk purs out of a souse ear. Basta. Anyone, hoo is pretty dam tired of this not so pretty how town.'





Ned Brooks with his fanzine collection. (Photo from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.)

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## Murray Moore

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### Ned Brooks made the effort

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**News from *File 770*:** Southern fan Cuyler W. 'Ned' Brooks died 31 August 2015. The 77-year-old had been on his roof making repairs when he fell off and died. He was in his sixth decade as a fan, a life begun by answering a small ad in a science fiction magazine, 'Discover fandom for \$2.'

**Bruce Gillespie writes:** Ned Brooks was at the first Aussiecon, in Melbourne, 1975, but I did not meet him there. I've never met him, but I counted him one of my best friends in fandom. He boasted an enormous collection of printed matter, which happened to include much science fiction and many fanzines, plus an enormous collection of typewriters. He was an aircraft engineer with NASA until he retired. In the late 1970s he started trading fanzines with me: first *It Comes in the Mail*, then *It Goes on the Shelf*, telling us about the extraordinary collectibles that he bought or people sent him, year after year. He has sent me many letters of comment over the years, and during the last 15 years we've swapped messages on various e-lists. All I can say is: don't climb on roofs. We can't do without people like Ned Brooks.

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Three years ago Mary Ellen and I drove to DeepSouthCon 50, our first DeepSouthCon, to help throw a Loncon 3 party. The following weekend, in a suburb of Cincinnati, was that year's edition of the even older

Midwestcon, another con we had never attended.

But the day following DeepSouthCon, that year held in Huntsville, Alabama, we drove not north but east?, southeast?, arriving at 5 p.m. at Ned's address.

I had emailed Ned that we would arrive late tomorrow. Ned opened his door expecting a tradesman and instead found me. I hadn't noticed that I sent the message to Ned a few minutes past midnight.

Ned invited us in; showed us his paper collection (books, fanzines) and his metal collection (typewriters); took us to his favourite hunting ground, the Last Chance Thrift Store (in which I was disappointed by the lack of

anything interesting; perhaps I had to visit, like Ned, seemingly daily); and to a favourite restaurant (Greek, maybe).

Ned was as nice and as sociable and as interesting in person as otherwise.

The lesson I take from this encounter, and I offer it for your consideration, is, if you want to meet someone, and doing so requires effort, make the effort.

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## James Doig

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### Graeme Flanagan 1948–2015: Passionate about Australian popular fiction

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When **James Doig**, noted Canberra academic, librarian, writer, and anthologist, told me a while ago that he lived down his Canberra street from **Graeme Flanagan**, I thought that a mystery had been solved. What had happened to Graeme Flanagan, who was the projectionist for the Melbourne Fantasy Film Group for some years? He seemed to disappear from sight in the early 1970s. I remember Graeme Flanagan well. When Leigh Edmonds and I looked in at the Melbourne SF Club one Saturday afternoon in 1969, Graeme was doing something else, but said, 'Sit down, fellers, and watch the complete, tinted *Metropolis*. We showed it last night here in the club.' So we watched what was then believed to be the only copy of the complete *Metropolis*, which had been lent to the Club for a week by a collector in Adelaide.

It seems that the Graeme Flanagan James Doig knew was quite a different person from the Melbourne incarnation. True, Canberra's Graeme was a distinguished member of Australia's SF and book-collecting community. But as far as I know, he did not attend regular Australian SF conventions, so I didn't meet him. After Canberra's Graeme Flanagan died, James Doig contributed this obituary of his near neighbour.

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Graeme Kenneth Flanagan died at his home in Canberra on Saturday, 21 February 2015. He was aged 67. Graeme was passionate about Australian popular fiction, blues music, art, and cinema, and he became involved in fandom for all of these interests, often taking a leading role in Australia. He loved travelling, and he visited the United States several times with his family, where he visited writers, collectors, and artists, and attended paperback fairs and blues festivals.

Graeme is probably best known for the *Australian Vintage Paperback Guide* (Gryphon Books, 1993), but he also wrote or co-wrote bibliographies of Robert Bloch and Richard Matheson. He began collecting as a high school student, and his first passion were horror stories and weird tales of the sort that were available at the time in British paperbacks published by Pan (the *Books of Horror* and *Alfred Hitchcock's* anthologies), Panther (the *Weird Tales* authors), Four Square and Corgi. His favourite author was Robert Bloch, whom he originally read in a Horwitz anthology titled *Horror-7*.

After finishing school, Graeme joined the Department of Defence in Canberra, where he remained for his entire working life. During the 1970s he became heavily involved in the Australian Blues Society, and contributed to its newsletter and other events and publications. He

continued to read Robert Bloch, but was frustrated that he could find very few of his books in Australia. Eventually Graeme decided to go to the source — he obtained Bloch's address from Forrest Ackerman at *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and wrote to him asking how he could obtain his books. A correspondence began, which culminated in Graeme's bio-bibliography of Bloch, which was published in 1979. The two met when Graeme visited the US in 1980 and when Bloch was Guest of Honour at Cinecon in 1981, a science fiction film convention organised by Merv Binns in Melbourne. They remained friends, and Bloch mentions him in his autobiography, *Once Around the Bloch*.

During the 1980s, Graeme joined amateur press associations dedicated to Robert E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, and crime fiction. Bloch sparked an interest in crime fiction, and collecting vintage crime fiction became a passion — in particular, Graeme's collecting interests became centred on the Phantom Books series of US reprints and the Australian writers 'Carter Brown' (Alan Yates), 'Larry Kent', and their ilk. Soon Graeme was writing articles about these writers for the Sydney crime magazine *Mean Streets*, and for Gary Lovisi's *Paperback Parade*. Graeme also wrote an entry on Australian crime magazines for *Mike Cook's Mystery, Detective and Espionage*



Graeme Flanagan with a small part of his collection. (Photos supplied by James Doig.)

*Magazines* (1983). This work culminated in the *Australian Vintage Paperback Guide*, published by Lovisi's Gryphon Books in 1993. The guide is still the best and most authoritative book on Australian paperback fiction and is based on meticulous research in the archives of prolific Australian publishers Horwitz and Cleveland.

Graeme corresponded and met with numerous writers and collectors. Through his involvement in amateur press associations and fandom he developed friendships with L. Sprague de Camp, J. Vernon Shea, Fritz Leiber, E. Hoffman Price, Basil Wells, and Margaret St Clair. He knew and exchanged books and information with numerous collectors, including Tom Lessor in the United States, who has one of the largest collections of Austro-



lian crime pulp in the world. Graeme was also a great fan of paperback cover artists, in particular Robert McGinnis, but also Bob Maguire, Earle K. Bergey, Rudolph Belarski, and Mike Hoffman.

While Graeme will remain best known for his bibliographical work, his greatest love was his family, and his greatest thrill was sharing his passion for books, blues, and films with others. His aim in all of his published work was to promote the work of writers, musicians, and artists who interested him.

— James Doig, September 2015

## Health Report, for now

Since I last wrote about them, my various health problems have cleared up, but I don't know that they won't return.

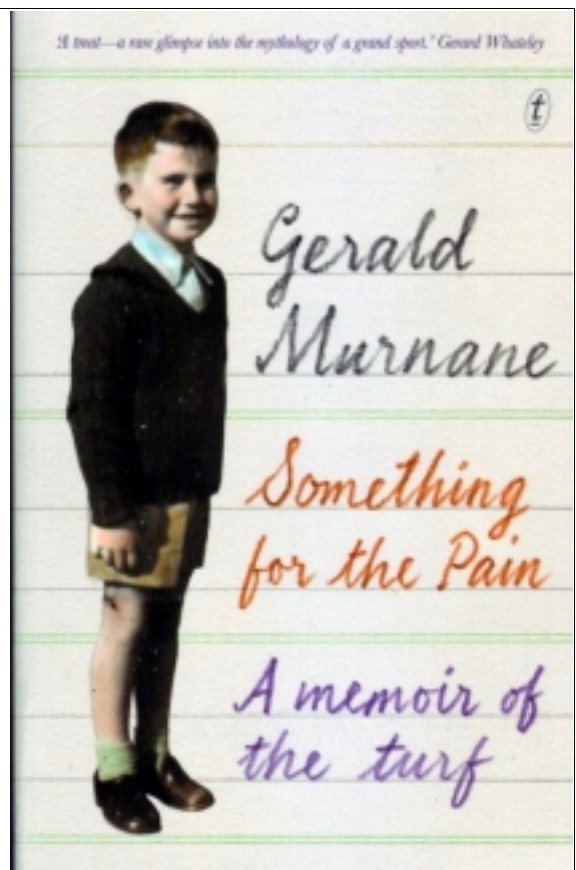
In May the GP sent me to a local chest specialist, who actually knew what I was talking about. For the GP my prolonged dry cough had been just a vague condition that might be fixed up by doing this or that. Meanwhile I kept meeting people who suffered from the same condition. The specialist agreed that there had been an epidemic of dry-throat-goes-on-for-about-eight-weeks, but offered no explanation. (A viral test a few weeks before had showed no virus at all.) He tested my lungs and found they are working well. He showed me the right way to use my nose inhaler to ensure I did not suffer from post-nasal drip (a trigger of the cough), and prescribed

a antihistamine inhaler. Meanwhile I took an antihistamine tablet (Telfast) every day for a week, and suddenly I came good. But I still don't know what triggered the condition in the first place ... twice.

The main trigger for my springy lower back seems to have been pulling a wheelie-case instead of carrying a bag, thus twisting my back. I've bought a much lighter wheelie-case, and use it sparingly. Also, Elaine bought me a new, much more suitable typist's chair in February. However, my medical masseur has retired recently, so I don't have someone who can dig into those painful muscles to make my back feel well. Anybody know a good medical masseur, easily reached by public transport from Greensborough?



first, the letters ...



**GERALD MURNANE**  
**PO Box 40, Goroke VIC 3412**

Thanks for the two publications.

I've enclosed the twenty-first of the twenty-seven sections of my horsey book, as I call it for short. Text will publish the book at this time in 2015.

While I was writing *Summer Fair and Mrs Smith*, it occurred to me to wonder what became of the Ortlieb couple mentioned therein, she who was pleasant to look at and he who whinged often about his pay and his working conditions. I looked into a telephone directory of a few years ago and found only one entry for Ortlieb. I recall that the address was in Burwood.

I don't read all of your publications, of course, but I made sure to read about your trip to W'bool and while doing so was struck by your mention of some Ortliebs in Burwood. What can you tell me about your Ortliebs?

When I last saw my Ortliebs, I was 22 and they, I reckon, were a few years older.

(30 September 2014)

[\*brg\* I told Marc and Cath Ortlieb about Gerald's enquiry. Marc and Cath live in Burwood, but Marc arrived in Victoria from South Australia only during the late 1970s. He met Cath in Melbourne. After they married, they bought a house in Burwood, where they still live, with their children (now in their twenties) Natalie and Michael. Marc, who was born in Britain, tells us that he was adopted by the Ortlieb family. Cath and Marc have been the rocks upon which Melbourne fandom has been based for the last forty years. Not only has Cath been the

Secretary of the Australian SF Foundation since it was founded, but she and Marc have been long-time members of ANZAPA and members of various convention committees. Marc has dropped out of fandom recently, but we can hardly forget the Ditmars he won for his fanzines in the eighties, and his brilliant editorship of the *SF Bullshead*.\*]

I was pleased to receive *SFC* 88, even though most of the contents are remote from my interests nowadays.

Your photos of Oakleigh reminded me of a visit that I made to that part of Melbourne in March 2009, only weeks after my wife, Catherine, had died. An old uncle of hers had died, and his funeral was at the Catholic Church near the corner of Ferntree Gully Road and Huntingdale Road. That was not at all my part of Oakleigh, so I left home an hour early and made a detour into the drab, semi-industrial area between Huntingdale and Clayton railway stations and south of the line itself. I hadn't set foot there since I moved out of my family home in early 1960 — 49 years before.

You'd think someone who has read *Remembrance of Things Past* twice would have had more sense than to be nosing around the site of his adolescence. (I lived in Peter Street, South Oakleigh, from around my thirteenth to my eighteenth birthday.) In a word, I got nothing from my visit — no new insights; no long-lost memories. Proust's narrator was right — it serves no purpose to try to find the past in the places where you experienced it. If my past is anywhere, it's in me — in the place I call for convenience my memory, which is a simple term for a hugely complex thing.

I have a host of memories from my years in South Oakleigh. In my Chronological Archive, as I call it, is a



typescript of about. 70,000 words, being a straight bit of autobiography covering my Oakleigh years. During the few minutes while I strolled along Peter Street, I could make no connection between my host of memories and the meagre sights around me. I didn't even recognise our old house when I first walked past it—I had to count the houses from the nearest corner to learn for sure which place had been ours long ago. I got out the street directory just now and reassured myself: I looked at Peter Street, South Oakleigh on the map and saw only what I used to see in that locality in the early 1950s. Whatever I saw there in 2009 I've quite forgotten. It had nothing to do with me.

(29 December 2014)

**[\*brg\* As I wrote back to Gerald, I was astonished when I visited our old house, at the corner of Bishop Street and Haughton Road, Oakleigh, last year with my sister Robin, to discover how little it had changed. Disappeared was the large lawn at the back over which I used to lay down my Hornby railway lines, pretending the shape of the garden formed a map of the USA. A second house has been built over the lawn and garden at the back. But the front of the house looks exactly the same as it had then, except for the disappearance of the rose trees along the path from the front gate to the front door. Both my father and his brother Fred loved rose trees. Still existing along the front veranda is a stone and plaster parapet. I used to sit on there for many hours in the late afternoon watching the shunting engines 'playing train bangs' with the goods carriages in the huge railway yards that stretched along the main Gippsland line from Oakleigh station halfway to Huntingdale (then East Oakleigh) station. I hardly noticed the cars careering along Haughton Road in front of our house. Only the trains interested me.\*]**

I don't know why you were expecting *Landscape with Landscape* so soon. I've just written an Author's Foreword and sent it to Sydney, but I don't know whether the book will come out late this year or early next year. I'd argue for next year so as to avoid a clash with the horse-book, *Something for the Pain*. Sometimes I can't believe I'm still doing all this writing and publishing as I'm approaching eighty. The horse-book will be my twelfth. After that will come a collection of poetry. I've finished about a third of the poems and shown about a sixth to Ivor Indyk of Giramondo. He's a well-known publisher of poetry, and he has told me my stuff is well deserving of publication. Plus, I've still got *Border Districts* with Ivor, although I want that to be my very last published book. Plus again, Ivor has it in mind to bring out a new *Emerald Blue* in future.

(28 January 2015)

**[\*brg\* *Something for the Pain*, Gerald's book about his obsession with horse racing, has been published in September 2015, from Text Publishing. Its publication coincides with a long article by Shannon Burns about Gerald's life and work in *Australian Book Review*, and a long and engaging interview by Stephen Romei, the *Australian's***

**Literary Editor, in *The Weekend Australian Review*, 19–20 September 2015.\*]**

**BRIAN W. ALDISS O.B.E.**

**39 St Andrews Road, Old Headington,  
Oxford OX3 9DL, UK**

Grateful thanks for *SF Commentary* 88 — a pretty swish production. My connections with fans and friends has a lower threshold these days, but I always thirst to hear. Of course I was tickled pretty pink to read the bit about my being serenaded by 9000 people at the World Con. What jollity! You might imagine that after that I'd be resting up on my oars — but no. I'm now writing a long historical novel set in Russia (inspired by wonderful Tolstoi ...)

I bear glad news for your pages. Today, I have been told that I am elected President of the Maktumkuli Society. I turned Maktumkuli's eighteenth-century verses into English verse a while ago. Unpaid, please note. That volume has — remarkably, you might think — recently been reprinted by The Friday Project, who are reprinting all my previous stuff, all 70 or 80 volumes of it.

My family is fine and sends regards. My two dear daughters are about to celebrate their birthdays — same day, ten years difference between them. How they managed it I dunno.

All best regards to you and all other friends,  
Brian.

(3 March 2015)

**[\*brg\* As witness that *SF Commentary* 90 is appearing a year later than it should be, note that Brian recently celebrated his ninetieth birthday. In *SFC* 88, Murray Moore's report was of Brian's eighty-ninth birthday, celebrated by the assembled members of the London world convention in 2014. At a gathering in Old Headington for his ninetieth**



Brian Aldiss reading from his latest short story at his ninetieth birthday gathering in August 2015. (Photo: John Clute.)

birthday, Brian read from a recent short story and announced that he is half way through writing a new novel.\*]

**JOHN LITCHEN**  
**PO Box 3503, Robina Town Centre QLD 4230**

Some time ago you mentioned you couldn't get a copy of *Jocasta* by Brian Aldiss.

Although it was published in 2004, it seemed to have vanished.

I ordered a copy from Book Depository since (last year around October or November) they had it listed as forthcoming, but after six months or so I queried them, and was told they had no idea if it would come soon or if it would come at all, and offered to refund my money. I told them to leave it and if the book ever turned up I'd already paid for it.

I had forgotten completely about it until the first week in December (2014), when an email arrived from them to tell me the book was on its way (at last after more than a year of waiting).

It is not what I expected. I had some vague idea it was a family saga and thought, well it could be interesting; after all, it is written by Brian Aldiss, and anything he writes is usually, at the very least, interesting.

As it turns out, it is a family saga, and a fascinating one at that. It is the retelling of the story of the great drama/tragedies *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* by Sophocles, but recast from the viewpoint of *Jocasta*.

Absolutely brilliant writing! Even if you don't know the story in those plays, it still reads as fresh and exciting as the plays themselves must have been when first performed thousands of years ago.

I think you will like it. It is a small masterpiece from the era of later Brian Aldiss' writings and shows wonderful maturity and restraint. I suspect this was written about the same time as *The Cretan Teat* but for some reason didn't get published then or was distributed properly. Since Brian's son married a Greek lady, I suspect Brian spent quite some time in Greece and its islands, absorbing the culture and history. It has inspired him to write brilliantly, and *The Cretan Teat* and *Jocasta* are two of the results, some of the best things he has ever written.

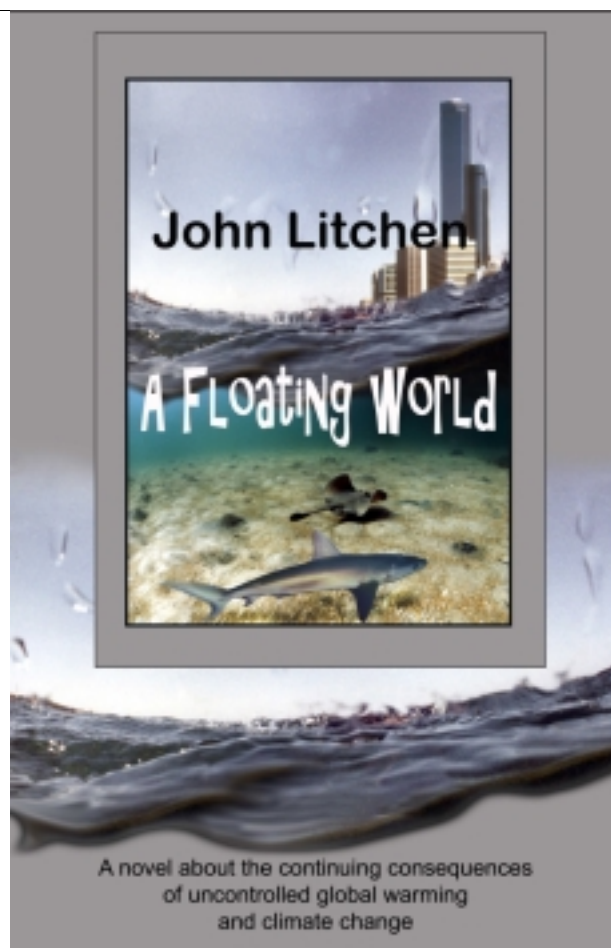
It appears that the publisher The Friday Project is doing all of Brian's previously published works and this is fabulous because perhaps more people will now become aware of him. It would be such a shame if he ends up forgotten like so many other deserving writers.

(19 January 2015)

**[\*brg\* To say that I'm astonished and delighted to finally have the chance to read Brian Aldiss's *Jocasta* is the understatement of the year. I'd better ask first: is this a loan or a gift? If a gift, I'm astonished at your generosity. Surely you don't want to keep the copy? Looking forward to reading this immensely.\*]**

It's a gift.. Enjoy it.

I thought I'd get this off to you; otherwise it will sit in a folder and I won't remember whether I sent it or not.



There are other reviews in the folder which I have sent you and some of them you have already published.

(3 February 2015)

I have finally gone over the file for *And The Waters Prevailed* and corrected (I hope) all the typos, and incidentally changed the ending so the young policewoman doesn't die (just in case I want to use her again) which also makes the ending a bit more satisfactory. I've prepared it for sale as a smaller paperback available soon from Amazon and Book Depository, among others, including the Espresso Book Machine. It has been retitled to *A Floating World*. So I made a new poster with the new titled cover in case one day you would like to use it.

(30 May 2015)

**WERNER KOOPMANN**  
**202c Reiherstieg,**  
**21244 Buchholz, Germany**

**[\*brg\* As you can see from the following letters, Werner and his wife Ulla spent the last part of 2014 and much of 2015 anticipating their visit to Australia in September this year. I'll relate the strange end of this story after you've read the letters — just a few of those Werner has sent me over the last 12 months.\*]**

Our journey to Australia is approaching slowly. We have the prospectus here. In 2015 we'll have the opportunity to meet you in person.





Everything you see is a model. Just one of the hundreds of detailed landscapes at the Miniatur Wunderland in Hamburg, shown in *4365 Days of Wonderland: 12 Years of Stories, Amusing Details and Hidden Secrets*, a book sent to me by Werner and Ulla Koopmann.

The trip will last 21 days, beginning in Frankfurt, with Singapore Airline. We would begin in Sydney, via Cairns, Ayers Rock, and Adelaide to Melbourne. We will try to stay one or two free days longer in Melbourne in the Travelodge Southbank Hotel.

(10 December 2014)

You will probably never get to Hamburg and the Miniature Wonderland. Please accept from me *4365 Days of Wonderland*, a wonderful book issued by the Miniatur Wunderland in Hamburg. We hope you will enjoy it. Keep it as a recollection of our longstanding transcontinental friendship by mail. This miniature wonderland, which we visited about two years ago, is a miracle for children and adults.

(3 February 2015)

I haven't emailed for some time because my mother-in-law Luise Stueber (Ulla's mother) is terminally ill in a special hospital in Elmshorn. Each second day Ulla goes by train or car to visit with her and keep her company. At Easter, I'll accompany her, as I did some days ago.

Ulla and I are well. We still have our booking for Australia and hope to meet you and Elaine for a day or two in Melbourne.

(3 April 2015)

We wish you happy Mayday. At present it's raining cats and dogs here. The temperature is about 10 to 14 degrees Celsius.

Ulla's mother is still in hospital and steadily growing weaker under heavy doses of morphiates.

Ulla (though a pensioner) has been working 6 hours daily as a stand-in at a kindergarten nearby, driving by car, and we're getting up at six in the morning. At Whitsun she'll go to Lieberwolkwitz (suburb of Leipzig) for the Catholic communion of grandson number two. I'll stay at home waiting for a court decision on the auction of the house of my mother in Uetersen, contested by my brother Reinhardt.

(29 April 2015)

My mother-in-law is still in the hospital and is visited by Ulla every second day. We do not know when her ordeal will be over. Ulla and my trip to Australia will not be cancelled. On our return it's the 50th anniversary of my promise to Ulla that I'd marry her.

(29 May 2015)

We are back from our short trip on the Baltic Sea. The cruise ship was agreeable, but the prices! A can of Pepsi was more than three Euros. The food was OK. The

weather during the first half of the week was sunny, thereafter rainy.

Please tell us how much cash money should we take with us (taxi from Melbourne to Greensborough, fare for the trams, medicinal cost for a diabetic, etc.)?

On Wednesday we'll attend the funeral of Luise, Ursula's mother.

(23 June 2015)

**[\*brg\* I received a few more emails from Werner before he and Ulla set out on their Australian journey. On Monday, 31 August, Werner rang me from either Sydney or Adelaide to say that he and Ulla would arrive on Friday, 4 October, staying at the Travelodge Southbank. I warned them that there was a planned train stoppage during the middle of the day during Friday, so it might be difficult to travel to tourist destinations. However, I said I would meet them at the Travelodge on Friday if possible. On the night of Thursday, 3 October, I rang the Travelodge, The person on the front desk denied that any people with the name of Kopmann were expected the next day. Surely they had booked? Perhaps they were not coming in until early afternoon? The next morning I made a major mistake, but one that seemed logical to me. Since the Koopmanns were not booked into the Travelodge, I could only wait until they rang me to tell me exactly where they could be met. Elaine or I made sure that neither of us was out of earshot of the phone for the next two days, but there was no**



Werner Koopmann alights from the Ghan train. (Photo: Ulla Koopmann.)

phone call. Meanwhile, I made four further phone calls to Travelodge, Southbank. I was told that there was no booking for the Koopmanns. I was told late Friday night that they would arrive the next day, Saturday. When I rang on Saturday morning, I was told that the booking had been made, but had been cancelled by the travel agency!

None of this was true. Werner and Ulla waited downstairs at the hotel, and asked several times if there was a message for them. My own messages did not reach them. It's easy to say now that they should have rung me, but I realise how difficult the situation must have seemed to them. The upshot was that Werner and Ulla wasted two days in Melbourne, and we still have not met. Unless a miracle happens, I will never have the ready cash to travel to Europe to visit them in Germany.

However, they seemed to have a good time during the rest of their trip to Australia. On this page is a photo of Werner alighting from the Ghan train, which travels from Adelaide to Darwin, right through the centre of Australia.\*]

## DICK JENSSEN PO Box 432, Carnegie VIC 3163

I find two possible errors in Kip Thorne's book *The Science of Interstellar*. The first may not be an error but due to my misunderstanding; the second surely is a mistake. Neither part of the book where the problems occur gives anything away of the plot.

### Error (?) 1

Page 58: 'Working through the details I conclude that Gargantua's mass must be at least 100 million times larger than the sun's mass. If it were *less massive* than that it would tear Miller's planet apart!' [My emphasis.]

A few lines above, Thorne writes: 'The strength of this

(tidal) stretch and squeeze is inversely proportional to the square of Gargantua's mass.'

Both of which imply — to me at least — that if Gargantua had *zero* mass the tidal effects would be infinitely large.

Is there an error here, or have I misunderstood what Thorne is saying?

See also page 292, where Thorne has an equation (correct!) showing that tidal force is directly proportional to the mass of the larger object (Gargantua, in this case).

### Error 2

Page 195: line 7: 'decrease as  $1/r^2$ ' should be 'decrease as  $1/r^3$ ', and

line 8: 'as  $1/r^3$ ' should be ' $1/r^2$ '  
(7 December 2014)

## STEPHEN CAMPBELL 52 Aitkins Road, Warrnambool VIC 3280

Your card and good words of acknowledgement for my loss of my daughter in November was gratefully received by me in my paralysing sorrow that I felt at the time.

Looking at it clearly, I realise that Raphael's death is an end to the 26 years of pining that I have felt since she was taken from my presence and eventually ended up living over a thousand miles away, making it very difficult for me to visit her. I missed not growing up with her. That misery is now put to an end by the removal of the object altogether; by life itself. This is a reminder to me of ruthlessness of nature above and beyond any human activity, and the need for me to be vigilant with my own time that is shared with fellow human beings.

Raphael ran a regular blog, which I found out about only recently. It is mainly a testimony to her thoughts and feelings at having a terminal disease such as cancer at a young age. Apparently she had quite a following on the Net. Invasive cancers are affecting more and younger people in our times, and there seems to be a small army of fund raisers out there collecting for preventative research. Current radio and chemical therapies still seem to do more harm than good, and only prolong the suffering of the body. Remission, and how it occurs, remains a mystery. I was lucky to have visited Raphael earlier this year, and to have met the man she married just before she went to hospital to die (in his arms, I am told). Seventy-five thousand dollars was raised during her effort. Her greatest love was singing and music (often jazz), and she was in her graduating year at the Brisbane Conservatorium. I remembered how I played classical music to her while she was still in utero. After she was born I would often bounce her, and rock her to sleep in the bassinet while playing on the piano. I have no contact with her mother, and can only imagine the grief she is feeling.

Thank you for your concern for me, Elaine and



Bruce. I will see you sometime in the early part of the year when David Russell and I next visit.

(20 December 2014)

I like Carol Kewley's cover for *SFC* 89 very much, and look forward to seeing more of her work.

As always, your fanzine is erudite and informative, and keeps me in touch with an important part of my world, *\*brg\** even more so. The Australian Science Fiction Foundation has always seemed to me the prime cog of the science fiction fan machine. It was enlightening to hear of some of its history during a period when I was almost completely out of touch with old friends while I forged a body of artwork out of my solitude. Carey Handfield, as usual, offers a concise and precise account of things, and I could see his face in my mind's eye as I read *\*brg\**.

I'm writing this sitting here with a cat I call Missy. She is providing wonderful warmth in this cold Warnambool winter. While I watch her behave, I often think of the cats are with you and Elaine, and understand your enthusiasm to comment on their lives and antics. They are truly amazing beings. Even more amazing beings are some of us and the struggles we endure. I think now of Philip K. Dick and my digestion of *Exegesis* — the work of more than 10 years in order to relate an experience that involves his relationship with a potential deity. I couldn't help feeling that he had intended the *Exegesis* to be read by others — the readers of his fictions — in order to explain why he wrote his stories and the meaning that can be found in them, pointing to his discovery of a cosmic consciousness. The *Exegesis* is a discourse of/with that consciousness. He suggests that his fictions, science or otherwise, are also part of that discourse. I found the superior-sounding annotations by various intellectuals quite revealing of the seriousness with which they regard Phil Dick's revelations and epiphanies. In the *Exegesis*, a sense of wonder is maintained with the same energy that his science fiction possessed. Thanks for the Guy Salvidge article.

I am annealing over my grief with the loss of Raphael's loss with continual work: hundreds of pages of black-and-white drawings, which include word balloons as dialogues, forming a vast story like a science fiction fairy tale of the solar system and its inhabitants. This stuff is lighthearted, with some world building. I remember you saying, Bruce, that you could not become interested in my characters, which you found hard to differentiate, and that was because most of them speak the way I would. This is on purpose, because I tired of the stereotype that we have been programmed to recognise as having some relationship to ourselves or our lives and invent characters that all come from my own psyche and not from something I have read before. I know that they way I create these pages (one by one) can lead to stream of consciousness, and I've been careful to avoid that, and have each successive page constantly refer to the pages that come before, so no information gets jumbled. Sometimes a whole page of dialogue is inspired by a single drawing of one of the characters; once, an accident droplet of ink on a page inspired the story for many pages and even, ultimately, the plot of the whole story arc. These are some of the mysterious joys of this work and the way that I do it. I look forward to when I can show

you the finished artwork, which will be six 80-page books. I may need to find a suitable publisher.

I watched the DVD of *Under the Skin*, starring Scarlett Johansen. It's a Scottish production, exquisite to look at. The making of the film was a social experiment, and has prolonged unacted scenes with everyday people. The science fiction element of the film is artful and very strange, appealing to a deep sense of cosmic weirdness. Scarlett acts as an alien being. She is excellent, and beautiful, too. Fandom seems to grok on alienation; why should this be? If this is the true appeal of science fiction, is it desired or feared? A literature of the strangeness of itself. Fandom is the strangeness we feel about ourselves, and strange stories remind us of it. We must be careful not to let industry hammer us into a mould where we can no longer view our own strangeness; that is, our real identity. Our real identity, of course, is the one that likes to go and meet the stranger, surely? This is what SF conventions are for. Thanks to the enablers.

(10 June 2015)

## YVONNE ROUSSEAU

PO Box 3086, Rundle Mall, Adelaide SA 5000

While looking forward pleasurably to becoming immersed in the rest of *SF Commentary*, I feel that I should mention that the photo of Polly and Bruce on page 6 is not by Elaine Cochrane, but was taken by me — Yvonne Rousseau — on 29 August 2003 when Vida and I visited you in the afternoon, and Vida was startled by the cracks in the Keele Street fortress. I then mailed the Polly picture to you, with some others, on 18 September 2003.

(26 December 2014)

Thank you for the exceptionally beautiful *SF Commentary* 89, May 2015, which arrived in my post-office box yesterday: much of it has since been read. It's good to learn of books I hadn't known about, such as Diana Wynne Jones' *Reflections on the Magic of Writing* (succinctly and enticingly noticed by Colin Steele).



The photo of Polly and me that Yvonne took in 2003.

On the other hand, I'm very sorry indeed about the way your lower back has been going long-lastingly 'Sproing!!!' and about your mysterious-to-medicine tickly dry cough. Thank goodness, meanwhile, for Elaine and the provision of a sufficiency of small firm cushions.

I'm sorry to report that I'm still limping (although not so painfully as before), and will have to consult my podiatrist on Friday about the effect on my ankle brace of following the podiatrist's advice and using it without its outer rigid stay, although retaining the stay on the inner side.

Current reading in Klemzig is *What Makes This Book So Great* (2014) by Jo Walton, author of *Among Others*. I'm enjoying this series of blog posts (2008–2011) under inviting headings such as 'Why Do I Re-Read Things I Don't Like?' and 'Licensed to Sell Weasels and Jade Earrings: The Short Stories of Lord Dunsany'.

(20 May 2015)

Thank you for your kind words about being 'a subscriber and, I hope, a very good friend'. Indeed, Vida and I are very conscious of how much happiness and encouragement you and Elaine have contributed to our lives. We couldn't have done without you!

Other friendships may wreck themselves, however. I mentioned reading Jo Walton, *What Makes This Book So Great: Re-reading the Classics of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, Corsair, London, 2014. Here is an extract from 'The Suck Fairy', pp. 437–40.

p. 437: 'The Suck Fairy is an artefact of re-reading. If you read a book for the first time and it sucks, that's nothing to do with her. It just sucks. Some books do. The Suck Fairy comes in when you come back to a book that you liked when you read it before, and on re-reading — well, it sucks. You can say that you have changed, you can hit your forehead dramatically and ask yourself how you could possibly have missed the suckiness the first time — or you can say that the Suck Fairy has been through while the book was sitting on the shelf and inserted the suck. The longer the book has been on the shelf unread, the more time she's had to get into it. The advantage of this is exactly the same as the advantage of thinking of one's once-beloved ex as having been eaten by a zombie, who is now shambling around using the name and body of the former person. It lets one keep one's original love clear of the later betrayals [p. 438].

'Of course, there isn't really a Suck Fairy (also, there isn't really a zombie) but it's a useful way of remembering what's good while not dismissing the newly visible bad. Without the Suck Fairy, it's all too easy for the present suck to wipe out the good memories. And it's much better than doing the whole "hate myself for loving you" thing and beating yourself up. The name is genius, because it's always helpful when something isn't real but is a useful model to have names that make this clear. Nobody really believes in an actual literal Suck Fairy, but that doesn't stop her being very handy to know. She's wonderful shorthand for a whole complicated process.

'In her simplest form, the Suck Fairy is just pure suckitude. You read a book you used to love, and — something's happened to it! The prose is terrible, the characters are thin, the plot is ridiculous. Worst of all, that wonderful bit you always remembered, the bit where

they swim into the captured city under the water gate at dawn, and when they come out of the water in the first light and stand dripping on the quay, it all smells different because the enemy's campfires are cooking their different food — it turns out to be half a line. "Next morning we went in by the water gate." This most typically happens with re-reading children's books. It's like the moral opposite of skimming, where you've dreamed in extra details the book never mentioned. The thin thing you're re-reading can't possibly be what you remember, because what you remember mostly happened in your head. The Suck Fairy has sucked all the juice out of it.'

(26 May 2015)

Thank you for your responses to Jo Walton's account of the Suck Fairy! Elaine, you say: 'I don't often re-read books — there are so many books I haven't read for the first time — but I certainly know that they are never the same the second time around. Of course, some are even better.' Agreed! — and I thought you might also like this observation from Jo Walton:

'There are two kinds of people in the world, those who re-read and those who don't. No don't be silly, there are far more than two kinds of people in the world. There are even people who don't read at all. (What *do* they think about on buses?)'

Bruce: thank you for thinking of me as a recipient of your spare copy of Peter Alexander's biography of Les Murray. I would indeed be interested and grateful to receive it. As I prepare to send this email, classical ABC is engaged in its 'Swoon' count-down. I'll be missing a few of these tomorrow when I'll be looking in at Michael Treloar's Queen's Birthday book sale — which this year will have vintage crime among its enticements.

(5 June 2015)

In the latest *Quoz*, Mark Plummer mentions on Sunday 12 April 2015 that the late Stan Freberg was known to him chiefly for his 1957 version of the 'Banana Boat Song'. However, in Australia in the early 1960s, although we also knew the 'Banana Boat Song', we who listened to local radio treasured Freberg for 'Elderly Man River', where Mr Tweedly (representing the citizens' radio review board) graciously responds to the thanks his cacophonous buzzer has extorted from the harried Stan Freberg with a demurely harmonious 'You're welcome, I'm sure!' We loved Freberg's gallant but doomed efforts to please: 'He don't, er, doesn't plant 'taters, er, potatoes he doesn't plant cotton, er, coting and them-these-those that plants them are soon forgetting'. Freberg gives up the unequal struggle when he realises that his next line will be: 'You gets a little drunk and you lands in jail.' 'Take your finger off the button, Mr. Tweedly — we know when we're licked.'

(20 June 2015)

**GIAMPAOLO COSSATO**  
**Cannaregio 3825, Calle Fontana,**  
**30121-Venezia, Italy**

Thanks again for the ample use you made of my material.



Attached you see one side of the Rialto Bridge, probably one of the most visited places in the world. Not at all easy to shoot a picture without a single human being in it, not even the omnipresent pigeons.

It might be taken as a symbol of the Venice to come: empty and forgotten, with the few surviving Venetians leaving the place with the last available spaceship through the door to infinity at the top.

As for the mountains, they are actually visible across the lagoon, especially after a storm has turned the air crystal clear.

(1 January 2015)

Recently I had and still have some heart problems on top of my usual stuff. At the moment one Coumadin a day (I think it may be called Warfarin in your country) accompanied by an injection of Clexane (which turns the surrounding area into a nice purple spot) are my daily staple.

To make things a bit more agreeable, the external walls of the building where I live had to be replastered and part of the roof repaired. It has been going on for three months already, with darkness and noise the leitmotiv of every day. The enclosed pictures gives you an idea.

(31 May 2015)

## KIM HUETT

PO Box 1443, Woden ACT 2606

Further searching on Trove has revealed more material of interest, only some of which directly relates to J. M. Walsh. For example, the 30 August 1927 issue of *The News* reveals that an 'AUSTRALIAN AUTHORS' WEEK WILL BE HELD THROUGHOUT COMMONWEALTH FROM SEPTEMBER 12 TO 19'. *The News* then helpfully publishes a photo of J. M. Walsh and 19 other authors who were involved in this promotion. I assume that by Commonwealth the editors of *The News* meant Australia.

Also interesting to note that eight of the photos were of female authors, not a bad gender balance for 1927.

Mr Walsh also turned up in a plebiscite conducted by *The Argus* just before the Australian Authors' Week. The aim of the plebiscite was 'to indicate the relative popularity of Australian poetry and prose writers'. He did surprisingly well in the prose section, making it to 11 with 90 votes. Obviously having his novels serialised in a number of different Australian newspapers ensured he was a well-known author back in the day.

Perhaps even more interesting is a column on books in *The Daily News* of 24 September 1927 in which he's quoted as being against tariffs on imported books by foreign authors. Instead he felt promotion of local authors was a better path to success than trying to limit the competition.

I also found a letter by a J. M. Walsh of Pakington Street in the 6 February 1912 issue of *The Geelong Advertiser* that is probably our man. In it he complains about cadets throwing stones into his house and the lack of action by those in charge of said cadets. No literary connection here, but an interesting sighting of our man nonetheless.

I haven't attached the PDF files of the above to this email as I don't want to clog your in-boxes. Of course I'm happy to pass along any of these pieces if either of you want to see them. There were a lot of other hits for J. M. Walsh in Trove, but mostly these were novels and short stories of his published in this paper, which I didn't see any point in downloading. The only exception was a West Australian newspaper that mentioned him among the various interesting shipboard passengers passing through Perth on their way to the UK. I didn't download that one either, as it didn't add anything to what I already had.

Perhaps the most interesting mention of J. M. Walsh I found wasn't on Trove at all. I pulled my copy of the fanzine *Tomorrow* (published by Doug Mayer in 1938) out of its box so I could search the article on Walter Gillings and the magazine he edited (*Tales of Wonder*) for quotes

to add to an article I'm writing. Imagine my surprise to discover this article claims that not only did Walsh know Gillings and encourage him in regards to science fiction, but that Walsh preferred writing SF to his mystery novels. I do find that rather unlikely, given Walsh's relatively small SF output, but it's an interesting claim nonetheless.

Trove continues to be an interesting source of material.

(1 January 2015)

**RAY WOOD**  
**PO Box 188, Quorn SA 5433**

Tom and Claudia Coverdale are over here visiting Tom's parents at present. Les Murray chose one of his poems, 'Woodwind', as one of the 15 poems representing Australia in the Poetry Foundation's Harriet Monroe Poetry Institute Poets in the World Series, *Another English: Anglophone Poems from Around the World* (2014).

*Woodwind*

My didjeridoo Nibelungenlied  
wallows brooding as Wagner's did.  
You point to where your back is sore;  
I press the didj to the spot and pour  
into the knotted muscle moans,  
half words, half-animal groans.

Through the wood your responses come.  
Who? An Austrian long from home.  
What? A sprite playing hide and seek.  
When? A week, I'll be gone next week.  
Where? My home—you knew I would.  
I miss the wood, my wood.

(1 January 2015)

I'll check with Tom and if he's okay with it being printed here. He's still teaching at RMIT, by the way. He's been so busy for so long now because he and Claudia are building their house in Richmond while living in it — long-term project, obviously!

He's working steadily on a novel at present, set in China, which he and Claudia visited years back.

He's been writing and having poetry published for years now, and some of his poems are SF.

The one I've attached, 'The Gulf Reclaimers', was published in *Southerly* not long ago.

I don't know if I ever sent you his short SF story 'The Maker', published in *Southerly* 64/3. I'll attach a scan of it to a separate email.

(1 January 2015)

**[\*brg\* Thanks, Ray, for both pieces from Tom, both enjoyed. I don't see the 'little magazines' very often because usually the standard of the fiction is very low, nothing remotely as good as Tom's piece. The trouble is that probably nobody from the SF world saw it when it first came out.\*]**

He would have told me if the story'd been nominated for anything, which it wasn't. I have a feeling that SF fans

stick to the pure SF magazines and books and don't read the literary journals looking for SF.

**[\*brg\* The one time I met Tom, at a Nova Mob meeting many years ago, we got along very well. I'm not sure why raising a family should exclude keeping up contacts, but obviously it does happen with some people.\*]**

Tom is heavily involved in academia for one thing, building a house for a second, struggling to find time each day to write, and also goes rock-climbing and bushwalking whenever he can find the time to spare.

It was always the same for me when I was younger : I was involved in so much that something like SF fandom (conventions and so forth) would have felt to me like wasting valuable time.

I think most people are deeply involved in one interest only, rather than half-a-dozen or more. Then they have all their time to devote to it. But if you're deeply involved in a heap of interests, you have to run like mad all the time just to keep up.

And most of my closest mates had nothing to do with the SF world, either : we shared other common interests.

**[\*brg\* Your own article (for the next SFC) would probably go well in one of the literary magazines, but its real audience is the people I publish for, I agree.\*]**

Actually, what I look forward to most from you sticking my articles in your fanzines is for people to disagree violently with what I've said, tell me where I've bungled badly, ad got things dead wrong. That kind of thing is great good fun.

(2 January 2015)

Have you ever published a table in it giving the issue numbers and the dates you published each one? And a publication history of it? It'd be great to see photos of a few front pages too, especially of early issues. I don't know if you have other readers like me who've come to it only in recent years, and who are fascinated by it enough to be curious about its life.

**[\*brg\* In SF Commentary 84, I published Mark Plummer's extraordinary piece of research, 'Bruce Gillespie's Fanzines, 1968–2012: The Complete Catalogue'. Surely you noticed it at the time? It doesn't include cover art, but it does include a table giving the issue numbers and the dates when I published each one.**

Another great piece of work is PETE YOUNG's list of the contents of all my fanzines online. As Pete wrote to me in 2013: 'It's probably worth de-lurking at this point to mention that as a moderating editor at the ISFDb, as a long-term project I began indexing *SF Commentary* a few months ago, starting with paper issues at hand and the more recent editions currently up at efanazines.com.

**'SF COMMENTARY:**

**http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/seriesgrid.cgi?32684**  
**'BG: http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi?19631**



**'Needless to say, there's still a l-o-o-o-n-g way to go, Bruce, but it's enjoyable bibliographic work.' Follow the links ...**

I noticed your note about Murnane's *Landscape with Landscape*, and it reminded me that you told me about it a few years ago, and I remember that you used to advertise copies of some of his books and I asked you if I could buy that particular title. But then I heard no more about it. Do you still have a copy that I could buy?

(14 January 2015)

Thanks for *SF Commentary* 89. Sorry to read about your problems with costs.

Dunno if you check out ABEBooks.com, but if you don't, look at all these Penguin SF covers: [http://www.abebooks.com/books/publisher/penguin-science-fiction.shtml?cm\\_mmc=nl-\\_nl\\_-CPrt24h00-pnguinAM-121214TG-\\_01cta&abersp=1](http://www.abebooks.com/books/publisher/penguin-science-fiction.shtml?cm_mmc=nl-_nl_-CPrt24h00-pnguinAM-121214TG-_01cta&abersp=1)

Maybe you could ask readers to list their favourite SF magazine/book covers in a future issue? I know I'd love to take part in that. I could send you a cover to start the ball rolling with a cover if you like.

Beaut sunny day here: I'm off hiking in it later on.  
(22 May 2015)

## **RON SHELDON Ferntree Gully VIC 3156**

Thank you for sending me a hard copy of *SF Commentary* 88, 46th Anniversary Edition. Forty-six years is a long time to pursue your passion ... a lot of water under the bridge since the days of *Cashbox and Chatter*. I have found it relaxing to dip into when I have some down time. I was interested to read about your recent excursion to your old stomping ground in 'Return to Oakleigh'. And I appreciate your personal references in the article. Happy New Year to you and Elaine. It was good to catch up with you again after 50 years.

(7 January 2015)

***Cashbox and Chatter* was the little fanzine (although we knew nothing of the term 'fanzine') that Ron and I published in 1961, when we were in Form 3 (Year 9) at Oakleigh High School. We sold it around the school, and to a few relatives. I had always wanted to thank Ron for his part in my strange career as a fanzine editor, but could never track him on the internet. In the end he found me through Facebook, but just a bit late to tell me about the Oakleigh High School reunion in 2014. In 2016 there will be another, in March. It will be much larger than the first, mainly because of the efforts of Ron and his small committee (and Facebook, of course).**

## **CAROL KEWLEY Sunshine VIC 3020**

Thanks for the mention under 'We also heard from ...' I've just seen *Dr Strangelove Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* at the Astor with a terrific new

print. The Astor is excellent as always. I have a new comic in *Perihelion* in the upcoming January issue.

(6 January 2015)

Thanks for *SF Commentary* 89. It's great to see how my cover turned out. I've been too ill recently to go anywhere, but I'm seeing the GP and getting some tests so hopefully I can turn this around soon.

(18 May 2015)

## **GUY SALVIDGE**

### **My new address:**

**18 Newcastle Street, York WA 6302**

Where have the last couple of years gone? Looking over the reviews I wrote in 2011–12, which are now to be published in *SF Commentary*, I am nostalgic for the self who actually wrote reviews, of SF books, no less! My blog at [guysalvidge.wordpress.com](http://guysalvidge.wordpress.com) was set up in 2008 in part to provide me with a platform as a budding author, and partly as a place to publish the reviews I wanted to write. In those first few years I wrote dozens of reviews, many of them on the novels of Philip K. Dick, and in fact my 'Ranked Top Ten PKD Novels' is by far the best-loved item on my blog today. These PKD reviews were collected in *SF Commentary* 83 in 2012 as my PKD obsession began to wane. I published my last PKD review, on *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*, in August 2012 and, according to my records, I haven't re-read a PKD book since then. This is a pity, as I bought new editions of practically all of PKD's novels for this very purpose a few years back.

But people move on, don't they? It's not like I haven't been reading: I read 82 books in 2013 and 101 in 2014. I've always primarily read fiction, mostly novels, but my reading has suffered two Great Genre Shifts in the past five years or so. First it was a shift from SF to crime, and then, more recently, from crime to literary fiction. I still read some crime, but precious little SF. And sadly I've written very few reviews. In 2013, my favourite reads were by the likes of Megan Abbott, Pat Barker, Raymond Carver, Zoe Heller, and Peter Temple. Not an SF book to be found among them. In 2014, I actually read some SF by M. John Harrison (his 'Kefahuchi Tract' novels), especially enjoying *Nova Swing*. In 2014 I discovered the work of Mikhail Bulgakov, and I also very much enjoyed works by Alan Warner, J. M. Coetzee, and Helen Cross.

2013 was an excellent year for me in terms of my own creative writing. I undertook a residency at the Katharine Susannah Prichard Writers' Centre and secured another for 2014 at the Fellowship of Australian Writers. I published *Yellowcake Summer*, the follow-up to *Yellowcake Springs* and, perhaps most pleasingly of all for me personally, I published three short stories. 'The Dying Rain' appeared in a collection of post-apocalyptic noir that I ended up co-editing, 'Blue Swirls' appeared in the first issue of *Tincture Journal*, and 'A Void' was shortlisted for the Carmel Bird Award and thus wormed its way into *The Great Unknown*.

Unfortunately, 2014 proved problematic in a number of ways. Over the past two years I've been working on my first crime novel, *Thirsty Work*, but it's been rejected by

publishers across the land. I did have one story published in 2014, 'Enter Sandman, Exit Light', amidst a swirl of rejections. My marriage of 12 years ended and at the time of this writing I've moved twice in the past five months. And yes, that meant moving 1200 or so books! Right now I'm reading Barry Miles' 600-page biography, *Call Me Burroughs*, and I'm looking forward to reading a biography of Larry Brown and novels by Julian Barnes and Peter Temple. And I think it's high time I revisited PKD too. I think I might start with my handsome hardcover edition of *Puttering About in a Small Land*.

(25 April 2015)

**ROBERT LICHTMAN**  
**11037 Broadway Terrace,**  
**Oakland CA 94611-1947, USA**

**[\*brg\* Trap Door 31 seems to be the best one yet. Steve Jeffery, long in awe of Mark Plummer's great wandering letters in SFC and elsewhere, points to Mark's letter as the highlight of the issue.\*]**

It is good and, by the way, the first time Mark has responded to *Trap Door* at any length. My own highlights of the issue are Rupert Fike's poem, Roy Kettle's long article, and Lenny Kaye's piece. Overall, I agree this is one of the best issues in a while.

I like the idea suggested by some that you begin using CreateSpace for the non-Australian copies. Instead of paying the cost of postage from Australia to the US and UK, CreateSpace would print and mail from those countries to the people on your list. I'm sure that printed copies *and* postage would be cheaper (and probably much cheaper) than your doing it there. You could then just print enough for local consumption and your files. As was suggested, Michael Dobson would be good to consult to get his on-the-ground take on how it all works.

(9 January 2015)

What to tackle first? In my case it's going to be James Doig's interview with Graham Stone. Like you, I really

enjoyed Chris Nelson's special issue of *Mumblings from Munchkinland* on Stone — and I wrote him a letter of comment in which I described my own interactions with him.

**[\*brg\* I hope you have room somewhere in the house to incorporate Art Widner's collection. If I were made a similar inheritor from an Australian collector, I would be in great trouble attempting to house such a collection. Good for Art for making sure the fanzines are going to a good home.\*]**

I definitely wouldn't have room for all of Art's books and fanzines. And Art never intended that in leaving them to me I would be obliged to take them all. Carol and I went to Gualala early this month, and I spent a long afternoon picking and choosing what I did want — which filled five boxes of the size that holds 10 reams of standard letter-sized paper. Art's grandson will let others roam and pick during the memorial service/gathering late in June, and I told him that I had some dealer friends what might be interested in seeing what interests them. Since Art's grandson can use the money, I'm happy to let him have whatever he can get that way.

(30 May 2015)

One of my favorite Mike Ward photos from Art Widner's Memorial Gathering is this one: from left to right: Ethan Widner, Missy Widner, Jeanne Bowman and Alan Rosenthal.

(21 July 2015)

**WILLIAM BREIDING**  
**New address:**  
**R3507 N. Santa Rita Ave. #1,**  
**Tucson, AZ 85719, USA**

I know the era of hard copies is waning. They are becoming extinct, because of prohibitive costs, not because we don't want them. That said, here is another \$100, American-made cash, and hard earned!

**[\*brg\* Thanks, William, for the \$100. Elaine gets a bit annoyed that people keep sending me occasional bits of money, so I need to keep producing some print copies, but I don't think she appreciates that some people (like me) must have their print copies of some publications. But the postage just keeps going up and up.\*]**

I'm reading a Gordon Eklund novel, *Thunder on Neptune*, written in 1989. It's very old-school Heinleinian YA SF (seven kids, ages four to 17, go to Neptune). Gordon is constantly making reference to 'stacks of paper-



Seen at the Art Widner Memorial Celebration: (l. to r.) Ethan Widner, Missy Widner, Jeanne Bowman and Alan Rosenthal. (Photo: Mike Ward.)

work' or 'he sifted through the many pages of data'. And I'm thinking Gordon must be cringeing now when he thinks back on failing to foresee the pervasiveness of computers and hand-held electronic devices. (They also smoke on the spaceship.)

Upon your strong recommendation, I took out *Predestination* from the library as soon as a copy came in. I liked it very much — the film maker has humanised Heinlein, whose works often turn my stomach — and Sarah Snooks' performances as Jane and John are just extraordinary. It seems that women are more capable of expansive performances than men, though Jared Leto's performance in *The Dallas Buyer's Club* is a recent example of the ability to become other than what you are.

I was really surprised by the J. D. Robb piece. I read the first in the series when it first came out and considered it to be a guilty pleasure. That is — I enjoyed it while realising it was a total piece of trash. I did not read any others in the series.

You pulled a Bowers on me. He used to cobble together much of our correspondence and publish it in *Outworlds*. I was surprised to see myself 'featured' in SFC, and flattered.

(27 February 2015)

Do you have any idea of whether Brunner's piece on Philip K. Dick's *The Man In The High Castle* is available anywhere? I always liked Brunner — he was tough-minded and compassionate.

I was alerted to the TV pilot of *Man in the High Castle* by Bruce Townley when we spoke recently. It seems to me there should be hardly any difficulty at all in filming the book, particularly as a series. It's all interweaving identities and invisible worlds, not crash-and-burn military exercises.

I'm going through a phase of finding SF stilted and compromised. This is a cycle for me. I run around and around, finding SF alternately fascinating and repulsive. I think I have *Martian Time Slip* on the shelf. May have to pull it out.

(1 March 2015)

**MICHAEL BISHOP**  
**PO Box 646, Pine Mountain, GA 31822, USA**

I'm very happy with the appearance of both my piece on Dick and the eulogy to him. Thank you so much for featuring these in this issue. It's always gratifying to receive *SFC* and a special treat to find that something of mine has sneaked into an issue.

Bruce, here's a copy of my long, long review of the two Griaule books by the late Lucius Shepard. It appeared last month in *The New York Review of Science Fiction* (No. 315, I believe, for No. 316 has since appeared), and you're welcome to do with it what you like, if you wish to do anything at all besides, no doubt, throwing up your hands at its grinding length.

(10 January 2015)

Don't worry about disrupting my day. I spent a good portion of it carefully writing a fairly detailed letter to send to illustrator candidates for my still unpublished

book for young people, *Joel-Brock the Brave and the Valorous Smalls*, which I'm determined to have come out reading and looking exactly as I want it to. Every major publishing house in the US, or nearly every one, has rejected it, at least partly (I believe) because it expresses a very jaundiced view of Big Box Stores like Walmart, K-mart, and the rest, but especially Walmart. In the novel, I call the store subbing for Walmart, well, uh, Big.

Anyway, the letter to the illustrators I'm querying runs not quite two typewritten single-spaced pages. And I send them as an attachment the front matter of the novel, consisting of the title page, the copyright page, the table of contents (two pages), the dedication page, and the acknowledgments page, just to let them know that the book is already a done deal, insofar as its text goes, and I'm now looking for a contemporary John Tenniel to illustrate that text.

(15 January 2015)

Thanks for reprinting my Afterword to a new (revised) edition of my 1984 quasi-horror novel *Who Made Stevie Crye?* (aka *The Typing*). I don't intend to say anything else about the book, but must mention that the caption to one photograph in this section, to wit, 'Michael Bishop and his zinnias. (Photo: Jeri Bishop.)' contains two small errors.

First, I cannot claim the zinnias as mine. Jeri planted, tended, and replanted them, whereas I merely knelt among them to have my picture taken, turning myself in the process into a grinning garden gnome.

Second, although the photograph was taken with Jeri's iPad, it was not Jeri who took it, but a friend of ours, Wayne Pruski, who dropped by and wielded the iPad in her absence because I wanted to show off her zinnias on Facebook while simultaneously making them appear a little taller than they truly stood.

Small errors, but worth noting just to assign credit, or blame, where due. (And, of course, to absolve myself of misassigning it.)

(27 May 2015)

**MILT STEVENS**  
**6325 Keystone St., Simi Valley,**  
**CA 93063 USA**

Before reading Murray Moore's article in *SF Commentary* 88, I hadn't considered who might be the greatest living SF writer in the UK. I hadn't considered who might be the greatest living SF writer in the United States either. Brian Aldiss isn't a bad choice as greatest living SF writer in the UK. He certainly is the most senior SF writer in the UK.

Aldiss expressed a lot of interesting ideas in *Trillion Year Spree*. I didn't always agree with those ideas, but they were interesting I thought he argued quite well for Mary Shelley as the founder of modern science fiction. Personally, I think she is more in the gothic tradition than in what was to become the science fiction tradition, but that's only my opinion.

I thought the movie *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* was quite well done. I also thought it was the most depressing movie I had ever seen. By comparison, *On The Beach* was



tragic and sad but not all that depressing. *A.I.* was so depressing that I had to go back in the multiplex and watch another movie to get my mind off the first movie.

Michael Bishop uses the word 'dislocated' in connection with the writing of Philip K. Dick. On thinking about it, that's a very appropriate word. I like it.

I've never heard of J. D. Robb before. Since her work is in the form of a long series of science fiction police procedurals, it isn't the sort of material that would interest me. I never did read fiction about crime or police work. In theory, I am wary of reading the first book in a series. I want to hear some favourable comments on a series before I even think about reading it.

I noticed Robb's series included an electronic detection system of some sort. While I was still working I attended a presentation at Jet Propulsion Laboratory of an artificial intelligence crime analysis system they had been developing. You might wonder why JPL had been doing such a thing. Times had been slow for the space program, and the government wanted to keep them from going out of business for lack of work. So the government commissioned this crime analysis system. It was actually two systems. One of the systems prowled data and reached conclusions by itself. The other system accepted input from human analysts. The systems were really in an embryonic state. They were figuring out things that human analysts already knew. The systems might have been useful with more development. Unfortunately, police agencies didn't have the money for the development, and the government had other work for JPL.

Wow, this is the Nile River of letter columns. From Greg Benford's letter, I was glad to learn we probably aren't in a giant computer at the end of the universe. I'd have a difficult time explaining why I feel the way I do, but I don't think I'd like being in a giant computer at the end of the universe.

(11 January 2015)

*SF Commentary* 89 was sort of overwhelming. A whole lot of books were mentioned in Colin Steele's column. It seemed like beelions and beelions, although I'm sure the number was much smaller. However, I've only read half a dozen of those books. I've been reading a lot of science fiction and fantasy for decades, but every year I find I've read a smaller percentage of all the books in the field. It's enough to make a fan feel inadequate.

This feeling of fannish inadequacy isn't a new experience. My 17-year-old grandnephew reads science fiction and is even working on his first novel. I asked him about which writers he liked. He named three or four writers. I hadn't heard of any of them. In broad terms, I can understand why I haven't read a lot of the titles discussed in *SFC*. Most of the titles in *SFC* appear to be fantasy, and I have a fairly strong preference for science fiction.

So what do I read? Since I retired, I've been trying to

catch up on all those books I've heard discussed in years gone by but never got around to reading. Within the last couple years, I got around to reading Stapledon and Hesse. Next year, I may get around to reading *Messiah of the Cylinder*. I have noticed a problem with this approach. For every book I read, I remember half a dozen others that I really should read as well. I can see where this is going.

Then there are the award for current works. In most years, I go to the NESFA recommended reading list and find a few novels that I think are worthy of a Hugo nomination. Most years, two or three of my nominees make it to the ballot, and I then read the other two or three works I didn't nominate. This year, none of my nominees made it to the ballot. With all of the attached controversy, I've read more current novels than I have in recent years. In some cases (*Three Body Problem*, *Station Eleven*), that was a good thing. In other cases, not so much so.

The review of *Science Fiction* by Mark Bould reminded me of a couple of obscure SF films from the thirties that I've encountered recently. One was the 1933 *Men Must Fight*, which is about a future world war with New York getting bombed and gassed. The film contains the only positive comment I've ever heard on gas warfare. 'Gas is the perfect weapon. It kills everything at once.' Then there is the 1935 *Trans-Atlantic Tunnel*. You can probably guess what that's about.

(11 June 2015)

**[\*brg\* I agree with you entirely about the overwhelming volume of fantasy that is filling up the field. Colin Steele does his best with the books he can extract from publishers, but inevitably he is sent far more fantasy books than SF. The best SF book I've read for a long time is Michel Faber's *The Book of Strange New Things*, which is not labelled as SF. Indeed, Faber admits it was not labelled as such because 'the science fiction label might have frightened off many potential readers'. That's what SF literature still is in Australia for the general reader — frightening. On the other hand, most of the movies that people go to see are SF or fantasy. I can't figure out that split in the national consciousness about acceptable entertainment.**

**I also find few books that even sound enticing, so I leave it to my reviewers. Also, I'm not sent many review copies these days, so I go for the books that people, usually friends, send me. For instance, Franz Rottensteiner, who is now agent for books by the Strugatsky Brothers, sent me a copy of the new translation of *Hard to Be a God*, not only coinciding with the movie that is now doing the rounds, but also reminding me of how good is this book (one of my favourites of 1974). The Russian concept of humour is a bit offputting, though.\*]**



Bruce Gillespie (L.) and Angus Taylor (r.), 28 March 2015, Greensborough. (Photo: Elaine Cochrane using Angus's camera.)

**ANGUS TAYLOR**  
**Victoria, British Columbia V8V 4M2, Canada**

Greetings from Victoria, British Columbia. It's been many years indeed since we communicated. I see you are still alive and, I hope, well.

One of my brothers lives in Brisbane. I will be staying with him and his wife there for the last three weeks of February and the first three and a half weeks of March. I visited them in Brisbane five years ago and spent a few days in Sydney coming and going. But I've never been to Melbourne, so this trip I plan on being in Melbourne the last week of March, basically just to see the city. I have another friend there whom I plan on visiting — and I'm wondering if I might meet up with you and Elaine at some point.

(14 January 2015)

There's a reformatted the .PDF version of *Philip K. Dick and the Umbrella of Light* on the Philip K. Dick Fan Site: <http://www.philipkdickfans.com/literary-criticism/essays/>. I've been reading your essays (always insightful) on that page.

I dropped out of active fandom a long time ago, about the time I did my PhD and became a low-paid sessional lecturer in philosophy. As you know, SF stories are commonly philosophy thought-experiments in fictional guise, so I suppose I haven't really strayed far.

I just had a look at your house on Google Street View: solar panels on the roof (excellent) and what could be

you yourself at the door!

(15 January 2015)

I neglected to say that I got married in 1989 but am now separated (though still friends with my wife Jan). We have a 24-year-old daughter, Mairin, who graduated from the University of British Columbia in 2013 with a degree in Anthropology. I am not quite retired from teaching yet — can't afford to be, given the fairly abysmal salary of what is called, oxymoronically, a 'continuing sessional lecturer' — but I've cut back, which is why I have this term (January to April) off.

I'm more or less self-taught in the field of ethics, with a particular interest in animal ethics. I've written a book that's an overview of that field. Here's a link to the publisher's site: <http://www.broadviewpress.com/product.php?productid=951&cat=12&page=1>

(16 January 2015)

Bruce, last night I was reading your piece in *The Incompleteat...* on Roy Orbison. I've always been an Orbison fan, but reading the article was also very good timing, because tomorrow I'm going to a concert by a tribute band called The Lonely. (I know one of the band members.) I'm looking forward to it. <http://www.timescolonist.com/entertainment/music/orbison-act-far-from-lonely-for-fans-1.1745632>

It was great visiting you and Elaine.

(6 June 2015)

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

*SFC* 88: I've noticed an awful lot lately that so many people are losing a family member, namely their cat. It is a shame to see this happening, but pets seem to have been put on this earth to teach us about love, responsibility, and grief. I've never had pets, but there are a few cats who still have a very important part in my life, and I remember them well.

I am pleased (and more than a little relieved) to say that I have been fully employed since June of last year. In September, I changed jobs from one jobs whose idea of training was to continually say 'No!' until I figured out what they wanted. There were so many rules, exceptions to the rules, and exceptions to the exceptions, plus two trainers who often taught me completely contradictory things, no wonder I didn't really learn the job. I am now with a customs agency editing and updating their databases.

Brian Aldiss is not an author I have met, but he's given me, as has others, marvellous stories to read.

Leigh Edmonds throws out a lot of his old fanzines. In some ways, I'd like to do the same. My collection is getting rather large, and as time goes by, and I get slowly closer to retirement, I realise that I might not be able, or even want to, keep all I have, including 26 bankers' boxes full of fanzines. (That's an estimate.)

You call Arthur C. Clarke a poet of SF, because he said what he wanted to say in the fewest words possible. One other poet of SF I could name was Clifford Simak, who

did the same in slim paperbacks because he was a working journalist, who needed to do the same thing: tell the story in the fewest words.

I am not sure how many copies of *Busswarble* issue forth these days, but Michael Bolden/Hailstone continues to send them to me. He is doing what most of us do these days, reminisce about happier days long past. Michael is recovering from a stroke, but in spite of that issue 88 arrived recently, and I have responded.

Like Murray Moore, I feel no urgency to read the Hugo nominees, but then, he has a franchise in having a Worldcon membership and I don't. I do plan to get back into the Aurora Awards. We must restore the Best Fan Publication Aurora, for it was not awarded last year due to lack of nominations. (I hope we don't do this, only to see a blog win.)

(18 January 2015)

SFC 89: My back is relatively fine these days, but Yvonne knows a chiropractor's office very well. She credits a series of chiropractors for making sure she didn't grow up in a wheelchair, and she does have regular visit to a chiropractor today.

Part of our growing older is the dying of so many friends and familiar faces. Christopher Lee died the other day, as did Ron Moody, and a number of people connected with jazz music. The obituary columns online have been busy. Terry Pratchett, Leonard Nimoy, so many more ... I hope I do not live long enough to notice that all of my friends are gone, and the entire world is alien to me.

Some parts of my world are already alien to me ... I can no longer afford books, and I don't want an e-reader. My favorite genre has become mostly foreign to me, and what's happening with the Hugos? Totally foreign. Yet, something good things are happening, too. I had my fifty-sixth birthday, we had our thirty-second wedding anniversary, and we are both on the final Aurora Awards ballot in different categories. Our fingers are crossed.

I wish I had more for you right now, but this great fanzine is full of wonderful books I know I will never have the chance to read. I feel wistful at that; I simply haven't been able to keep up with much of what I like, usually through lack of time or money. I have learned to take some comfort in knowing that if I cannot take part in SF fandom the way I used to, at least I know it's still going, even if it isn't much recognisable.

(11 June 2015)

## STEVE SNEYD

**4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield,  
West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, England**

SFC 88: I'm intrigued by the enigmatic barbed structure in Ditmar's cover illustration. The windows are church-like, but the half-timbered tower is unreligious looking. A puzzle.

Your return to Oakleigh after 40 years set me wondering why I so strangely belong to the 'never go back' tendency, and not just because, as at least two houses I've lived in have since been demolished, as well as the educational establishments where I did a Certificate in

Educaation and later an MA in Poetry. I would expect to find an empty space or an entirely different structure at other memory-holders. Maybe at some irrational mind level it could be an unlikely attempt to defy time.

Doctor Pedanticus insists that I mention, re Doug Barbour's page 36 comment about Clarke being trapped in an all-white mindset in the far future, that in *Childhood's End* the last human is specifically described as black, a rarity at that time. (My battered paperback has a vaguely purplish colour — the publisher is hedging its bets!)

*Rendezvous with Rama* was one as a radio serial, transmitted on BBC Radio 4 Extra last year. It was effectively gripping.

As well as being a fascinating SF take on Swinging Sixties psychedelia, *Barefoot in the Head* is also of great interest because of Aldiss's extensive use of poetry within it, and the main text is stream-of-consciousness prose poetry. It remains the SF novel most extensively employing verse within its pages.

**[\*brg\* Aldiss includes a fair bit of poetry in his *The Eighty-Minute Hour*, as I recall — but it must be 40 years since I read it.\*]**

Online radio can be received anywhere (even repeats from games involving our local football team, Huddersfield Town, in Radio Leeds). Interested to see from Casey Wolf, though, that she can find such specialist programs as *In Our Time*. I can't say I share her enthusiasm for *Infinite Monkey Cage*, with its corny humour. To me it is an attempt, no doubt well meant, to defuse listener fear of complex science subjects, but all it does is muddle them, attempting to convey too much in too short a time (a problem also with *In Our Time*), and wasting half the time on daft jokey exchanges between panellists and between them and the audience.

Dick Francis was my late father's favourite author, and I read some to have a topic in common. They are page-turners, but my lack of interest in horse racing put me off them, although more recently I have heard a couple done as radio serials. In that form, bite-sized chunks, they gripped me more.

Casey also mentions *The Ingoldby Legends*, which I really enjoyed for their impudent verse mockery of ghost tales and the like. I remember vividly obtaining my copy. Someone had recommended the book, and I tried a massive secondhand bookshop (sadly long gone) on the uppermost level of the Piece Call, a former textiles market, built in the nineteenth century around a courtyard in imitation of a Middle East caravanserai, and saved from demolition. As soon as I said the title, the proprietor whizzed up three ladders in success, each in a different aisle of his stock, and in a couple of minutes was back with a choice of three copies, all battered and dirty, but remarkably cheap, leaving me awestruck at his knowledge of the location of such an obscure item among his thousands of tomes.

Greg Benford's crediting of Philip K. Dick's 'kipple' source to Myriam Knight's use of the term reminds me of a dictionary expert on radio who mentioned the phenomenon of people believing they've invented a word, perhaps dialect or obsolete, a word so rare that



they believe it unique to themselves or their family. The word was remeaninged as a result of Dick's use of it. I'm sure I'm not the only person who still uses it for general clutter in the house (or to use a British equivalent, 'gubbins', itself apparently remeaninged from Gubbins, a family who were traveller-type traders in junky items and who left a mess wherever they camped), a long way from the original meaning (according to *Wright's Dialect Dictionary*): a dialect term for 'couple', i.e. 'copulate' (though I suppose junk does breed!), leading to the music hall joke: 'Do you like Kipling?', to which the faux naïf replies, 'I don't know; I've never kippled.' In turn this received its immortality on a seaside postcard, a double-entendre-infested genre from the days when Brits still holidayed at the seaside, instead of flitting to Spain or Disneyland.

An interview with me by Diane Severson Mori went on line recently: [amazingstoriesmag.com/2015/03/interview-sf-poet-steve-sneyd](http://amazingstoriesmag.com/2015/03/interview-sf-poet-steve-sneyd).

(26 February 2015)

## RANDY BYERS

1013 N. 36th, Seattle WA 98103, USA

Today I finished reading the latest *SFC*, which took me a week. Yes, it was another epic feast of sercon-fannish goodness, lovingly and brilliantly produced. Delightfully delicate cover by Ditmar. Loved the ornithopter and the bird's-eye view.

I was most interested in all the comments on Joanna Russ, both pro and con, and I was particularly taken by Doug Barbour's praise of 'the formal aspects of her writing' and 'fine style'. As I've said elsewhere, if there's one writer I wish I could write like, it's Russ. In college I probably studied her style as closely as anybody's. A couple of people mentioned her anger, which is indeed very powerful, by I also find her hilariously, if fiercely, funny. By the way, I think you slightly misread me regarding *On Strike Against God*. You had said you preferred her autobiographical work, so I suggested you might like it, which apparently you do. I don't consider it her best novel myself. I'd probably still go with *And Chaos Died*, followed closely by *The Two of Them* and *The Female Man*.

Kim Huett was surprised to learn that John Wayne

played me in a movie called *Randy Rides Alone*. I've seen the movie, because: (a) I plan to steal the title for my autobiography, and (b) it stars John Wayne before he became John Wayne. It has a nicely gothic opening in which Randy enters a saloon strewn with dead bodies, but after that it becomes a standard pulp adventure involving a dastardly villain and a hidden lair, the details of which left no impression whatsoever on my memory. As far as gothic B Westerns of the 1930s go, I prefer *Mystery Ranch*, which isn't a very good movie either, but features the great Noble Johnson playing an Apache and Charles 'Ming the Merciless' Middleton playing a grand piano.

Steve Sneyd mentions *The Congress*, which is Ari Folman's half-live, half-animated adaptation (very loose) of Lem's *The Futurological Congress*. I saw it twice in the theatre and liked it even better the second time. Folman turns it into a meditation on celebrity and virtual personalities, but it still has some of Lem's concern that humans would rather hide in the idea of utopia than face reality. Because I liked the movie so much, I reread the book, which infuriated me the first time I read it in my twenties. In my fifties the cynicism doesn't seem so bleak anymore, and I really loved it. Some of the wordplay — for example, the names of the drugs people use — is quite astonishing, and I was actually kind of stunned at what Michael Kandel was able to accomplish in his translation. I wish somebody would pay him to translate *Solaris*.

(3 April 2015)

**[\*brg\* *The Congress* is one of my favourite films seen during the last twelve months, but I couldn't remember any resemblances with Lem's novel *The Futurological Congress*. All I remember is reading it about 40 years ago and feeling that it was Lem's least impressive novel. Robin Wright playing herself adds much to the effectiveness of the film.\*]**

## DANIEL KING

Thornlie WA 6108

I was interested to read David Pringle's comments pertaining to my article about the 'lost' Ballard story. He mentioned that the newly discovered story is now known as 'Hardoon's Labyrinth'. At first, I was inclined to argue that 'Hardoon's Folly' would be a better title for it, because of the double-meaning of 'folly' ('costly ornamental building' and 'foolishness'). But then it occurred to me that because Ballard seldom went in for such wordplay 'Hardoon's Labyrinth' is after all better. (The only example of wordplay in Ballard's work that readily comes to my mind is in 'The Cloud Sculptors of Coral D', where there is a character called 'Bea' and also a Coral B.)

I was pleased that David Pringle liked my sequel to the Ballard story. Its title, 'The Quarry', was deliberately chosen for its ambiguity ('quarry' of course meaning both an excavation and something that is hunted). It is because my story is full of such



Randy Byers' breakfast reading.

wordplay that I'd hesitate to call it a pastiche of Ballard, although I did try to duplicate the surface feel and images of Ballard's earlier writing.

Only a few weeks ago I found that the literary magazine *Sentinel* published a short story of mine ('This Room is Really Me') and four poems that I sent them two years ago without even acknowledging receipt of the original manuscripts!

(5 May 2015)

I finally got round to reading a Greg Egan novel: *Permutation City*. I was very impressed, although I suspect most readers and reviewers would have concentrated on its 'hard SF' ideas rather than on the metafictional game that Egan also plays in the novel. I'm referring to the permutations of the letters in *Permutation City* that precede many of the chapters in the novel: for example, 'remit not paucity'. One of the ideas that Egan plays with in the novel is that causality is not absolute but mind dependent. His treatment of this idea reminds me in many ways of Fred Hoyle's 'pigeon-hole' theory, as developed in his novel *October the First is Too Late*, a theory that itself owes much to Kant's position that causality is just a 'category' — a perspective, if you like — of the mind. What Egan, metafictionally, is doing is showing that *Permutation City* is itself just one perspective among many, just as the letters in *Permutation City* form one perspective that includes other, thematically still relevant ones such as 'remit not paucity'.

Amusingly, though, you can take this game to a still higher metafictional level, and apply it to Greg Egan himself. One permutation of the letters in 'Greg Egan' is 'range egg'. Now the word 'free' would normally be expected to precede these two words: its absence, together with the common symbolism of the egg as representing life, can be interpreted to mean that Greg Egan himself is just a 'Copy' (as he terms the virtual reality clones in his novel)! Now if his middle name were 'reef' (an anagram of 'free') the implications would be brighter; but his middle name is in fact 'Mark', an anagram of 'k RAM'. How many kilobytes of RAM do Copies require?

(6 July 2015)

By the way have you ever read Greg Egan's *Flight of Sirius* (and if so, what was it about?) I believe Nostrilia Press was going to publish it years ago.

Incidentally, have you ever read any of Somerset Maugham's short stories? I have the complete box set of them and thought it would be fun to read them on a recent holiday to Thursday Island. (Maugham spent some time in the original Grand Hotel there and even set a few stories on Thursday Island). He's one of the writers where you can see clearly the faults, but the faults don't get in the way of enjoying the stories.

(9 July 2015)

I found this statement (purportedly from an interview with Egan) about 'The Flight of Sirius'. It says Nostrilia Press was set to publish it! It's on this webpage: <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/title.cgi?871245>. According to Egan's interview in *Eidolon* 11 ([http://www.eidolon.net/old\\_site/issue\\_11/11\\_egan.htm](http://www.eidolon.net/old_site/issue_11/11_egan.htm)), this hard

SF novel was supposed to be published by Nostrilia Press in 1985, but they couldn't get Literature Board funding for it. In the interview Egan describes it as 'a very badly written novel'.

(9 July 2015)

Guy Salvidge told me he visited you last week and that you recommended a novel called *Hard to be a God*. Is this really worth seeking out?

(15 July 2015)

**[\*brg\* As I recall, very imperfectly, after we published *An Unusual Angle* Greg Egan sent to Nostrilia Press for our consideration the manuscripts of not just *The Flight of Sirius* but also several other novels and five books of short stories — or was it five novels and three books of short stories? I had forgotten that we submitted one of them to the Literature Board for its support. Unfortunately, we did so at a time when the Literature Board's finances were being cut badly. Rob Gerrand and Carey Handfield might be able to recall what happened next. I know we sent back a huge packet of material to Greg Egan, because we could not raise the funds to publish any of his work. All I could do was advise him to re-start his SF career by sending individual short stories to the top overseas markets. He did this, and began to appear regularly in *Interzone* in the late 1980s. In turn, he was commissioned to write *Quarantine* for Millennium Books in London, and that is usually counted as his first SF novel. Greg has never allowed republication of *An Unusual Angle*, his actual first novel, although it remains an astonishing achievement, especially for a seventeen-year-old.**

**And yes, the Strugatsky Brothers' *Hard to be a God* is one of the best SF novels of the last 60 years, and reads particularly well in the new translation. These days, Franz Rottensteiner (see below) is the agent for the Strugatsky Brothers' literary estate.\*]**

## FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

Marchettigasse 9/17, A-1060 Wien, Austria

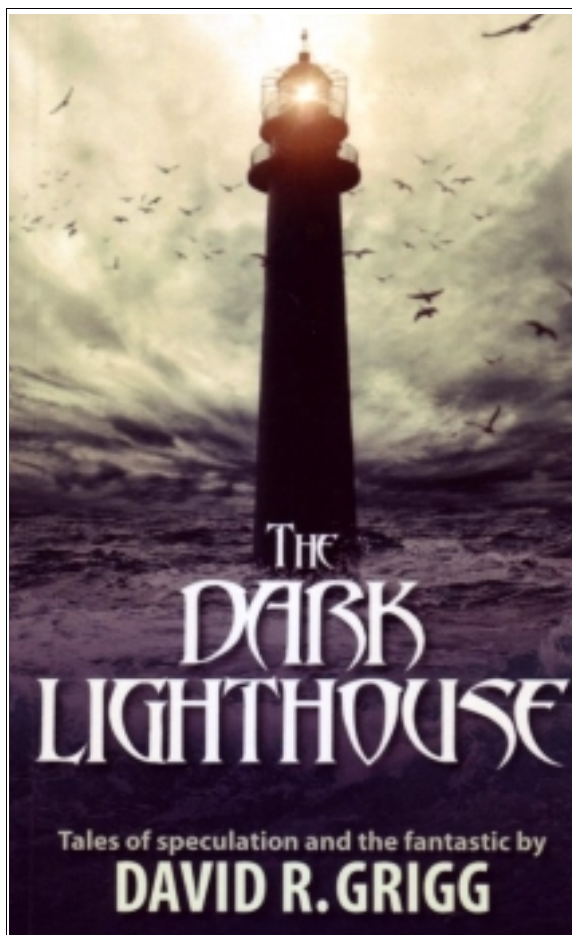
I hope to be able to send you the Strugatskys' *Dead Mountaineer's Inn*, which is due from Melville House on 3 March. *Monday Starts on Saturday* has been postponed. According to Amazon it should be out in September 2015. The Orion homepage still lists a publication date of August 2014, but it certainly did not appear.

(24 January 2015)

I am sending you the Gollancz edition of *Hard to Be a God* tomorrow via Germany. This contains a foreword by Ken MacLeod (the US edition has one by Hari Kunzru). The US edition looks better, but aside from the cover and the foreword the two editions are identical.

(20 May 2015)

Glad to hear that you enjoyed the new translations.



*Roadside Picnic* is still selling phenomenally, in both US and UK, while *Hard to Be a God* was selling poorly and had a lot of returns. But the reviews of the Russian film seem to have turned the tide and caused Chicago Review Press not to give up on Strugatsky. If the new editions are successful, there certainly will be others. A few short stories will also appear in anthologies such as a Jeff VanderMeer book of World SF from Vintage.

The success of *Roadside Picnic* seems to me less to do with the *Stalker* film than the Ukrainian computer game S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Shadow of Chernobyl. Sapkowski and Glukhovsky also owe much to the games based on them, while Lukyanenko was a flop, despite the Russian films. It is to be hoped that film producers will discover that there are also other Strugatsky works beside *Roadside Picnic*!

All American producers seem to want to do a remake of *Stalker*, but Boris Strugatsky signed way back a most unadvantageous contract.

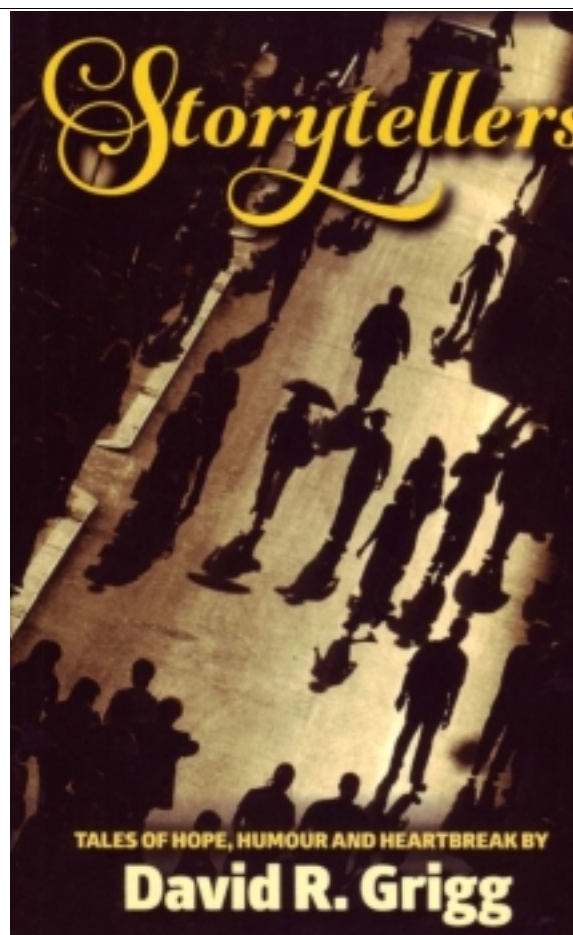
(30 June 2015)

#### DAVID GRIGG

100 Redleap Avenue, Mill Park VIC 3082

Interesting to see my year-old thoughts brought together in a letter. A few things have happened since then, which you might be interested to know about.

First, I've been meaning for ages to give you complimentary copies of two self-published paperbacks of my stories which I put together last year. Together, they represent almost every piece of short fiction I've written



over 40 years! Vanity publishing, to be sure; but these days one can vanity publish very small quantities at a very reasonable cost.

I'm very bad (as you no doubt realised decades ago) at being social, but I'll consult with my social secretary (Sue) and find a mutually convenient time when I can bring the books to you and Elaine.

Second, to bring you up to date with my writing efforts, I have written and had published a few other stories during 2014:

- 'Enhancement' (6600 words) was published in an anthology called *Real World Unreal* in July 2014.
- 'On the Cold Hill Side' (7500 words) was published in the first NovoPulp anthology in August 2014.
- 'Too, Too Solid Flesh' (4400 words) was published in an anthology called *Cadavers*, published by KnightWatch Press in October 2014.
- 'The Miracle Cure' (5800 words) will be published in the second NovoPulp anthology early this year.

I've continued to struggle with the novel, but it's still a long way from being finished. Maybe later this year.

(24 January 2015)

#### GREG BENFORD

84 Harvey Court, Irvine CA 92612-4070, USA

SFC 88 is a very fine issue, especially the Aldiss tribute. At least the closing-ceremony audience singing 'Happy Birthday to You' to Brian Aldiss, who was 89 that day, was a fitting end. Meanwhile the *Daily Dot* held that 'Worldcon is like a family reunion', said longtime convention-



goer and fanzine writer Curt Phillips, at a panel about the history of Worldcon. After a few days, I could only agree. It was indeed like being at a family reunion, in that it felt like you were spending your time with elderly relatives. You might want to talk to them and listen to their stories, but you'll have to tolerate some offensive and outdated opinions along the way.

Of late SF has acquired the air of a contested ground. Think of it as a compliment: SF and fandom are important enough to steal. Some didn't like the feel of Loncon. Silverberg referred to the media emphasis as a 'moron fandom', and Mike Resnick remarked to me, 'I think you and I should consider ourselves lucky that we were GOHs when these things were still relatively easy.'

James Cambias remarked, 'Meanwhile the younger, more diverse — and vastly larger — cohort of fans are going to Comic-Cons in New York, San Diego, or Salt Lake City. They're going to DragonCon and PAX and GenCon. Hundreds of thousands of them are going. They enjoy science fiction movies, TV shows, comics, computer games, webcomics, tabletop games, card games, fan fiction, anime, and probably some enormous hobbies I don't even know about. They're having fun doing what they enjoy. And what they don't enjoy are serious-minded panels about the need for more diversity. Instead of worrying about making SF more diverse, we should focus on making SF more fun again. Bring the fun and the diversity will follow.'

I suspect he's right: expand the audience; overlook their temporary PC flourishes.

(30 January 2015)

I came into fandom in the 1950s, putting on the first German SF con (1956, aiding Anne Steul) and helping Tom Reamy put on the first SF con in Taxes, the 1958 Souwestercon. But my heart lay in fanzines, and they charmed me with their wit. We don't have much of that anymore. There's a lot of anger in fandom these days — indeed, in the culture — mostly for political reasons outside the field (Sad Puppies etc, and the generally PC culture in SFWA, etc). But little wit.

(8 June 2015)

It's said these days that with more diversity in SF's readership, individuals will look for stories that suit their taste. True, but also to follow characters they can agree with identify with. So maybe the past favored POV characters of Caucasian males, like me, because most readers were. I do suspect SF/F has more women reading it (certainly more are reading it!) — and so on for various subcultures and persuasions.

This too shall pass.

I'm mostly interested in ideas; working out current social issues seems a short-term view. I recall the earnest pollution/environmental novels and stories of the 1970s etc. Few seem to be read today. Maybe not a good long-term investment, then, to focus on immediate political issues ... including diversity enforcement, affirmative action in the USA, etc. But *The Stars My Destination* is still there, and much Bradbury.

(22 June 2015)

## ERIC MAYER

[groggy.tales@gmail.com](mailto:groggy.tales@gmail.com) (somewhere in USA)

*SFC* 88 is an impressive and no doubt highly useful contribution to the SF community. Unfortunately, it has been almost four decades since I read any appreciable amount of new science fiction or fantasy, so much of what you've published is about authors I've never read, and likely will not read, given my current lack of interest in the genre. Therefore I hope you will forgive me if I treat this issue, for loccing purposes, as the small enjoyable perszine I found buried inside the genzine.

Your tale of Polly the cat was touching. Our last cat, Sabrina, made it to 21. I think it is rare for cats to get near to 20, although I don't know what your own experience with cats has been. When they are with you for that many years they really become a part of your life. Almost like having a small, furry, detached appendage. Well, okay, Sabrina was actually very attached to me during her last years. If I was at the computer, she was in my lap. My legs used to go numb from trying not to shift them and wake her, and she was constantly in the way of my keyboard. But I miss the discomfort now that she is gone, or rather moved, in the form of ashes, to a small box on the shelf behind me.

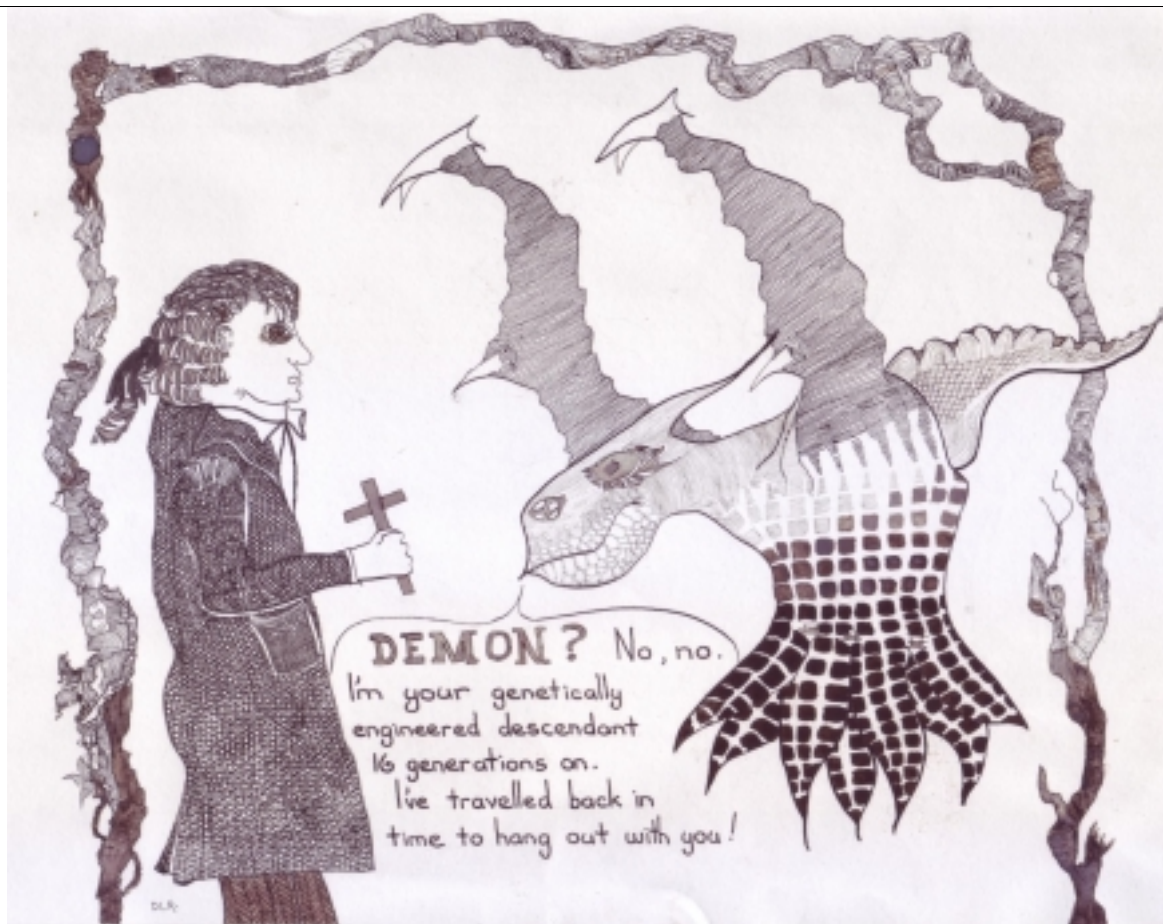
It was interesting to follow you around your old hometown. When I walked around the town where I grew up, after a long absence, it made me uncomfortable. I don't know what I expected. That my past would still be hanging around? The familiar streets and houses were still there, but they had long since turned their backs on me, or so it felt. Everything was so much smaller. How could we have played kickball in that tiny yard? What about those towering snowdrifts that had loomed up over the stone wall? The wall was barely up to my waist now. My family had nurtured numerous large flowerbeds. Those were gone, replaced by flat, featureless lawn.

I retraced my daily walk to the grade school, up the steep hill where, later, I had bicycled. The hill, actually felt longer and steeper. Funny that. The familiar narrow sidewalk amazed me. The stretch where it had been roughly patched with macadam hadn't been touched, the patch remained, only slightly eroded over the course of 50 years. Nor had anyone bothered to repair the concrete slab that a root had cracked in one spot and pushed up into a dangerous speed bump you needed to avoid coming down the hill fast on your bicycle.

During the 20-plus years I've been self-employed, the work always fluctuates, usually unpredictably. I have finally joined Mary on Medicare, this country's pitiful excuse for health care for the masses, so that is a huge savings, and by next year I will be able to take my full Social Security pension without having to give up doing paying work. Well, if you earn too much your Social Security pension is taxed. The robbery never ends! At any rate, for the first time in my adult life, I will not be making my way along the edge of a financial abyss. We'd be able to get along on our pensions, if worst came to worst, although it wouldn't be desirable.

I do wish those fans who insist on paper would see how that discriminates against those of us who might not be as able to foot the bill.

Speaking of fanzines: *Kwalhioqua* and *SFC*!?!? You



really should scan that and post it to eFanzines. I can't imagine such a creature. A weird wonder of the fanzine bestiary!

I feel a little embarrassed, in light of the erudition displayed in *SFC*, to be sending off this short note. Back in 1972 I would have had all sorts of strong opinions and deep insights to offer on the genre, practically all of them totally misguided of course!

(12 February 2015)

[\*brg\* As you might have realised, it's the personal stuff I publish and is sent to me that keeps my interest in publishing. However, the reaction of my friends to SF, other literature, films, music, etc, is also very personal.

Thanks very much for your memories of going back to where you lived as a child. Like you, I was astonished at how much remained. A reminder that various bits of time remain anchored, whereas others rush ahead.

Some aspects of the suburb I currently live in will probably live on, but I have heard from local people that many aspects of Greensborough changed radically in the few years immediately before we moved over here (2004). The gigantic shopping plaza, dug out of the size of a hill, has sucked in all other shopping, wiped out all the housing that was once situated on the same hill, and caused a complete change of traffic patterns near the railway station. A friend who came to live in a nearby suburb in the 1960s said that when he first visited Greensborough, it was nothing but a

pub and a few shops — a country town that became surrounded by housing. Much of what is enjoyable about the place is the remaining atmosphere of a country town. People still greet each other in the streets, older people stay here till they die instead of retiring to Queensland (our equivalent of retiring to Miami), etc. Almost no street crime or burglaries, although I suspect none of us leaves houses unlocked, as everybody in the suburbs did during the fifties and sixties.

Yes, my income has been perilous ever since I started freelancing in the seventies. Some years have been much better than others, particularly the twelve years I had 'guaranteed monthly freelance work' from Macmillan, up to 1996. Some of my worst years were those before I could claim any sort of pension — and in 2007 I was saved only because of a gift from a friend, and the next year because of a legacy from my mother.\*]

Like you I mostly publish for the personal contact it gives me with others, and in that regard my *Vexed* collection succeeded wildly, whereas *E-Ditto* and *Revenant* failed miserably. I do have to admit that I have never outgrown my joy in putting together little magazines.

If you now have the atmosphere of a country town, along with some conveniences, you have the best of both worlds. What has changed the most about my hometown is the price of real estate. It would be totally out of my range these days. As for locked doors, my parents, no matter where they lived, never stopped leaving their doors unlocked, as was the custom when I was growing

up. It scared me, but luckily they got away with it.

You say you've been freelancing since the seventies! I'm a piker compared to you. I feel good to have survived for 20 years. However, I firmly believe, working for yourself is the only way to live. What do we have more valuable than our lives and being self-employed gives one more control of one's life than working for an employer — at least the sort of corporate employer I worked for. The pay isn't as good, but what price freedom?

When I mentioned your collaboration with Ed Cagle I forgot to add that *Kwalthioqua* was one of my all-time favorite zines. I loved Ed's sense of humour. We corresponded regularly. He was older than me and a totally different sort of guy. Heck, he operated heavy equipment and I can barely drive a car! What he got out of our correspondence I can't say, but he had a way of putting things in perspective and bucking me up. After he was diagnosed with high blood pressure, he described his quickly evolving reaction: 'From scared shitless to don't give a shit.' When I moved to Rochester, NY the first piece of mail I found in my new apartment's mailbox was a letter from Ed. He always ended with some facetious advice, in this case, 'Be sure to hunch a stranger in the elevator today.' A few days later I learned that, unknown to me, by the time I read his letter he had already died. Far too soon. He would have made a wonderfully outrageous old geezer.

(13 February 2015)

**[\*brg\* But Ed Cagle wasn't an old geezer, although he liked to pretend he was in his fanzines. He was 40 when he died of a heart attack.\*]**

## ANDY ROBSON

**63 Dixon lane, Leeds LS12 4RR, England**

Sadly, *Krax* 51 is our final issue. Falling interest in the magazine meant that I returned to cut-and-paste for a couple of issues, but we were reluctant to do this. We're glad that we always did appeal to the older reader, which means that a lot of our clientele will have reached a point of both saturation and a more obsessive desire for cups of tea, afternoon naps, and raucous music. (A couple still dress as if it's 1956; I'm baffled as to where he gets his brothel creepers, 'cos I know that crepe soles disintegrate after 25 years, so his must be specially made.)

Hope all goes well at your end and that you can still race to the train station after seeing gigs. I'm not sure I can any more.

(24 February 2015)

The thing with people wondering how you write is that it is never near the truth. Much of it scrapes itself down as we go along, and maybe it does reflect our favourite reading matter. Not many of the books I've really enjoyed contain memorably comfortable chairs, ostentatious cars, or elbow-room writing desks — and sure enough, none of them ever features in my writing. Things like this are written leaning on the wall waiting for the point in the washing machine cycle to add some crucial chemical, or in between rain showers when I should have been doing some outside painting or re-

planting.

The Brian Aldiss piece is well edited. Having heard him speak a couple of times, my only problem has been his enthusiastic eulogising over publications in the dark, dark past. Not his fault for being 89, but maybe some more detail is needed for the majority who are half that age. And mostly they do like museum-styled mental images of crumbling tomes never seen or likely to be.

Judging by your letter pages, a lot of last year's mail has been left for three or four months in a depot before being passed onto you en masse. (Visions of tea chests and hessian sacks stacked next to the mail box!)

Ah, lists of neologisms. My favourite one is 'music: cat puke', and I often find myself saying it aloud in shopping malls, pretentious bars, etc: 'What's that dreadful cat puke?' when the muzak is irritatingly electronic and equally frequently at toddler funeral-march pace.

One thing I have noticed recently is the disappearance of cover illustrations on all books. There are reprints of books barely five years old, but they are priced up by another third and have no graphics on the cover, just maybe two colour bands or a mock-typography frame. If the books were cheap I wouldn't mind as much — even Penguin books used to show the penguin, though. This leaves *SF Commentary* as a classic, if only for the lavish colour pics. (I'm not sure about the twenty-foot-high giant guy in the foreground of this issue's picture, but that's just nit-picking.)

(22 April 2015)

Many thanks for the final print issue of *SF Commentary*. Overseas postage has become an irrelevance, as there is no way you can mail anything overseas that is of the value of the postage. (Not even a stolen Picasso painting. Whatever happened to the reduced stolen Picasso rate if you rolled it in brown paper?)

The idea of a 'steampunk H. G. Wells' is probably far better than the actuality. He was the techno-geek of his time, yet also believed in fairies. (Much as today's geeks believe that we need to have a watch to see Italian football while driving along the highway.)

Graham Joyce's novels are more fantasy than SF, but manage to provide the most interesting title in the last 10 years — *The Facts of Life* — and the least interesting cover blurb. The publisher could have changed the title to *No Seriously, You're Better Off with a Different Book*. At some time I've actually flipped through *Three Ways to Snog an Alien*, but decided I was too old for it.

(9 June 2015)

## MURRAY MOORE

**1065 Henley Road, Mississauga,  
Ontario L4Y 1C8, Canada**

I would suggest we swap houses in February if your weather was not the opposite of our weather. February was the coldest February in adjacent Toronto since record-keeping began. The high temp, briefly, during the 28 days, was -1. Common high temps were -8, -10, -15. Outside today the temp was 2 when Mary Ellen and I walked to the library. The walk would have been pleasant if not for being overcast. The damp air creates a





Jim Burns: 'Fyrdraca'.

different type of cold.

Thanks for sharing the Aldiss letter.

(11 March 2015)

The lesson that I take about your back problem is that you should be less concerned about vacuuming. When you give up on your vacuum cleaner, or your vacuum cleaner gives up on you, whichever comes first, I suggest that you investigate a robot, especially if you don't have carpet or rugs. Your cats might be entertained, too. We have had a Roomba for years.

I see that I have two Philippa Maddern stories, 'Inhabiting the Interspaces' in Rob Gerrand's *The Best Australian Science Fiction Writing: A Fifty Year Collection*, which I bought in a bookshop near your Queen Victoria Market after Aussiecon 4, and 'Things Fall Apart' in *Centaurus: The Best of Australian Science Fiction*, which I found in a bookshop here in Ontario.

I feel confident in boasting that I have the most extensive collection of Australian SF/F/H in Mississauga, Ontario.

Paul Anderson had an international presence, in Canada, as a member of the Canadian apa, Canadapa, in its early mailings. Another Canadapan at the same time was David Grigg.

I have not read Graham Joyce. However, my reaction to Carol Kewley's art on the cover of *SF Commentary* 89 is strongly positive.

Here's my Michael-Bishop-sent-me-a-fan-letter story. I met Michael Bishop in July of 2002 during that year's ConVersion in Calgary. He was supposed to attend an event the previous fall in Edmonton, but that event was

cancelled because of the 9/11/2001 attack on the US. He and that event's other guests instead attended ConVersion in 2002. I introduced myself to him as the recipient from him of what I prefer to think of as a fan letter.

In the early 1990s I resumed getting fanzines, and one of the first titles I read and LoCed was *Anvil*, the clubzine of the Birmingham Science Fiction Club of Birmingham, Alabama, edited at the time by Charlotte Proctor. *Anvil* published a LoC from me in which I mentioned having read, three times, Michael Bishop's 'Her Habilene Husband'; first, its publication location; second, in a Best of the Year collection; thirdly as the first third of his novel *Ancient of Days*.

Bishop was on the mailing list of *Anvil*, or someone gave him a copy. He wrote me a letter, on lined paper. I still have it, somewhere.

(17 July 2015)

Three days ago (July 26), the depth of a southern Ontario summer, I walked 12.5 kilometres, most of that distance beside a river. The Ancestors' Trail Hike [www.ancestorstrail.ca/](http://www.ancestorstrail.ca/) was organised by the local branch of the Humanist Society. Each step represented 60,000 years. At appropriate points we stopped and listened to the leader explain when we were in geological time. He told us of the life at that time.

I emailed this news to a cousin who takes much more ambitious hikes. I learned that he and his wife will be driving for six to eight weeks using a new road from Baie Comeau, northern Quebec, into Labrador, then through Newfoundland, then on to the East Coast. By East Coast I am guessing he means only our Maritime



provinces.

In 2012 we visited Ned Brooks in Georgia. I had an ulterior motive. In addition to meeting Ned, I wanted Mary Ellen to see Ned's larger collection of books, to perhaps cause her to think, 'It could be worse in our house.' And I do not collect typewriters. But there is the bigger of our two basement rooms filled with fanzines.

I just counted. We have fourteen bookcases of differing heights plus, under our bed, two storage units on wheels perfect for being filled — as they are — with paperbacks. Plus, in the basement, with the fanzines, the SF digests.

I was raised in the United Church of Canada, a merging in 1925 of the Methodist Church of Canada; two-thirds of the Presbyterian Church in Canada; and the Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec, so, similar to your Uniting Church. My parents let me read the church bulletin during the sermon. I never was a believer.

I urge you, Bruce, to put with your file of fanzines to save in case of a house fire your quite likely only surviving copy of the Cagle/Gillespie one-shot fanzine. You did not write a report of your 1973 exploration of the United States and Canada (Torcon 2, anyway) — this is a great vacancy in the library of SF fan trip reports. You could have been that decade's Walt Willis.

*Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*: the Canadian equivalent is *Murdoch Mysteries*. Lloyd Penney can tell you much more. The setting is Toronto in the 1890s. I see it has achieved nine seasons, and is licensed to broadcasters in 110 countries and territories, including the US, UK, France, and China, so maybe it is shown on one of your TV channels.

(30 July 2015)

## JACK DANN

Windhover Farm, PO Box 101,  
Foster VIC 3960

I've a terrific GP with a top-notch network of specialists. I've had lung-associated problems for years, including bronchiectasis, and you really need a good specialist to figure this stuff out. Whoever you see should give you lung function tests and the like. Anyway, I hope you feel better. If there's anything I can do, just let me know.

Yeah, it's getting ever more difficult to be in touch with pals. Race's movie nights gave us a schedule. I should just get in touch when I'm going to be at the flat in Melbourne.

Everything good here. Finished the novel (last week), am publishing director of a new small press PS Australia, which is an imprint of the British PS Publishing, and Satalyte Publishing here in Australia is bringing out my backlist in e-editions and also doing some print editions. Forthcoming is a chapbook interview with Lucius Shepard called *Reading the Entrails*, the complete text of *The Rebel*, entitled *The*

*Rebel: Second Chance*, a book of poetry entitled *Tales from a White Heart*, and on and on. PS in England is publishing a volume of my Holocaust stories entitled *Concentration*.

Janeen is doing great: writing novels, and her short story collection *Death at the Blue Elephant* came out to great reviews.

Other than that, just getting old without a skerrick of grace.

(18 March 2015)

**[\*brg\* Congratulations to Janeen. Her *Death at the Blue Elephant* has been nominated this year's World Fantasy Award for Best Collection.\*]**

## JOE SZABO

PO Box 493 Inverloch VIC 3996

It's been ages since our last correspondence and quite a bit has been going on. I had a really bad patch with work last year, forcing us to sell up our house and move further out. As luck would have it, we found a nice place in Inverloch — yes, distances are a bugger, but we are enjoying it. Sold our house well and purchased at a good enough price to be now the proud owners of our own house — no more mortgage! Quite a liberating and yet surreal feeling.

Only problem now is that since our move I have been inundated with work — typical — when you need it, it's not there and when you are more blasé it's everywhere. I am not complaining. (Apart from the fact the we haven't had any time to visit the beach yet).

Not much time for my pining at the moment, but the ideas are welling up. When work subsides a little I

hope to get into it — although there are a still a few things that we need modified around the house, such as painting, carpets, and landscaping.

Tereza is well, although the travelling into Armidale every second day is a bit taxing as she is taking the bus and trains — but I am meeting her half way, saving time on transport.

(23 March 2015)

## PETER SIMPSON

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

I had just finished re-reading, for the first time in over 30 years, *Clans of the Alphane Moon*. The only thing I could remember was the Ganymedian slime mould! I must say I enjoyed the book even though I thought it was quite insane — aptly, in view of the subject matter. I got the impression that it seemed to have been written in a tremendous rush. I dug out my copy of *Electric Shepherd* to see what you thought of it — ‘a near masterpiece’, no less. Do you still hold that view? I wouldn’t go quite as far as that, but I thought the concept was brilliant. The Wikipedia entry references a recent *Guardian* article which describes it as ridiculous and offensive. As far as I’m concerned, if the *Guardian* asserts that, then I am confirmed in my view that it’s brilliant!

I’m sorry I didn’t get to see you on our recent trip to Australia. Keep well.

(3 March 2015)

## MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER

**P.O. Box 8093, Silver Spring,  
Maryland 20907 USA**

Thanks for *SF Commentary* 88. The clipping about Aussiecon I, 1975, tells me that Leigh Luttrell, who I thought was a figure from the ancient and remote past, is actually only three years older than I am. I remember that she and Hank were your American agents in the 1970s, back when you received Hugo nominations and I subscribed to your zine. Do we know if the *Antifan* film still exists? I have a dim memory that I saw it at SF conventions in the 1970s, but it’s definitely an important part of fan history that should be preserved.

**[\*brg\* Both *Antifan* films still exist: the one used to promote our bid for Aussiecon I, and the one made to promote Sydney’s bid for Aussiecon II. Thanks to intervention by Mark Loney in Canberra, the complete Aussiecon I videotapes, plus the *Antifan* films, were transferred to DVD in 2004 by the Australian Film and Sound Archive. I have a set, but that’s mainly thanks to Elaine’s generosity. The two-inch tapes (made in 1975, remember) were only half an hour long each. They were supposed to be transferred to 20 DVDs, but instead were transferred one-tape-per-DVD: 80 DVDs instead of 20, with a final cost to the customer of \$800! I had expected the cost to be \$80 when I ordered my set. I’ve heard that only five complete sets were made by the Film and Sound Archive.\*]**

Yvonne Rousseau talks about seeing *Predestination*. I was looking forward to seeing this movie and was planning to get a group to watch it, which I like to do for films that are based on SF books or stories. Unfortunately, the film only appeared on one screen of one multiplex in the Washington area, and the multiplex was over 20 miles away. So the film falls into the category of ‘something I might see on Netflix sometime’.

Tim Stone should get credit for digitising his father’s photos of Heinlein’s trip to Australia in 1954. I alerted a friend of mine who is a very devoted Heinlein fan, and he enjoyed them and said, ‘I’ve never seen a photo of Heinlein smiling.’ I agreed. The man frowned when he was with his cat and he loved his cat!

Mark Plummer talks about the adventures he had collecting fanzines in 1976 when he was 12. Well, in 1974 when I was 16 I saw fanzines for sale for the first time, at Barbarian Books in Wheaton, Maryland, which was mostly a comics shop, but which actually carried fanzines. The first fanzines I bought were *The Alien Critic* and *Amra*, which at the time had limited national distribution. Then later that fall I went to Discon I, my first Worldcon — and now it’s 40 years later, and I’m still writing LoCs.

(23 February 2015)

## CASEY WOLF

**142320 Woodland Drive,  
Vancouver V5N 3P2, Canada**

I loved the photos of Polly and see that in her baby pictures she is doing the same thing in each, gnawing on the thumb of her wet nurse. Very sweet.

(11 March 2015)

I always feel remarkably decadent, deliciously old-fashioned, when I sit at my tiny kitchen table and prepare to write — with my fingers holding a pen — a letter, however short.

Here is a small gift of thanks for your wonderful fanzines, a constant pleasure now through 30 years (more than half my life).

I’m feeling pleased this morning. No errands to run, a chance to do the laundry, make a third (and most superior) attempt at rigging up a screen to keep Sparky in the cool, or at least with fresh air flowing through out little room. I even unearthed a part of the surface area that had gotten too cluttered in my recent dashings in and out.

I’m also pleased that the increased Cerenis is bringing much comfort to Sparky, and I’ve started breathing again, and have put down the knife (metaphorically). I’m in no hurry to say that goodbye. I think I’ll get myself over there now to sit and enjoy his company.

(4 June 2015)

Sparky is well. I have changed his title of lo! these many years from The Social Director to Commander. He is in fine fettle and bossy as hell, but also affectionate and very dear. I do love our ‘walks’ in the garden. Glad all is apparently well with your felines. Wave a hand to Elaine for me.

Amazing summer with so many fires in western Canada, so early in the year, and snow in Oz. Shaking my head.

Be well, my dear. My course ends in two and a half weeks. Must write my ever-blossoming paper and put together an oral presentation. Have never done that before, having left school at 13, so I think I will play to my strength and do it as a poem. That way I don't have to think, only perform. That I can do, even scared.

(20 July 2015)

I had a new experience of doing an exam. In the past, my anxiety was the worst factor. This time it was my body. It clobbered my old studying style, of writing and nodding between several books at a time — just crippled me. Had to go for straightforward reading and minimal underlining and *no* rewriting. When I was in the actual exam I was pretty relaxed, having accepted that I couldn't study (and therefore put out) as well as I used to. But after an hour of writing I was in a lot of pain and it became very distracting, making it harder to think. Worst of all, the overactive bladder kicked in hard, and I was drowning. Clearly the second half of the exam suffered from these two intruders. Still, I was glad I did it and I got a lot out of it, and although I do write papers on my own, I somehow am being more vast in my choice of topics and treatment here, so I do feel stretched in lovely ways. Back to the drawing boards!

(24 July 2015)

#### DAVID BOUTLAND

**405 The Ridgway, Lisarow NSW 2250**

The bed is propped up with books, the car is 20 years old and on its last legs, and I've had to buy a ride-on mower (\$2000-plus) now that my health ain't what it used to be. I wish I could renew my subscription but I can't.

I'm still writing, though, doing a book called *Crime Writer* about David Rome's pulp-writing life (just for Kindle) to keep busy. My SF on the net is not selling at all (except for one copy of *Squat*), and there has been a trickle of sales for the pulp thrillers.

(15 May 2015)

#### ROBYN WHITELEY

**10 Brady Street, Richmond VIC 3121**

I finally heard your sister Jeanette sing last night, Bruce, at Albert Park Yacht Club. She has a really sweet voice with excellent diction (so lacking in most singers these days) and Duncan is such a joyful singer! Jeanette said you had considered coming, but the public transport is not good enough. Indeed, it was 11 p.m. before the evening ended, but a great evening it was.

(16 May 2015)

Somewhere in *SFC* 87 there was a letter from someone wanting back copies. I didn't mark it at the time and I'm not going back to look for it, but I do recall being pleased that I have always sent back to you the copies I have eventually been right through. I felt a bit virtuous when I read that there are people who look for back copies.

Sometimes you may be able to supply one I have returned, though they may well be mystified by all the little lines in biro throughout the magazine.

I did in fact write a couple of notes that raised further thoughts.

On page 55, Murray Moore talked about *SFC* being like a garden, and he finishes by saying, 'But unlike a garden, *SFC* will outlive its creator'. I was reminded of a marvellous program we saw on ABC TV one Sunday afternoon some time in the last 20 years. The commentary was by Penelope Keith and the program was about the gardener Capability Brown, who was responsible for designing many of the gardens in the great houses of England. The thought that blew my mind was that he planted great avenues of oak trees that would last for a couple of hundred years, far longer than his lifetime, so he would never see his dreams completed. That's far sight for you.

On page 71, Tim Marion mentions the folk music group called The Watsons. I would never have known about whom he was talking, except that I went to the Danny Spooner and Friends concert at the Albert Park Yacht Club in May and almost the whole concert was devoted to The Watsons. Your sister Jeanette was one of the Friends that night, and you had intended to be at the concert but were not able to be there in the end.

I hope you and Elaine and the cats are surviving this cold spell in Melbourne. We're flying off to the Sunshine Coast on Wednesday, to spend a week visiting John's 91-year-old sister-in-law, who is quite frail, so I insist that he goes at least once a year to see her. As well as visiting her we'll do the local op shops looking for \$10 kris kingle-type gifts for our family winter Christmas party on 1 August, and we might even do some shopping. We'll also go to the cinema if there's anything on that looks interesting.

(13 July 2015)

#### BRENDA ANDERSON Grange SA 5022

After some thought, I wonder if I could ask you to discontinue sending copies of *SF Commentary*. While I do keep in touch with the SF scene up to a point, I never followed fanzines like the real 'fans' did — Paul, for example. Second, and more important, fanzines make me sad because I know just how much Paul looked forward to getting his hands on them. He read them cover to cover, enjoyed them, pondered them. So it's a bitter reminder of the happy times that I no longer have, with Paul. This is absolutely not a personal thing, in terms of SF or fandom or anything. It's just because I find things like this hard. Thanks for your understanding. I'm sorry. I miss Paul. Some days it really hurts.

(19 May 2015)

I visited Paul Day today and showed him your *SF Commentary*, which he was impressed with. He said that it had 'significantly higher production standards' than he remembered. (I left it with him to go through). I note that you won't be doing any more hard copies. I also noted a book review in the back, one in particular (*The Collector*



of *Lost Things*) which I'm going to order via the library! Thank you so much for all your hard work on this zine over the years.

Re Paul Day: he says he's out of touch with the SF scene — he's been concentrating on survival (his health). If you want to write to him, his address is 55 Tisbury St, Elizabeth North, 5113, but he's out of circulation these days.

(5 June 2015)

**JOSEPH MAJOR**  
**1409 Christy Avenue,**  
**Louisville KY 40204-2040, USA**

I understand. It's hard times all over. All CanFanzine-dom has gone electronic. And my job problems (or lack-of-job problems) have been a nightmare ...

Here is the previous issue of *Alexiad*, in electronic format. As soon as we get a new one done, it'll be on the way.

When reading *SFC* I always felt like I was seeing something so far and high above my level that I did not deserve to even read it, such was the quality of your articles. Please continue to produce at that exalted level.

(20 May 2015)

**[\*brg\* Thanks very much for the PDF of *Alexiad*. I always thought we were doing much the same thing, but on different sides of Pacific. The only thing that annoyed (and still annoys me) about *Alexiad* is the size of the leading between lines, making it just that extra bit more difficult to read than it should be. There should be two more points of leading in a text than the size of the text itself, e.g. Times Roman 8 on 10, 10 on 12, etc. On the other hand, my typeface is probably too small, but I keep it that way so I can fit everything in. People can always magnify the text when reading the eFanzines.com version.**

**As two of the very few serious fanzines left (as opposed to the academic magazines about SF), we need to keep going. The only magazine that is better than both of ours is *Vector*, but officially that's available only to members of the BSFA. BSFA membership rates are beyond me, but fortunately a good friend from Britain sends me *Vector* every six months after he's read them. For a long time I was a personal friend of whoever was editing *Vector*, going back to Malcolm Edwards in 1972, so I do have a pretty good run of the magazine from its heyday.\*]**

Thank you for your kind words. I think you overestimate my worth, but that is my own opinion and I respect yours. I have been trying (sometimes even successfully) to stay out of the ongoing Hugo Awards Argument. It comes across to me as replacing one set of mediocrity with another set of mediocrity. Just looking at the Best Related nominations: are they really saying that those works were more significant to the field than Bill Patterson's biography of Heinlein? Really?

I hope we can get the next issue out in a day or two.

What with all my problems, my energy for writing is low. (And I have to get my family newsletter out, too, and that has a lot more recipients!) Perhaps knowing of the respect you hold me will boost me.

(20 May 2015)

**MICHAEL SHUMAN**  
**somewhere in USA**

I can relate to your recent health problems as I am about your age (I'm 65) and in the past I've been diagnosed with bursitis (as well as TMJ, gout, Sjogren's syndrome, dry eyes, and a host of arthritic and gastrointestinal issues). I'm an academic (I teach at University of South Florida), I'm sedentary, and I read too much science fiction, all of which probably compounds my symptoms.

In my particular case, the solution to all of my problems was ... wait for it ... a gluten-free diet. I discovered this much by accident and serendipity, and just before the rush to gluten-free in all the media.

The bottom line: since eliminating gluten from my diet, my clinical diagnosis of Sjogren's syndrome went from an increasing statistical marker over about seven years to ... zero, in about two weeks. My bursitis is gone, my gout is gone, my arthritic pains are limited to one index finger, and my gastrointestinal pain is nearly nil, and my dry eye issue is under control. I've been stable and healthy for very nearly a year now. My rheumatologist is astounded (and, in fact, admitted to me that she has gone on a gluten-free diet herself, primarily as a result of my experience).

I would urge you to try a gluten-free diet for just one week, regardless of the current popularity of this trendy cure. I'd be skeptical, too. But in fact, just about one week was all it took for me.

Okay, I hope this is helpful. Now I'll get back to your great fanzine ...

(28 May 2015)

**[\*brg\* Thanks, Michael, for your quick response to *SF Commentary* 89. Very glad to make your acquaintance for the first time.**

**I hear the term gluten-free diet often, but am never quite clear what are the essential products to delete. I was diagnosed diabetic 2 about six years ago, but have kept my blood sugar levels to normal by keeping mainly to the 'diabetes diet', 'healthy food pyramid', or what you will. I lost about 18 kg originally, put back back half of it, and lost quite a bit again during the health problems described in *SFC* 89.**

**In other words, if I stick to the essentials of diabetes diet (lots of fruit and vegetables, less protein and fat, no soft drinks/soda, no more than one standard drink of alcohol on any one day) I keep the weight down and remain healthy. I am often tempted by inter-meal snacks, though.**

**Meanwhile, the back problems and bursitis cleared up after February.**

**Feeling much better now, but there do seem to be factors in my environment that bring on the cough unexpectedly. Not sure what they are.\*]**

Gluten free basically means eliminating wheat and wheat-based products from your diet. In my own case, I stopped eating bread for a few days (it just wasn't appealing to me) and I saw very nearly immediate relief. It all sounds too simple, I know. And ... it is now more complex to avoid gluten in all its forms. The most distressing adjustment is that ... I can't drink beer. I've found a very good hard cider that I drink instead, but somehow it's just not the same.

(29 May 2015)

**JOHN HERTZ**

**236 S. Coronado St., Apt 409,  
Los Angeles, CA 90057 USA**

The arrival of *SF Commentaries* 88 and 89 evidently means you deem me a substantial contributor. This is awesome, and I am awed.

Do you look at File770.com? Ecumenically I appear there from time to time. Those book notes from [www.collectingsf.com](http://www.collectingsf.com) (which seems to have died the death) can now be found there, right-hand column below 'Meta'. You may certainly reprint.

I just wrote to Steve Jeffery recommending the music documentary *Genghis Blues* (R. Belic dir. 1999). I knew Mario Casetta and met Kongar-ol Ondar. They — Paul Pena, Richard Feynman, and B. B. King — have all left the stage. A note by me is in my first collection *West of the Moon*.

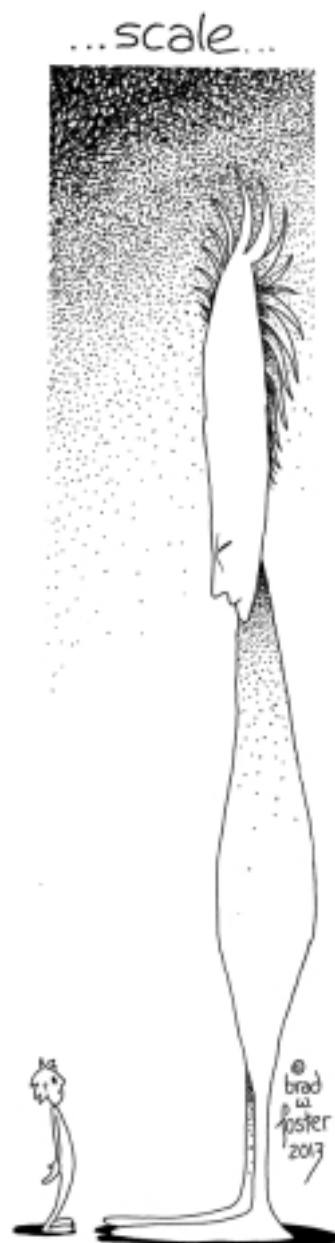
I've spent several happy hours dancing with Cretans. My Greek friends with good English — not always the best dancers — firmly pronounce that other word to rhyme with 'get in'. Alas, getting to know Greek communities in Australia — Serbian — etc. — was among many things I had to leave out of my DUFF trip in 2010. Probably I know Macedonian dance best, which may be related to success escaping attempts by Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs — I don't know enough Albanians — to convince me Macedonia is really part of their country.

Leigh Edmonds, alas, does not explain any more than anyone has ever told me of what happened to the Leprechauns. In Crockett Johnson's superb *Barnaby*, our protagonist's fairy godfather Jackeen J. O'Malley belongs to the Elves', Leprechauns', Gnomes', and Little Men's Chowder & Marching Society. Berkeley, California, is the home of the Elves', Gnomes', and Little Men's SF, Chowder and Marching Society, famous in song and story. I can no longer ask Poul Anderson. Karen Anderson has told me much, but not that.

Luckily, much which is of more use than newspapers remains of the past. Chopin, for example. Bach. *The Tale of Genji*. History is not written by the winners; it's written by the losers. The winners are busy, and the losers have an axe to grind.

Greg Benford kindly quoted me in *Beyond Infinity*. I quite agree that with you that Clarke at his best is (literary present tense) a great poet of SF, with or without your time-honoured definition of saying as much as possible in as few words as possible. Mark Olson says of *The City and the Stars*, in my opinion Clarke's masterwork, that it has a numinous quality. Luminous, too.

My favorite recordings of Beethoven piano concertos



remain Schnabel's. Perhaps this proves what I really think about technique. But I am only an egg.

'Reading Borges about the same time as I was reading Delany, and the mis-and-match felt right' must be the Typo of the Decade. If it wasn't a typo —

I've spoken elsewhere of the poetry in Asimov's SF. He and Heinlein were once ill-foundedly loved, are now ill-foundedly something else. Nabokov said, 'Minor readers like to recognize their own ideas in a pleasing disguise.' Also, 'The worst thing a reader can do, he identifies himself with a character in the book.'

A good question whether *The Martian Chronicles* will prove more enduring than *The War of the Worlds*. Bradbury always said *Chronicles* wasn't science fiction, with which I respectfully disagree. I'm also quite content to consider *Chronicles* a novel — as I do *Foundation* — and *The Dying Earth*. Indeed, I think *The Dying Earth* is science fiction, as we realise when the trap springs and we see we'd been duly warned. *Chronicles* rates high as poetry, far above its nominal contents of commentary on burn-

ing issues of the day. All four have been among those Classics of SF of which I've been doing book discussions at Worldcons and others over the last decade or so. We just took up *War* at Westercon LXVIII. Chesterton said Wells was 'a born storyteller who has sold his birthright for a pot of message'. In fact, Wells was older than Chesterton. I tried to keep focus on the birthright.

Certainly I applaud Michael Waite, not only for his splendid *Trial and Air* (and its kind treatment of poor *Vanamonde*). Also I applaud *archy and mehitabel*. Also Chris Nelson and Kim Huett. But won't you say 'alternative' history?

When I was at the Sydney Airport it had two branches of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art gift shop, one of the finest museum gift shops I know. I can't say whether Sydney is 'American' — whoever discovered water, it wasn't the fish — but on at least one point it's taken a good export.

Alas, *Vanamonde* mailings are still behind. Here are some recent issues.

(10 July 2015)

## CY CHAUVIN

14248 Wilfred, Detroit MI 48213, USA

Your article 'Genre Works Both Ways' actually helps to solve the problem it complains about. So much is published that no one can keep up with it, and much of what we read is happenstance. We depend on reviews and recommendations from friends and places with good reputations like *SFC* to be our radar for books, both new and best of the past. I am especially grateful for the articles on Theodore Sturgeon in *Steam Engine Time*, which made me re-read and find many stories I'd not read before, and Dan Galouye, whose *Dark Universe* I'd never read. (I bought and copy and read it, then found I already had a copy inherited many years ago!)

The description of *Vampires in the Lemon Grove* by Karen Russell made me think immediately of Angela Carter (they even have the same publishers), and then later Margo Lanagan. The stories are outrageous confessions. I admit the ideas make me curious because they are so outrageous, but how would I find the stories? I pulled down *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* by Carter after reading your article, but then thought: do I want to re-read this pain? I read the first two of Margo Lanagan's stories in *Black Juice*, but had to stop. They are very well written, and intense, but they aren't the flavour of art after a stressful day, and so will have to wait for the right day. Perhaps they are too close to horror. Their very skill makes them more intense. Some writers I can read nearly anytime, like *Elizabeth and the German Garden*. I don't know if evoking pain is my favorite use of fantasy, although I realise that conflict is the basis of any story.

At first, I misread the comment made by Michel Faber in your article that people still found SF 'frightening' (which could be taken in a certain senses as a compli-



ment) but I see that is not the case. Well, Susanna Clarke and her publishers were advised re *Mr Norris and Jonathan Strange* that SF readers would find her novel if published as general fiction, but not the other way.

I really quite enjoyed Kim Huett's article on J. M. Walsh. His story of tracking down details of the author's life has the elements of a mystery without the need of a murder, and I like the descriptions of the old magazines, even if I'd probably be disappointed if I read J. M. Walsh's actual stories. I hope Kim writes more for you.

Gillian Polack apologises a great deal for her review, but her assessment seems quite generous and fair. She wonders about Le Guin's play 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. Most people attracted to the book would also know Rome's history — that is part of its attraction. Or it might be a layer uncovered at a later reading (when they have more knowledge); perhaps like an archeological dig.

Your article on Graham Joyce makes me want to try reading his books again. I believe I may have read *The Facts of Life*, but if so, I don't remember it, and a quick look through my book log record finds no mention of it. But the comparison with Alan Garner is certainly a recommendation. I do like this type of fantasy, where a fantastical element is introduced into the real world, and the consequences explored. I also find that one of my favourite parts of fantasy is the point in which the characters are about to enter that other world — you know it, and anticipate it, and the initial reaction of the characters to the fantastic is especially appealing to me. Sadly, the actual fantastic element or other world is often disappointing — I think I've read too much, so it's hard for anything to be that new. But as with some of the hard science SF, I get that *frisson* of excitement that is one of the peculiar appeals of good SF and fantasy.

Guy Salvidge reviews authors who are completely new to me (except for Lewis Shiner), and he manages to make all the books sounds interesting. This is a hard thing to do for jaded readers like myself.

So what else is new? My laptop died again, but it

appears that the hard drive is intact, which has a partially completed letter of comment on two earlier *SFCs*. I have a new computer still not put together; this letter is being written at work. I have finally begun putting books on shelves in the bedroom in the old/new house, and of course one of the pleasures is finding so many new things I've not read yet but already have. I am following Jerry Kaufman's advice/practice of having a couple of shelves just for unread books, although of course those are also mixed in with the others as well. And I resign myself to the fact that many will simply stay in boxes — to be rediscovered another day.

I have also been terribly distracted by summer and gardening. I have been involved in a community garden, and I've talked to a Hmong woman. I was going to pull up what I thought was a weed in the tomatoes, when she stopped me and said, 'That is good to eat.' I was rather doubtful, but when I took it home and boiled it, it turned a beautiful green and looked and tasted like spinach. I don't know what is called; she didn't know the English word for it, and there really doesn't seem to be a Hmong word for it either. But I find weeding enjoyable in beautiful weather, so long as I am not pressed for time.

(11 July 2015)

**LEANNE FRAHM**  
Altona VIC 3018

[\*brg\* For many years Leanne Frahm lived at Slade Point, Queensland, from which she made many contributions both to fandom and SF publishing. However, a few years ago her husband died, and she moved to Melbourne to be near to her daughter. Only recently has she emailed me to say that she would like to make contact with a few Melbourne fans, especially members of ANZAPA — Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association — of which she was a long-time member. As editor of the bimonthly ANZAPA mailings, I pick up contributions in person every two months at the David Jones Food Hall in Melbourne.\*]

Lovely to hear from you. Thanks for all the info. The easiest way for me to get in touch personally is probably to pop into the David Jones Food Hall one Friday — when I learn to get there from whichever station I'd get off from. (Beautifully structured sentence, that.) I've found that Mandy and Phil are living in Altona, and have been trying to get in touch to arrange a meeting, but we seem to be playing phone-tag. I drive, but am desperately trying to avoid the freeways, even though I've driven on them quite comfortably with my daughter giving me directions; it's knowing where to get off to where you want to go that seems to be the problem! I think I'll have to get one of those natsav things — or whatever they're called.

This is necessarily short. I've received so many emails to answer and a paper to edit from the Uni has come in at the same time, so thanks once again, and give my best regards to Elaine.

(29 July 2015)

**BRAD FOSTER**  
PO Box 165246, Irving TX 75016, USA

Catching up on emails here, but good grief, can't believe this has sat unanswered so long. So sorry for sure!

As usual, lots of enjoyable reading here, though not much for any sort of interesting comments from me. My failing, not that of the writers. Also as usual, from the reviews in this issue, I have already been jotting down new titles to add to me 'see if you can lay your hands on these books' list. I already had a note to look for Karen Russell's *Vampires in the Orange Grove*, but have now added the *Swamplandia!* title as well. Have enjoyed Michael Faber's *The Courage Consort*, and had is *Under the Skin* on my look-for list, and have now added *The Book of Strange New Things*. Read and loved Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* a couple of years ago, so now have *The Bone Clocks* to look for.

Oh, and Sloan's *Mr Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* looks like another one I probably can't live without reading ... man, so many books, so little time ...

Keep on pubbing, even if you can't print. Fortunately, with the electronic age here, you can still get those words out to the world like this, and we do appreciate it.

(25 October 2015)

## We also heard from ...

IAN COVELL (Middlesbrough, England), who downloaded the latest issue, as did **CHERRY WEINER** (Dacula, Georgia), **SUE BURSZTYNSKI** (Melbourne, Victoria), **RICH LYNCH** (Gaithersburg, Maryland), **CAT SPARKS** (Wollongong, NSW), **ALISA KRAS-NOSTEIN** (Perth, WA), **MARK LINNEMAN** (Sacramento, California), **ROY KETTLE** (London, England), **GRANIA DAVIS** (somewhere in USA), **JOHN NEWMAN** (Maldon, Victoria), **TESSA DICK** (Crestine, California), **MALCOLM EDWARDS** (London, England), **GEOFF ALLSHORN** (Montmorency, Victoria), **RICK KENNETT** (Pascoe Vale South, Victoria), **GARY MASON** (Adelaide, SA) (a name from the legendary past of Australian fandom, now back in ANZAPA and writing better than ever), **DONNA HANSON** (Canberra, ACT), **JEANNE MEALY** (St Paul, Minnesota) and **TED McARDLE** (Ivanhoe, Victoria).

**DON MURRAY** (Richmond, British Columbia, Canada) thanked me for sending him *SF Commentary Reprint Edition: First Year 1969*. 'I love the fact that you had Robert Silverberg writing to you griping about a review (probably by George Turner). It's amazing how soon after beginning to publish *SF Commentary* you got on the authors' radar'.

**KEITH TAYLOR** (from a Melbourne suburb), wrote to say that he still writing, although we haven't seen anything from him a several decades: 'Grey Rabbit Press published a collection of my ancient Egyptian fantasy stories about Kamose, the archpriest and magician, not long ago. (2012) I wrote a novel as a sequel to the collection (reign of Rameses III) but haven't found a publisher yet. I wrote a 30,000-word medieval fantasy on the theme of the Black Prince's ill-advised bargain with the powers of darkness djuring his Spanish campaign.



Haven't found a publisher yet. And I'm about a third of the way through a Lovecraftian style horror fantasy set in the early twentieth century.'

**THOMAS BULL** (Doncaster, Victoria) sends brief but pithy reports on events around Melbourne fandom from time to time. Thanks for keeping me up to date, Thomas.

**ALAN STEWART** (Richmond, Victoria, reported on last year's annual Nova Mob dinner. I was not able to be there, because of the first bout of The Cough.

**JAN CREGAN** (Katoomba, NSW) who also grew up in Oakleigh, was very interested in my account of the Oakleigh trip that my sister and I made. 'The last time I was in Oakleigh was for our 35-year reunion, and all I really remember is that the little weatherboard house I grew up in had gone, and been replaced by a cream brick McMansion with arched portico and plaster columns.' She also wrote to say that she did not seem the point of my lists, to which I replied that the great thing about lists is that they are timebinders for the people who prepare them — sort of like being in the tesseract in *Interstellar*. It's just a way of communicating one's likes and finding fellow enjoyers.

At the beginning of the year, **PHYRNE BACON's** (Gainesville, Florida) book about mathematics was going well, in part because she had been able to change her thyroid medications. 'As a sign of my optimism, I drastically revised my title page today. Now, it looks like a real title page.'

**JEFF HARRIS** (Adelaide, South Australia), was, like other people and me, much affected by the loss of Paul Anderson on 1 January: 'I was lured into fandom by Paul Anderson and Alan Sandercock (you deserve your share of blame too, Alan) so we have a lot of shared experiences. Sadly there were things I wanted to discuss with Paul to get his point of view on shared events, but the chance to do so is gone.'

**GEORGE ZEBROWSKI** (Delmar, New York) keeps in contact from time to time. He and his wife **PAMELA SARGENT** were a bit put out to receive only the electronic version of *SFC* 89, so I'll try to keep sending them the print edition until it's impossible to send print copies to anyone.

**GARTH SPENCER** (Vancouver, Canada) tells me that is email addresses are garthspencer@shaw.ca and gsgarthspencer720@gmail.com.

**ROB JACKSON** (Hambrook, Chichester) is willing to trade fanzines (his wonderful *Inca*) for my less decorative efforts.

**JOHN ADKINS** tells me 'how touching I found your remembrances of your cat Polly in *SF Commentary* 88. My wife and I lost a 19-year-old dog and a 20-year-old cat a few years ago and I know how hard that can be. I feel as if I too knew Polly and I am so happy to have met her.'

**JAMES (JOCKO) ALLEN** (Pascoe Vale South, Victoria) was going to write a letter of comment but 'now I have to go and see if the crickets keeping my daughter awake at night due to hot weather have been pacified by garden watering outside her window'.

**MARIANN MacNAMARA** (Adelaide, South Australia) sent a \$100 subscription, and also arranged for me to give out this year's Peter MacNamara Award to Merv Binns (see p. 3).

**DEAN SWEATMAN** (Florida) enquired about the health of Bill Wright. They met during Bill's *DUFF* trip in 2014. Dean is hoping for another issue of Bill's *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop (IRS)*, but I doubt if it will appear again. Bill's health is good some days, and not so good other days, but he is finally receiving quality care so that he can stay living in his flat.

**MIKE GLYER** (Arcadia, California) is willing to trade electronically his fanzine *File 770* for mine, but these days relies mainly on his website to supply fans with the latest news. 'I did happen to mail you a paper copy of the latest *File 770* a few days ago, which hardly begins to balance the books after all the great issues you've sent me in the past'.

**VAN IKIN** (Perth, WA) is willing to read my magazine on screen — but I'm hoping he will send me the next issue of *Science Fiction* when it appears. 'I hope to have a new issue of *Science Fiction* out in March, but it's already looking more likely to be April. I have hopes of producing a second one for the end of the year. (But I've learned not to hold my breath waiting ...)' So have we, Van.

**STEVE STILES** (Randallstown, Maryland) was 'surprised to see not a single comment on my cover for *SFC* 87. Guess I'm old hat.' Hardly, Steve, but letter writers notoriously forget to talk about the art in fanzines. Sorry about that; I try to feature art comments whenever people send them to me.

**MICHAEL DOBSON** (Bethesda, Maryland) is willing to read my fanzines on screen, but fortunately he is still sending me copies of his huge *Random Jottings*. This year's issue is 320 pages, trade paperback, fully typeset and illustrated. It looks just like *SFC* might look like in a better world in which I am blessed by a high income. Michael tells me that he can *print Random Jottings* for an astonishingly small amount per copy — but the problem of producing something like *RJ* here would be the postage cost of sending each copy overseas.

**MICHAEL HUTCHINS** (Duluth, Georgia) is the 'moderator on the Internet Speculative Fiction Database at <http://www.isfdb.org/> There is a substantial index of all issues of *SF Commentary* at this address: <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/pe.cgi?32684>. It is chiefly maintained by Pete Young.' Very well, too. I checked it the other day and discovered that I have been vastly more productive over the years than I could ever have imagined. 'The copies of *SFCs* 87 and 88 arrived in the mail the other day. I very much appreciate your time and effort (and expense!) in providing these lovely contributions to my Michael Bishop library.'

**PETE YOUNG** (Thailand), mentioned not only by Michael (above) but by me much earlier in this column, made 'a quick enquiry on behalf of another editor at the ISFDB: your *SFC* correspondent Werner Koopmann (*SFC* 40) and Werner Koopman (*SFCs* 80 and 88): are they the same guy, and if so, which is the correct spelling?' The former; see his correspondence earlier in this column. 'I've now finished entering all past issues of *SFC* into the ISFDB, and I'll be returning the copies to Mark and Claire in a couple of weeks (we're meeting up when Geri Sullivan will be in London). I'm very satisfied with the results but wish I had a better scanner for the covers, some of which look a bit ropey when scanned.' I'm

astonished at your efforts, Pete. I doubt if I'll be worrying about cover scans.

**PETE WESTON** (Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands) moved house at the beginning of 2015, but I haven't seen a new address. Since the onset of a serious illness a couple of years ago, he has cut most of his ties with fandom, which is a pity. But in February he was 'feeling reasonably well and cheerful'

**CLAIRE BRIALEY** and **MARK PLUMMER** (Croydon, Surrey) had a good time at the British Corflu in 2015, and then hosted friends between Corflu and the British Eastercon. Claire writes: 'We would have had one more night at home if Tom Becker hadn't come up with a plan to visit Bletchley Park tomorrow; we've never been and I've always wanted to, so we're staying nearby overnight, being tourists for a few hours and then going on to the Eastercon over by Heathrow, on another side of London (west) from us (south) and Bletchley (north).'

**MICHAEL WARD** (San Jose, California) likes reading *SFC*, both on screen and in print. He is the bloke who, when he and others visited our house in 2010 just before Aussiecon 4, showed me what the Landscape edition of *SFC* looks like on an iPhone — quite readable.

**FRANCES WADE** (Baringhup, near Maldon, VIC) sent lots of personal news, including the fact that she moved to a house she is buying in Baringhup, in the general area that includes Castlemaine, Maldon, and Guildford, where my sister Jeanette lives. 'The house is only about 30 years old and the last owners were an elderly couple who were very comfortable in it, so I guess that means everything works. There are water tanks (no town water supply) for domestic use. I'm already used to saving shower water in buckets for the loo. Only problem is that I seem to have inherited a cat. Quite a nice black-and-white cat, who's been left alone for too long. I hadn't intended to keep any more cats now I was living in the country; I had let Boof and Zip die of old age and that was that.'

**BILL BURNS** (Hempstead, New York) is the keeper of eFanzines.com, host of both downloadable files of each issue of *SF Commentary*. He checks every issue, including the landscape edition of *SFC* 89, which was an enormous PDF file. He was able to reduce the size of the file without losing screen resolution. He says: 'I always try Acrobat's reduction routine (with gentle settings) on large files, and sometimes it helps.'

**MIKE MEARA** (Spondon, Derby) has been sending me his fanzines *A Meara for Observers*. Each issue is a spectacular work of colour photocopying, and I love receiving them, but I did offer to change over to electronic trade only. 'Yes, I'm quite happy to download *SFC* and *Treasure* as pdfs. As far as *aMfO* is concerned, it is not generally available on the internet, e.g. via eFanzines. Instead, I email the pdf direct to everyone on my mailing list who has email access. In addition, I post paper copies to those who do not have email access, and to those loccers who have expressed a preference for paper copies. So you will continue to get *aMfO* by directly emailed pdf, and if you write me a loc, this will get you paper copies of the next two or maybe three issues. That's roughly how it works.' That's about as generous as fans

get these days — many thanks.

**NALINI HAYNES** (Lynbrook VIC) is still producing her fanzine *Dark Matter* as a website, although I haven't heard from her about it since the beginning of the year. Her email address is editor@darkmatterzine.com

**JEFF HAMILL** (Seattle, Washington) sent me a wad of cash although he is still willing to download copies of *SFC* rather than receive print copies. Many thanks.

**JASON BURNETT** (Minneapolis, Minnesota) comments about postage costs: 'I was initially joking when I said, *It's almost as if the government didn't want us sending printed words in sealed envelopes*, but the longer that idea sits in my head, the more I think there may be something to it.'

**KAARON WARREN** (Downer ACT) thanks me for my remarks about her work, and the review of 'Fresh Young Widow' in particular. In turn, I apologise for not having yet written anything long about your work, Kaaron, mainly because I'm not sure I've tracked down all the collections of your work.

**DAVID HYDE** (somewhere in USA) says 'Thanks for the kind review of our Philip K. Dick bibliography, *Pre-cious Artifacts* (available from [www.Wide-Books.com](http://www.Wide-Books.com)).'

**TONY THOMAS** (Ferntree Gully VIC), who is about my age, went off on his first overseas trip before I knew he was going. He managed to send a couple of emails while on the trip, the last of which says in part: 'Here's the first SF connection on our trip so far. Eva and I are having lunch in Teslina St Zagreb, named of course after the inventor Nikola Tesla, claimed by both Croatia and Serbia as a national hero. When Tesla died in New York in 1943 his long-time friend Hugo Gernsback had his death mask made, and it now resides in the Nikola Tesla Museum.' I haven't seen the photos of the trip.

**GRAEME PHILLIPS** (<http://www.freewebs.com/batglynn/cyaegha.htm>) announces that his magazine *Cyægha* 14 is now out. 'I'm hoping to do another un-themed issue early next year (i.e. anything Lovecraft/Mythos related) so anyone interested in submitting material for it (i.e. Art, Fiction, Non-Fiction, Poetry) should contact me before then. (Current deadline: 31 December 2015.)'

**DAVE LANGFORD** (Reading, Berkshire) was very kind to arrange for Lulu.com, the Print on Demand people, to send me a copy of his *Crosstalk* collection of Langford interviews. Lulu prints in Australia, so saving international postage. 'Very pleased that *Crosstalk* reached you so quickly: this was the first time I'd tried to have Lulu print and deliver in Australia. The current distraction is my attempt to typeset the first section of Rob Hansen's revised *Then*, again to be a real paperback book one of these days. So far Rob has expanded the 1930s segment by about a third, and is now working on the 1940s. We're a long way from the end of this project, but so far it's looking good.' Most of Dave's other recent fannish projects have been available only as e-books, so I haven't been downloading them, although they are free. I am looking forward to the print version of the expanded *Then*.

— Bruce Gillespie, 14 October 2015

## and now the feature letters ...

### This gets weirder

**[\*brg\* The following letter, from March 2014, were supposed to appear in *SFC* 88. The cover says that Jerry appears in that issue, but his letter disappeared somewhere between my first version of the magazine and the final print copy. After you read the letter, read about the truly awful mistake that led to it disappearing from *SFC* 88.\*]**

**JERRY KAUFMAN**

**PO Box 25075, Seattle WA 98165, USA**

I think I must have met Peter Darling at the 1983 Syncon, because sometime in the two years after that convention Suzle and I played host to him when he visited Seattle. We entertained many a travelling Australian in those years. My memory of his stay is scant, but in particular I recall he was quite impressed and amused that we had old Melbourne streetcars running on tracks along our waterfront. They still had signs and adverts from their Melbourne days. Too bad the city stopped running the waterfront streetcar line years ago, or we could have shown it to you, too.

Although it's interesting to read Daniel King's article about that unpublished Ballard story, it would have been more interesting to read the story itself. Well, we'll be in London this summer. It's unlikely I'll go to the British Library to seek it out, but one never knows. Maybe I can convince people to make a pilgrimage there.

I loved reading the Robert Bloch material — I wish I'd had more nerve and talked to him at conventions. I have (again, vague) memories of him presiding over Hugo banquets and awards ceremonies at some of my first Worldcons, and was thrilled when Suzle and I got postcards of comment from him on issues of *The Spanish Inquisition*. His sense of humour in public speaking was a cross between that of Bob Hope and Henny Youngman. His humour in fanzines was well represented in *The Eighth Stage of Fandom*, a book that helped to imbue me with a sense of fannish wonder.

John Clute's another kind of influence. I admit that sometimes I find his essays and reviews a tad difficult to follow. In his earliest reviews, he used (and still uses) unusual words that precisely hit his intended meanings but were not always in the dictionaries I used. (Yes, I needed better dictionaries.) In more recent material, John uses words he's made up, or repurposed, for new and ever more precise meanings. I have some trouble keeping the meanings in mind. (I often have to look up the definitions of common critical language as it is. Every time I see the word 'hermeneutics' I have to reach for my culture. What does that mean, again?)

I noticed on page 27 that Darrell Schweitzer suggests that every 20 years there's a tendency for the rise of a new movement in experimental fiction to do away with nar-

rative and write fiction based on other elements. John makes a good response to this. I would say that some of the experimental fiction I have read, from different eras, does not try to eliminate narrative. Some stories and books have retained narrative but have tried to get rid of plot — writing events in no obvious order, or small sequences that have no apparent relationship to each other, or narratives that are more like dreams. Others have stripped narrative down to extreme basics with no commentary or denouement, leaving the reader to fill these in.

It's my belief, from extremely limited investigation, that currently the radical experimentation consists of taking popular genres of narrative fiction and mixing them, taking them past the borders of what we expect of a genre and making them fuzzy and jagged.

(24 March 2014)

When I wrote about John Clute in my previous letter, I said he was an influence, but then just talked about his word choices. What I meant to say was that nearly every Clute review or essay has taught me something — a new way to think about each writer and about science fiction in general. I particularly liked his idea about the 'real decade' stories take place in. There's a lot of fairly recent Clute I haven't read, and have never dug deeply into the *SF Encyclopedia*. This is a serious gap in my grip on the literature (mixed metaphor) so I'd better mine the gap. With my grip.

I'm glad George Zebrowski wrote about Olaf Stapledon. I know little about him or his writing aside from the four major works. And I've never read *Odd John* or *Sirius*.

I realise now that, like you, I enjoyed more of Joanna's short fiction than her novels. Is it *We Who Are About To ...* that devotes about half the book to the narrator/protagonist starving to death?

(31 March 2014)

I had forgotten to look for *SFC* at eFanzines, until the other night at Vanguard, at Andy Hooper and Carrie Root's house. I found the issue on a stack of recent zines, and saw my name included with several others in a Feature Letter section. But so far as I can see, you didn't actually include my letter!

(9 May 2015)

**[\*brg\* Thanks very much for pointing out something that nobody had noticed until you did. Not only did I repeat a letter from Mark Plummer that had already been run in *SFC* under a different heading, but thanks to you, I now realise that in the rush to produce *SFC* 88, I have left out your letter.**

**This gives some idea of the pressure under which**

**SFC 88** was produced. On the one hand I was running out of cash to send out any issues by post, but on the other hand I was under obligation to send out print copies. Also, I was feeling ill during the whole time I was trying to push out this issue — first with a low-key cough, followed by severe lower-back pain, for a month (which was followed by a return of the cough in 2015).

But I still don't know why I made such a ghastly mistake. *Even worse* (if there can be an 'even worse'), I ran out of money altogether late in 2014, sent out only a few of the overseas print copies, and have only just got around to sending out the rest. **SFC** has become such money problem that I am going to confine print copies to subscribers and major contributors to an issue. Or I'll print just 30 copies and then work out how best to distribute them.

**All I can do in here is apologise for taking your name in vain in the colophon of SFC 88. SFC 88 felt like it didn't want to be done. Or was it telling me to stop and smell the flowers (and stick to writing mailing comments for ANZAPA)?\*]**

**SFC88:** I like the Ditmar cover — it looks like a computer game as first glance, but as I looked longer, I saw many more details that gave it life. It's a slice out of a story, isn't it?

Your memorial to Polly was touching, and the photos of Polly with one ear forward gave her more personality.

I much appreciated Murray Moore's report on Brian Aldiss's talk at LonCon. I was at the con, but this was one of hundreds of program items I missed. I particularly relished the irony of Aldiss's comparison of himself to Harry Harrison. 'I just did what I wanted to do.' So not a rebel. I must someday read more of his recent fiction, such as *The Cretan Teat*.

Michael Bishop on Phil Dick was a pleasure. I'm always surprised that there is always more to be said about Dick, and that people are willing to say it (or to say what has been said before, again). I liked the poem a lot, and will have to re-read it more than once. 'As calm as caffeine', from the last stanza, really paints Dick as I've understood him.

Is J. D. Robb worth all the energy that Patrick McGuire has put into reading, describing, and analysing her work? I've read one of the novels and found it mildly enjoyable, but not enough to read more. Even so, I found Patrick's article pretty interesting. Robb's books are popular, so just knowing what appeals to many readers has interest. It's also of interest to see just what Patrick's energy has dug out of the books.

I think, though, that he overestimates the imaginative powers of genre writers when he talks about ideas that Robb did not think through. I'm sure, but with no evidence to hand, that the typical (if there is such a thing) science fiction writer has not thought through her ideas to the extent that Patrick has thought about Robb's. (Patrick might offer his services as a beta reader regarding the implications of many a writer's clever notions.)

I liked Leigh Edmonds' remarks about the pleasures of history, which parallel the pleasures of fiction. I've just



embarked on reading *Isaac's Storm* by Eric Larson — it's about the enormous hurricane that devastated Galveston, Texas, in 1900, and Isaac Cline, head of the Weather Bureau in Galveston. It weaves together the history of weather forecasting, Cline's life, why the Weather Bureau didn't predict the hurricane, and the flattening of the city.

When Greg Benford says, of Joanna Russ, 'I knew her well (she was not a lesbian)', is he hinting at something? A secret intimate relationship, perhaps? Or am I reading into his remark more than he meant to suggest?

To Doug Barbour: I like some Canadian poets — Margaret Atwood's work from about 30–40 years was my introduction to her work, and Kathleen Fraser's is very good (again, from 30 years ago). I was introduced to most of the Canadian poetry and fiction I know back when Doug and Susan Wood were active in fandom and contributing to John Berry and Loren MacGregor's ambitious but short-lived *Pacific Northwest Review of Books*. And that's a long time ago, isn't it?

I bought more of John Clute's collected work at LonCon, and look forward to understanding his ideas about 'fantastika'.

Steve and Vicki's bookshelves are much neater than ours.

I'm listening to *How Big How Blue How Beautiful*, the new Florence + the Machine album, at the moment, and enjoying this first listen. I have a subscription to the music service Rhapsody, and downloaded a new version of their program last week. However, I've now discovered that this new version does not support my MP3 player, the Sony Walkman. It only works with Samsa and Android, which means I can't copy music to the Sony. That limits its usefulness, so now I either try to restore the earlier version of Rhapsody, get a new MP3 player, or cancel my subscription and find a music service that will sync with Sony. (As I've seen Mark Plummer say, 'First World problem'.)

(7 June 2015)

**SFC 89:** 76 pages, and not a single letter — and you can do this at least another two times? Pretty encouraging comment on interest in science fiction and fantasy among the cognoscenti, yes? Even the front cover by Carol Kewley is a critique — Graham Joyce's world being a lone man on a hillock, with dense forest behind him,



and a lonely power line support off to one side. The man is alienated from humanity, nature, and power. And he's too stubborn to turn around to see any of it.

Karen Russell is another writer I'm not familiar with (there are an overwhelming number of them). I will remember her name for at least a few minutes after writing this letter, just as I remembered her name for a couple of minutes after reading the issue a week ago. Perhaps one day I'll notice one of the books when I'm in a bookstore — we still have them, you know — and the name of the writer or the book will sound a distant bell, and I'll buy it. *Swamplandia!*, in particular, sounds intriguing.

It seems all the Graham Joyce books I've read (and enjoyed immensely) are the ones you mention only as earlier, less successful, ones. I need to make a list of what I've read, so as to better search out the newer ones. (As my SF/fantasy shelves are full, books I've read in the past five years are scattered around the house, filling up spots on other shelves. So making such a list will require more than a simple glance.) It seems I'll like the newer ones even more than the ones I've read.

The sort of fantasy I like the best is of the fantastic/realist mixture, such as Joyce's work. I also have enjoyed books by Lisa Tuttle, Neil Gaiman, and Elizabeth Hand that walk this maze. However, there are a few exceptions — I like a couple of series by writers who create huge trilogies, then trilogies of trilogies. I'm thinking of some of Robin Hobbs' work, and of Lynn Flewelling's work.

I stopped subscribing to *The New York Review of Books*

when it changed to an on-line magazine, so I missed the Michael Bishop article on *Who Made Stevie Crye*. I've never read the book, either, because it was a horror novel. And I thought the monkey figure in the coffin was the title character. It's still a horror novel, but it sounds like much more than that. As I'm likely to run across it at a convention, especially as Patrick Swenson of Fairwood Press often has his own table in the Dealers Room, I will get it and read with pleasure. (I can't really guarantee the pleasure part, but it seems likely.)

**[\*brg\*] Please look for anything by Karen Russell. She wipes the floor with most other writers labelled 'fantasy writers'. Many passages of writing in *Swamplandia!* (in particular) are magnificent. Steven Millhauser is the other non-fantasy-but-yes-really- fantasy author I keep urging on people, although I've not written much about his books.\*]**

I believe I've read at least one of Millhauser's books and a few of his short stories — yes, he's quite good. I also recommend some of Edward Whittmore's 'Jerusalem Quartet' — in particular the first three of the four. They comprise a secret history of the world, focusing on the secret powers that battle for control of Jerusalem. (The fourth book was an entirely realist novel, without the elements of myth and tall tale that made the first three so entertaining.)

(22 June 2015)

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## Some notes for Graham Joyce

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**STEVE JEFFERY**

**44 White Way, Kidlington,  
Oxon OX5 2XA, England**

Thanks for *SFC* 88. The landscape format works well on screen, and the e-edition has the advantages of nice colour photos inside, which do bring an added 'aaah' factor to the pictures of the cats, especially that one of Polly and Sophie lounging in front of a sun-filled French window on page 7 (landscape edition), page 4 (portrait edition).

I'm sorry to hear about Polly. Twenty, though, is an impressive age for a cat. I'm never quite sure how 'cat years' are worked out. It's not as simple as multiplying by a simple factor like 5 or 7, but seems to be on a sliding scale with a large multiplier in the first two years and then a factor of around 4 between 2 and 20+ calendar years. Different sites give different formulae, but 20 years is definitely at the top end (the calculator on the Purina site doesn't even go that far).

We've never had another cat after Enki, though you wouldn't think it from the number of cats you can see climbing, sleeping under, or racing around the tree in our front garden. It can get quite distracting when you're watching something on TV and one or more small furry blurs zip across the window in one direction, and then

back in the other.

Tara complained in a recent *Broken Toys* that he was losing control of his letters column, with contributors commenting on others' locs. But I think this is the sign of a healthy fanzine, and, as in previous issues, *SFC* has this in spades.

After Wells, I'd rate Brian Aldiss as probably one of the most significant and influential (and almost determinedly contrarian) British science fiction writers, so it's nice to see Murray Moore's report of his eighty-ninth birthday celebration at Loncon 3. That said, I don't think I've read anything of his since *HARM* back in 2007, and he's reported in the *Guardian* as saying he doesn't read science fiction any longer ('only Tolstoy'). There is at least one recent SF novel, *The Finches of Mars* (2012), although his latest book, *Comfort Zone*, is not SF, but about the problems and ignominy of ageing. I haven't even enjoyed or liked everything BA has written, but that's why I rate him so highly. If nothing else, Brian is determined to force you out of your comfort zone, and for many genre readers (especially of the 70s and 80s, although probably equally true now), that can only be a good and necessary thing. Many happy returns to the contrarian old codger.

Thank you for reprinting Michael Bishop's 1988 eulogy to Philip K. Dick. I've not seen this before.

Although it's shorter, and contains full stops, it reminds me a little of Ginsberg's *Howl*. How amazed would Dick be to look down now and see not just that practically all his work is still in print and still being read, but that he is almost inescapable on television, not just with reruns of films based on his work, such as *Blade Runner*, *Total Recall*, *True Lies*, *Minority Report* (and Ridley Scott is making a TV adaptation of *The Man in the High Castle* for Amazon Studios) but that his central questions of what is real and how can we know if we are free agents crop up time and again in films like *Twelve Monkeys*, *The Matrix*, and *Inception*.

I read Patrick McGuire's article on the future-set police procedurals of J. D. Robb with increasing puzzlement, not for McGuire's reviews, but as to why Robb decided to set them in a world some 50 years in the future but with apparently so little concern for exploring the changes that would come of such a jump into the future. (The idea of a man electing to commit suicide in a space station by hanging himself did provide one moment of typically SFnal cognitive dissonance.) While there are quite a lot of SF readers who also enjoy murder mystery procedurals, I can't think that the reverse is as true, and Robb's SF future settings might even actively discourage a lot of her main target audience.

I thought the Berkeley SF group mentioned in Leigh Edmonds' letter gloried under the name of the 'Elves', 'Gnomes' and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder and Marching Society' (*Mimosa* 18, from Jophan.org).

**[\*brg\* It was the model for the Nova Mob, Melbourne's SF discussion group, when it began in 1969. I'm glad we chose a shorter name.]**

As Leigh says, Google and the interweb are fine for idly browsing, but can be frustratingly incomplete when you actually want to research something. A couple of months back, I wanted to look at genre reading preferences ('people who read x also tend to read y') to see just how true the perceived crossover between SF readers and murder mystery/thriller readers was. It proved frustrating hard, even in these days of public access and Big Data, to get at any underlying data, and in the end I even had to resort to copying graph and table images off Google and retyping the numbers into Excel. Not something you'd want to do with a really big data set.

I wasn't aware of *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2014) before reading Greg Benford's letter, but it looks interesting (though reviews are mixed, and at least one — Sady Doyle at InTheseTimes.com — actively hostile for its underlying misogyny). The central premise reminds me a little of Richard Powers' *Galatea 2.2* and at least a couple of other SF stories I can't bring to mind at the moment. As of Christmas, I own the DVD of *Under the Skin*, which I've been looking forward to seeing since I heard about it, although wondering at the same time how Faber's book — which I read as an uncorrected proof back in 1999 and pushed for its submission to the Arthur C. Clarke Award — could possibly be adapted for the screen.

Tom Whalen and Yvonne Rousseau mention between them two other films I wasn't aware of: *Death Watch* (based on D. G. Compton's excellent *The Continuous*

*Catherine Mortenhoe*) and *Predestination* (based on Heinelein's solipsistic nightmare 'All You Zombies'), to which my immediate reaction to the latter is that I can't see how anyone could film a story where the entire cast is the same person (despite *Back to the Future II* having a good stab at this), but I'm really intrigued to find out.

**[\*brg\* You are in for a pleasant surprise when you discover how the filmmakers solve the problems of adapting *Under the Skin* and 'All You Zombies—'. *Death Watch* is on DVD, a very satisfying adaptation of Compton's novel, and the only film in which Harry Dean Stanton and Harvey Keitel co-star (along with Romy Schneider). The director is the very great Bertrand Tavernier.\*]**

If we are living inside a simulation, surely Greg is missing a point in his argument that there is not enough stuff inside the observable universe to be able to run it. We are only able to see the extent of the simulated universe and conclude there is not enough stuff for us, as simulated beings in a simulated universe, to be able to run another exact simulation inside it. This is a bit like the 1:1 map problem. Or a software agent examining the extent and capabilities of the machine it is running on and concluding that anything outside it, including the programmer, can't exist, and therefore it must be real.

But what if our universe is running as a simulation inside a much bigger universe outside it? That, to me, seems to more probable scenario if you want to posit the simulation theory. Of course when you start considering simulations running inside other simulations you start to get into Flann O'Brien territory.

Doug Barbour accuses me of being a *fan*. The game's up. I surrender and promise to come quietly. Doug also asks about the current crop of SF writers in Scotland (Charlie is not actually Scottish as far as I know). It's not so much what's in the water in Scotland, but what they do with it.

I'm sure you've printed that letter from Mark Plummer in a previous issue, although without your comments.

(1 January 2015)

**[\*brg\* That letter from Mark in *SFC* 88 turned out to be an exact reprint (even to the same date, 16 February 2014) as the one in my print copy of *SFC* 87, pages 33–5, although under a different header ('Oh no! Not a blog!' in *SFC* 87). This was the other ghastly mistake (apart from the deletion of Jerry Kaufman's letter) in No 88. I had a bad day, all of 2014.\*]**

I think I heard a radio adaptation of 'All You Zombies—' some time ago. That could be even more confusing, I suspect. *Predestination* is scheduled to open for general release in the United Kingdom on 13 February 2015.

Back to the discussion discussion with Zebrowski over Stapledon: Radio 4 has been running a short series called *Dog Days* each night, and featured an extract from *Sirius* a couple of nights back.

(1 January 2015)

Happy 2015 to you and Elaine. We tend to see in the new year quietly these days, me with a half bottle of mulled wine and Vikki with her annual alcohol ration of a spoonful of brandy in her coffee, then watch the midnight fireworks displays from the back garden before toddling off to bed. Rather disappointing this year, apart from an impressively loud display of rockets let off in the cul de sac somewhat prematurely at around 11:45 by the people from the house on the corner. I think my brother might have been having a quiet night in as well, as he was emailing me with questions about guitars and recording just before midnight.

You did actually send me a note that *SFC* was currently posted in eFanzines a week or so back, although not as part of a general mailing list. It also gave me an opportunity to pull my tablet from where it's been languishing under the desk and download the .PDF landscape version onto it so I could sit and read it downstairs.

I'm still not comfortable reading for any length on screen (and I'm extremely nervous about taking it into the bath, given what happened to the little book of Sudokus the other night; that is still drying out on the office windowsill). However, your email below reassures me that it's perfectly possible to read and write an acceptable letter of comment in short sessions, although I suspect it'll never flow as well as those wonderful stream of consciousness locs from Mark or Skel that go off at a complete tangent after the opening paragraph. (There's another one in *Trap Door* 31, which I recommend to you. Somebody really ought to collect these for a fanthology of Mark's fanwriting for a Corflu FAAN award or GoH spot sometime.)

A paper copy of *Trap Door* 31 from Robert Lichtman arrived yesterday, which I suspect I may have you — via your letter column — to thank for.

Is Peggyann Chevalier (or *The Washington Post*) familiar with the 'Uxbridge English Dictionary' round in the UK radio quiz show *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue*? The Neopeggyannisms are very much the same thing — even to the vaguely scatological references. I don't know how *Clue* gets away with quite as much as it does at 6.30 p.m. on a weekday evening, but we Brits have a weird tradition of being prurient and outraged over some things while allowing radio shows like *Round The Horne* and *Clue* to shave a double entendre to within a inch of its life.

(Exhibit A, m'lud: '[The lovely] Samantha [Clue's entirely fictional, and indeed redundant, scorer] nearly made it. She's been detained at the last minute in the city's Latin Quarter. An Italian gentleman friend has promised to take her out for an ice cream, and she likes nothing better than to spend the evening licking the nuts off a large Neapolitan.'

'Record researcher Samantha has made one of her customary visits to the gramophone library, where she runs errands for the kindly old archivists, such as nipping out to fetch their sandwiches. There favourite treat is cheese with homemade chutney, but they never object when she palms them off with relish.'

Hope you back is holding up until you can get to the chiropractor. We are a bunch of old crocks nowadays. I had a couple of weeks off work just before Christmas, the first of which was which was spent on a course of anti-

biotics after an emergency visit to the doctor on the Monday morning diagnosed a perforated eardrum which had become infected, while Vikki — in a horrible reprise of the fate which befell our former friend and fan artist Dave Mooring — has had a number of trips to the dentist and is now lacking most of her bottom teeth.

Randy Byers writes, 'It seems unlikely that there will be another fanzine like *SF Commentary* in the future. More likely this kind of serious, informed discussion of science fiction will take place online, don't you think?' For me, the problem is not that stuff is online, but that there is so much of it, so many blogs, so many titles in eFanzines.com, that it's overwhelming, and my default response is to huddle back into my shell and restrict my engagement to the handful of fanzines and commentators I already know. But I shall have a look at Liz Bourke's blog sometime, despite having frittered a large part of yesterday trawling through *NYRSF* online. (Not quite sure how I got there in the first place. This is the other problem of the internet: it's a bit like following a Hansel and Gretel breadcrumbs trail which disappears behind you as the birds Hoover up the crumbs left behind you.)

Did I mention the Ditmar cover (which comes off better on the portrait edition, being rather squished in the landscape format)? One thing puzzles me a bit (it may be a deliberate illusion) but why does it appear that the man's head is casting a shadow on the aircraft's wing unless he is (somewhat like Aled Jones) walking in the air a little above it, in which case, why does his shadow meet his feet on the ground? I can't help thinking this is a deliberate Escher/Ames room perspective trick from Ditmar.

I got fascinated with optical illusions again recently, particular with the 3D reverse perspective paintings pioneered by Patrick Hughes, and trying to emulate 3D anaglyph images on my PC. (I have a set of red/cyan glasses that were given away free in a magazine sometime back.) Unfortunately unless you have a stereo camera, the results from a single image aren't particularly convincing, more like those foreground/background separations in toy theatres.

Mike Bishop nails it exactly when he writes of receiving *SF Commentary* 87 in the post: 'these are beautiful'. They really are, Bruce. Personally, I think the fact they only appear once or twice a year only adds to that cachet of specialness that makes each issue something to treasure, 'to gestate in an unhurried and relaxed manner appropriate to *SFC*'s stature' as Mark puts it [which I admit I have rather shortcircuited in my response to this issue] — but then I don't have that backlog of material to contend with.

Matthew Davies' letter reminds me of an author we knew from Novacons and Fantasycons on the late 80s and early 90s, Joel Lane, who never quite crossed over the way many of his contemporaries from those same conventions — Newman, Gaiman, Campbell, and Jones — did in their various ways. I particularly liked Joel's short fiction, and he and Vikki shared a Birmingham upbringing (put two Brummies in a room and they will immediately start comparing all the places they knew growing up, and how it's all changed since). Matt's letter reminds me that I think I still have one of Joel's books downstairs, not yet read.

(1 January 2015)

Welcome to Europe. Yes, I'm as confused as anyone about how Australia managed to become an entrant this year's Eurovision Song/Tactical Bloc Voting contest. But then, I was always confused about Israel's apparent membership of the EU. Why not just rebrand the damn thing?

Actually, I didn't even see it. We were watching a rather engrossing new Danish mini-series, *1864*, about the ill-fated (for the Danes) war with Prussia over the ownership and nationality of Schleswig-Holstein. It all sounded horribly familiar after Russia's annexation of a chunk of the Ukraine. Last night's episode even managed to get in Palmerstone's famous quote that there were 'only three people who have ever understood the Schleswig-Holstein business — the Prince Consort, who is dead — a German professor, who has gone mad — and I, who have forgotten all about it'.

(24 May 2015)

Well, knock me down with a feather if I didn't find a copy of Karen Russell's *Swamplandia!* in the local library this morning. It was already in my Amazon wish list, along with *Vampires in the Lemon Grove* and Michel Faber's *The Book of Strange New Things* after your inclusion of Colin Steele's review and discussion in your Nova Mob talk in *SFC* 89. Naturally I booked it out instantly. I checked for the other two but they're not in yet, although the Faber is on order.

I read Russell's *St Lucy's Home for Girls Raised By Wolves* some time ago and loved it. I picked it up almost wholly on strength of the title. I'm a complete sucker for books with strange and intriguing titles, which is why I also have Ransom Riggs's *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* sitting next to the PC while I write this.

I'm pretty much in complete agreement with you as regards genre crossing. It's become very much a fluid thing of late, with authors like Faber, Chabon, Carey, and Mitchell using elements of SF and fantasy in otherwise mainstream novels and doing interesting things with them, probably because they don't suffer from any preconceptions that SF or fantasy should be don't in a particular way or conform to reader expectations. The reverse side of that coin is also the trouble with a lot of science fiction and fantasy being published as genre. Too much of it has become cookie-cutter stuff, following whatever the latest new hot publishing fad is. For genre fantasy, it used to be Tolkien — endless three-volume series of struggles a small band of heroes (and occasionally heroines) against a Dark Lord. Now it's an endless flood of vampires, werewolf, and zombie teen romances, steampunk novels, or Hunger Games clones. (I checked the SF/F shelves in the library this morning for the first time in a long while. It's depressing.) I found *Swamplandia!* in the General Fiction section, along with books by China Miéville (*Railsea*) and Ken McLeod (*Intrusion*).

Books like Faber's and Mitchell's used to be called Slipstream back in the noughties. It's a term that's fallen out of favour (like The New Weird, which threw up a handful of interesting new authors like Steph Swainston, for a while). Eventually it sort of contracted to describe books by Paul di Filippo and Jeff Vandermeer and almost nobody else. Such is the way with labels. They are either

coined to describe authors who then feel constricted by them after a couple of books or they are appropriated and redefined to mean something other than they were first invented for. A classic case is Urban Fantasy, originally used to describe works by a loose collection of fantasy writers like Charles de Lint, Patricia McKillip, Delia Sherman, and Steven Brust, but then co-opted as a label for a veritable flood of sub-*Twilight* YA paranormal romances. To me, an urban fantasy is a fantasy novel where the urban setting is a necessary part of the plot. Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* is probably its exemplar par excellence, to the point where the city is almost the central character of the novel, but David Almond's *Skellig* could be argued as another, as are Edward Carey's *Alma & Iva* and *Observatory Mansions*, and most of the works of Steven Millhauser.

Which comes back round the fact that, apart from Miéville, none of these were published as genre novels. (And I'd argue that Miéville was instantly and wholeheartedly adopted by UK fandom as soon as *Perdido Street Station* came out, and especially after they met him. That Miéville was personable, politically articulate, media savvy, and about as far from the stereotype nerdy image of an SF fan as it was possibly to get was not an opportunity that was going to be passed up in the rush to co-opt him.)

My memory says that I was sent an advance copy of Faber's *Under the Skin* while I was reviews editor of the BSFA's *Vector* magazine and I raved about it. I also have a memory that I tried to persuade Canongate and the Award administrator to submit copies for the Arthur C. Clarke Award. (I'd been a judge the previous year). They may have done, but it wasn't included on the shortlist for 2000–2001. It's nice to be vindicated after 15 years.

You should also look out for Faber's story collection, *The Fahrenheit Twins*. This seemed to have slipped though almost unnoticed by SF reviewers at the time (although there is a good review by M. John Harrison in the *Guardian*: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/sep/03/featuresreviews.guardianreview13>).

In fact, short stories are where the crossover between science fiction, fantasy, and the mainstream seems most evident. The short story form invites a playfulness or inventiveness that ignores genre barriers, where metaphors can be treated as real ('His world exploded'; 'She gave up her heart'; in the way that Delany outlined in one of the appendices this novel *Triton* and his essay 'About Five Thousand One Hundred and Seventy-Five Words'). Joanne Harris's two collections, *Jigs and Reels* and *A Cat, A Hat and a Piece of String* freely mix elements of fantasy and fable through many of the stories, as does Sarah Maitland's *True North*. In fact, short story collections are often where I look first for interesting new writers. It's a shame that these seem to be treated almost as vanity projects by publishers to keep authors happy between blockbuster novels. For some writers, like Kelly Link and the late John M. Ford, the short story seems to be their natural format.

In fact, there's a review article in the *Wall Street Journal* discussing Kelly Link's *Get In Trouble* that you may find fascinating: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/slipstream-fiction-goes-mainstream-1423072888>. It rehearses a similar argument to your Nova Mob talk, mentioning terms



like slipstream, fantastika, and interstitial fiction in regard to authors like Elizabeth Hand, David Mitchell, George Saunders, and Jeff Vandermeer, and also prominently flags book covers by Link and Karen Russell (*Swamplandia!* and *Vampires in the Lemon Grove*).

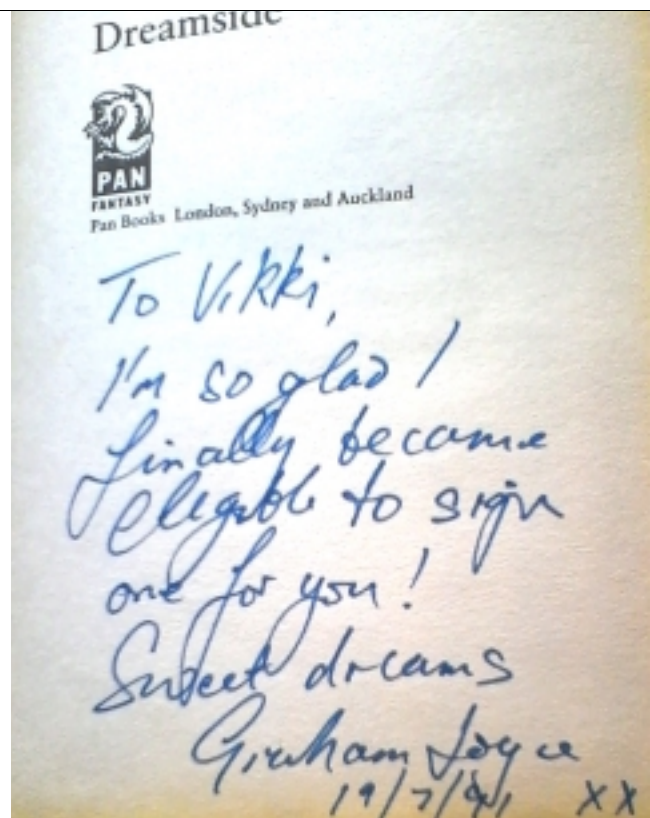
That photo of Graham Joyce on page 24 is so typical of how I remember him. He was always either convulsed in laughter at something, or putting on an expression of mock outrage at something you'd just said. Vikki and I first met Graham probably at the Novacon in 1990, before his first novel *Dreamside* was published. There's a nice story in that. Vikki had an autograph book and Graham noticed it and offered to sign it. Since she didn't yet know him, Vikki asked if he had any books out, and when he said not yet, but his first was due later in the year, she told him to see her when it was published.

So at the next Novacon, when we saw him again at a signing session for *Dreamside*, Graham announces, in a stentorian voice that could be heard across the whole book room, 'So, Vikki, *now* I'm important enough to sign your little book!'. It was brilliant and mortifying at the same time. Our copy of *Dreamside* is suitable inscribed, 'To Vikki, I'm so glad I finally became eligible to sign one for you. Sweet dreams, Graham Joyce 19/7/91' (see attached photo).

Graham was a member of Vikki's Prophecy apa for a while until fatherhood intervened and he decided the rest of us weren't as appreciative of contributions on the joys of parenthood as we should be. Regardless of what it to his apa contributions, I suspect becoming a father had a significant and positive effect on his novel writing. There's a emotional complexity and subtlety to Joyce's later works from *Smoking Poppy* onwards. For me, his later books started to be included in a select group of fantasy writers I would always look out for first — Elizabeth Hand, John Crowley, and Robert Holdstock. Other people obviously agreed with this assessment, since this is when Joyce started added a clutch of World Fantasy Awards and nominations to his run of British Fantasy Awards. I was, I admit, rather disappointed with *The Silent Land*, and *Memoirs of a Master Forger* seemed something of an odd and playful departure — as if he were trying out Joe Hill territory — but *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* more than made up for it. You can't expect everyone to hit 9/10 every time.

While I enjoyed Joyce's adult novels, I was only vaguely aware of his work for YA readers. I knew about *SpiderBite* and *TWOC*, since both had been submitted for review in *Vector*. I only discovered *Do the Creepy Thing* earlier this year when I found a copy in a charity shop. Definitely on the strength of that, and Tony Thomas' article in this issue, I'll have to look out for *Three Ways To Snog an Alien*, which sounds huge fun.

I've just discovered a fascinating website, <http://www.literature-map.com/>, which clusters authors' name based on reader choice. It's a bit like an interactive graphical version of Amazon's 'people who bought this product also bought ...' but more fun to explore. It's also guaranteed to throw in some authors you are unfamiliar with, and who may well be worth exploring. Some of the juxtapositions can be a little



startling: Tom Robbins, Salman Rushdie, and Ayn Rand?  
(22 June 2015)

I wonder if I am guilty as those 'SF fans' I recently had a bit of a poke at in my last loc to Taral Wayne's *Broken Toys*, those for whom SF fandom now has little to do with SF anymore. At the extreme end are fans for whom their the whole point and purpose of fandom is fandom itself, divorced from any notion of written SF. I name no names.

I've not got to that point, but I don't avidly or exclusively read SF any more, not since my time as a reviewer and editor for *Vector* and a Clarke Award judge in the late 1990s, when there was little or no free time to do much else.

I probably read three or four books a month, of which maybe one will be 'proper' SF, and the others split between fantasy/mainstream or non-fiction. You've seen my previous Prophecy contributions, so you know the score.

In this, at least, our tastes do overlap to a startling extent. Which may not be so surprising, as my three main sources about what's new and worth looking out for are *SFC*, *Vector*, and *Locus*.

Yes, Graham Joyce was in Prophecy, as was Storm Constantine, YA author Katherine Roberts, SF poet and critic K. V. Bailey (much missed), fan and writer Tanya Brown, and many others. Sometime I ought to go back over past issues if they still exist and put together a history. A few of those gravitated from our goth/fantasy fanzine *Inception*, and a short-lived writers apa, Initiation (where I learned I was not a fiction writer before it was too late).

(23 June 2015)

## Music accompanies

**MARK PLUMMER**

**59 Shirley Road, Croydon,  
Surrey CR0 7ES, England**

I started writing to you about the latest *SFC* yesterday afternoon, as it seemed in keeping with the accidental high tone of the day. The last two postal deliveries of 2014 had brought *SF Commentary* 88 and Robert Lichtman's *Trap Door* 31, a fine fannish conclusion to the year.

Yesterday morning, while setting the TV to record a documentary about wolves, I accidentally lighted on the New Year's Day concert from the sumptuous Golden Hall of the Musikverein in Vienna. Zubin Mehta was conducting the Vienna Philharmonic — and occasionally the audience — through a series of mostly well-known works by assorted Strausses, Franz von Suppé, and Hans Christian Lumbye. I'd not heard of the last two, and I think we missed Suppé's 'Ein Morgen, ein Mittag, ein Abend in Wien', but Lumbye, The Strauss of the North so they say, was represented by his 'Champagner-Galopp'. The commentary explained that this piece was supposedly written after the composer was invited to a reception at the British embassy in Copenhagen. However he allowed himself to be distracted en route — the subtext here is that he went to the pub instead — and so he never actually made it to the reception. Later he was asked what it had been like, and, improvising furiously about a place he'd never visited, he claimed it was wallowing in champagne. I'm sure we've all done something similar, even if our own iterations rarely involve any British embassies (Nicholas Whyte being a possible exception here) or anywhere that might conceivably be wallowing in champagne. Lumbye stands out, though, because having improvised a story about what he'd been doing he then went on to improvise a piece of music to encapsulate its ambience. Next time I come home late from The Better Place I must remember to pick up my guitar and strum my way through a musical invocation of an evening drinking strong craft beer with Jim de Liscard.

('The Better Place' is how I've taken to referring to the Craft Beer Co. in Leather Lane, Clerkenwell, only a short walk from London fandom's longtime first-Thursday-of-the-month meeting point, The Melton Mowbray. The Mowbray is fine as a venue for a pub meeting, as it has a reasonably large basement room which the pub lets us use for free, and also a tolerable bar menu, but their beer range isn't all that great. The Craft Beer Co., by comparison, is a craft beer bar, typically with about 30 different beers on tap as well as numerous bottles. It's usually crammed with people and some of the drinks are quite pricey, so it'd be hopeless as a First Thursday venue, but Jim de Liscard and some others often adjourn there after a few hours at the Mowbray, and I usually go with them, allowing me to say that we're going to a better place.)

But returning to New Year's Day, after the accidental discovery I left the concert on as I sat on the sofa, flicking

through various blog posts and of course *SF Commentary* and *Trap Door*. I was wondering whether it's just an ageing thing, that I now find the work of the various Strausses more engaging than I did a few years ago, even if I can never remember which is which. My tastes in classical music usually run to the modern and contemporary — Stravinsky, Bartók, Glass, Reich, anything to which the Kronos Quartet bend their bows — but just as I find I'm now drawn to older jazz performers like Duke Ellington as much as the later fusion and experimental performers, I wonder whether I might yet succumb to the romantics.

But this air of high-brow refinement is all a front really. I listen to classical music while reading because I can't cope with anything with a vocal, and in truth I only remember the name Zubin Mehta because he gets a mention in 'Billy the Mountain' by The Mothers of Invention. Some folks, we're told, believe that Studebaker Hoch looks like Zubin Mehta, while others think he's just a crazy Italian who drive a red car. Years ago I read Ben Watson's monumental Zappa volume *The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play*. This notes that slightly earlier in this epic story of mountainous mayhem, just after Billy — a regular picturesque postcardy mountain — has flattened Glendale, he 'caused an "Oh Mein Papa" in the Earth's crust'. Watson explains that the first English-language version of 'Oh Mein Papa' was recorded by Eddie Fisher with Hugo Winterhalter's orchestra and chorus. Thus 'Oh Mein Papa' equals Fisher equals fissure. You see what they did there? Overall, though, that left me with a general sense that it's probably just not worth trying to understand 'Billy the Mountain', although I admit that I have tried to follow its overall moral.

I'll make one final pretence at the highbrow by addressing that painting of Schubert that appears as a header to the letter from Leigh Edmonds. It's by Julius Schmid and it's called *Schubertiade* or *Schubertabend* — or more fully *Ein Schubertabend in einem Wiener Bürgerhause*. To mark the centenary of Schubert's birth in 1897, it was entered in a competition that was funded by Viennese industrialist, art connoisseur, and Schubert admirer Nikolaus Dumba. Schmid won, beating Klimt among others, with this extensively researched work; the group of Schubert's admirers includes known friends and contemporaries such as singer Johann Michael Vogl, actor Sophie Müller, painter Moritz von Schwind, and drama patron Katharina Fröhlich.

But bringing things down to a more appropriate level for low sci-fi fans such as myself, I shall concede that I knew none of that until a short while ago. I just googled 'schubert and friends' and scrolled through until I found the image, which gave me an artist which led to this scholarly article by Janet Wasserman: <http://www.janet-wasserman.com/into-oblivion-julius-schmid-artist.html>.

All a bluff really.

That's a good letter by Leigh, though; and I like your observation in response to it, that *SFC* ideally contains 'writing that is as much about the writers and readers of

the reviews or criticism as about the fiction itself'. For what it's worth, I think you succeed admirably. I tend to think of such writing as the province of fanzines, but really it goes wider. About a year ago I read a piece by *The Guardian's* art critic Jonathan Jones about a new exhibition of Picasso linocuts at the British Museum. This started from the premise that Jones (born 1966) and Picasso (died 1973 and still producing notable works almost up to his death) were thus briefly contemporaries. Picasso was part of the seventies, along with David Bowie as Ziggy Stardust, *The Godfather*, and Glenda Jackson on *The Morecambe and Wise Show*. He was even a fan of that mainstay of 1970s TV sport, all-in wrestling, and Jones imagined Picasso 'watching men in leotards grunt and groan' while as a child 'I was watching *The Clangers* and *Blue Peter*'.

*SFC* 88 has a fine crop of letters generally, which brings me to my letter therein. Your email of yesterday anticipates me, and saves me from having to craft just the right fannish sarcasmic comment on my unexpected reappearance in 88's pages. I was thinking of using Darrell Schweitzer as a lead-in, with his comment on your reprints from *NYRSF* — which reminds me that while I can't comment on what the switch to largely digital publication has done to its readership I can at least put my hand up as somebody who's *started* reading *NYRSF* now that it's available digitally.

An ebook copy costs US\$2.99 or US\$30 for a year's sub, and the latter translates as an eminently reasonable £1.60 an issue, whereas over here print copies used to run to about £4 each, which always seemed a bit much for a relatively slim publication.

I realise that this seem to contradict arguments that I've made elsewhere, that the price tag on publications had largely ceased to be a factor for me personally before I discovered e-publications. I'm sure I remember saying that in a letter that appeared in *SFC* 87 and which at least one person references here in *SFC* 88. And then, here I am again saying something much the same — exactly the same — on page 51.

But really, I wouldn't worry about the reprint.

It's Christmas, after all, and I don't know about Australia, but in this country we're always told that the Christmas TV schedules are just endless repeats, and so I'll take my reappearance in *SFC* 88 as being an ironic commentary on that phenomenon.

Or maybe you just found you had 77 pages of material for this new issue and rather than have to hack a page-worth of content out of those fine letters from Patrick McGuire, Doug Barbour, and all the others, you were just looking around for three pages of other material to make the issue up to round 80.

**[\*brg\* See Jerry Kaufman's letter for my spluttering attempting responses to the two gigantic mistakes in *SFC* 88: the deletion of his letter of comment, and the repetition of yours.\*]**

Us old school print-focused fanzine editors have to think in those terms, whereas I seem to recall hearing that when Chris Garcia was producing one of his usually electronic fanzines in a paper edition it had genuinely

never occurred to him about the need for certain multiples of pages depending on whether he was side or centre stapling. Many years ago, a friend of mine had similarly not thought about this when putting together her first issue of an A4-folded-to-A5 club newsletter. The resulting issue, with either two or maybe even three blank pages, was remembered in club lore for many years.

I'm sure I had lots of things I wanted to say about those letters. Like Doug Barbour wondering 'how you find time to listen to all those boxed sets?' I wonder the same. I mentioned earlier that (highbrow) I like Stravinsky, but the (lowbrow) truth is that this means I like *The Rite of Spring* — I'm endlessly fascinated by all this Riot at The Rite stuff around the first performances — and *The Firebird Suite*, and to a lesser extent *Petrushka*, but outside those pre-WWI Ballets Russes productions in his Russian period I'm not sure I even know anything else. Having had this thought, I was browsing on Amazon the other day and see there's a 22-CD 'Works' set which seems well-regarded — and which sells for under 25 quid. A bargain, doubtless, but when am I ever going to listen to and absorb 22 CDs?

Which leads me to wonder then — and *pace* my letter in *SFC* 88 wondering about your lists — how do you listen to music? By which I mean, what's your music listening regime? I'm not saying or assuming you have any sort of structure to it, with albums slotted into a carefully curated schedule (not that I'd put that past you), but how and when do you do it? For myself, I never embraced the Walkman or any of the subsequent and more advanced portable music players; I don't like their isolating effect and so I don't listen to music while commuting and obviously not at work because I'm in an open plan office and they frown on that sort of thing. Because Claire's and my tastes don't always coincide — you just know the name Neil Young is looming large if unspoken there — I don't often play my music while she's around, and so it's really only while I'm working at the computer, probably only an hour or so per day, or when I'm reading downstairs before Claire's come home. But is the Gillespie/Cochrane household filled with music all day every day, pulsating to the great tunes of Haverгал Brian and The Rolling Stones?

**[\*brg\* I like to sit down in front of the speakers and listen with some attention to music. Not too loud (according to me) but loud enough to obliterate sounds from the mundane world (such as the phone). In the case of vocal music, either classical or popular, I like to follow the lyrics from the little booklet that usually accompanies the CD. However, listening on the large speakers from the main amplifier can mean intruding on Elaine's space, so there can be periods of the day when I choose not to listen to music from CDs, but stick to music on the portable radio receiver provided by either of the two classical music stations, ABC Classical FM or 3MBS. There are entire categories of music Elaine does not like, such as jazz, which means I censor my own CD listening.**

**When I'm working on the computer or reading, I rarely listen to anything.**

**All of which means that I am usually way behind**

**listening to CDs, although I buy far fewer CDs than I once did.\*]**

(Music accompanying this letter comes from Czech jazz ensemble Limbo. Their music is ‘firmly rooted in the often esoteric tradition of experimental jazz [but] is wholly accessible even to listeners without a highly-trained ear’. Which is fortunate, as my ear has not even graduated so far as to pass its cycling proficiency examination. Catherine and Greg Pickersgill — although no disrespect to Catherine but I detect more Greg’s hand in this — sent us all four Limbo albums, from 2005’s *Limbo* to 2012’s *Koncert*. I like their work, although I wouldn’t really claim to understand it. I’ve been reading about them online and now, listening to *Koncert*, I’m seeing if I can detect František Kučera’s ‘buttery-and-dark flugelhorn work’, as referenced by Dan Bilawsky in his [allaboutjazz.com](http://allaboutjazz.com) review. I fear I may need to send my ear off to an evening class first.)

Also in Doug’s letter he says, ‘It seems that the editors in Britain could have, but apparently did not, correct Willis’s errors’ in *Blackout/All Clear*.’ Some of the errors were sorted out in the UK edition, or rather they were sorted out somewhere in the process. There were changes between the US hardback (February 2010) and the US paperback (September 2010), which were carried forward into the UK hardback (June 2011). They included eliminating the reference to making a phone call from a ‘pillar box’ and expunging a couple of mentions of the (1970s) Jubilee underground line. ‘Errors’ that remain seem generally less clear cut, like the criticism that male hospital patients in 1940 wouldn’t have worn gowns but their own pyjamas and tea wouldn’t ever have been served in disposable paper cups given the general shortage of paper. Both those feel like valid comments to me, but it’s less easy to establish the truth whereas it’s indisputable that the Jubilee Line didn’t open until 1979.

Patrick McGuire says he ‘[doesn’t] know the history of the loose wording’ in the Dramatic Presentation Hugo category, that allows for ‘dramatized science fiction or fantasy or related subjects’ and I wonder whether I should shut up because what follows is to a degree speculative.

However, I see that the 1997 ballot — which is available online — talks about ‘A production, in any medium, of dramatized science fiction or fantasy’, whereas the 1999 WSFS rules, as reprinted in the Aussiecon III souvenir book, include the ‘or related subjects’ extension. So presumably it was added in 1998 or 1999. I also see that the 1996 ballot (i.e. before the ‘or related subjects’ addition) included *Apollo 13*. Now, granted, the film contains inaccuracies, but it is still essentially an historical docudrama. I do recall some controversy about its inclusion, and perhaps that was what prompted the change. But that is essentially speculative.

Having been soundly defeated by first Steve Jeffery and then you in an Ancientness Contest, I am still going to retaliate to Steve over my comment about ‘album bands’. Steve says he agrees with Tim Marion (*SFC* 87) when he ‘contests Mark’s assertion that album bands like Deep Purple or Jethro Tull “rarely if ever troubled the Top Forty” (by which I assume he means the singles charts)’. Returning to my *SFC* 85 letter, I was actually talking about Led Zeppelin ‘as part of a genre of music listened to by older kids: album bands like Pink Floyd, Deep Purple and Jethro Tull who rarely if ever troubled the top forty’. As Steve notes, Zeppelin never released *any* UK singles, and while the other three did, I still think it’s reasonable to assert that they rarely hit the top 40. Pink Floyd had two hit singles in 1967 and then nothing charted until they hit No 1 with ‘Another Brick in the Wall (Part II)’ 12 years later. Jethro Tull did marginally better, charting five times between 1968 and 1971, but then didn’t crack the top 40 again until 1993. Deep Purple did about the same, and better than I’d thought — I didn’t know ‘Smoke on the Water’ had charted in 1973, for instance — but even so I think it’s reasonable to describe their hits as ‘rare’.

That was a small point, I know, and really as nothing to your comment on Casey Wolf’s letter attributing *archy* and *mehitabel* to e e cummings.

Oh, Bruce, Bruce, Bruce. OK, I’ll concede that you did get me to check whether in rushing to correct you I was about to embarrass myself by overlooking some well-known pseudonymity, but Don Marquis, Bruce, Don Marquis. It’s just as well that, *pace* Casey’s later comments, there isn’t a law. We have copies of *Archy and Mehitabel* (1927) and *Archy’s Life of Mehitabel* (1933), both in 1960s Faber paperback editions that seem to be artefacts of a still earlier era. I refer to them often, and am always ridiculously charmed by the table of contents in the latter volume and chapter xiv, CAPITALS AT LAST.

prohibition makes you  
want to cry  
into your beer and  
denies you the beer  
to cry into

**[\*brg\* Worse, we don’t have a copy of Archy and Mehitabel anywhere in the house.\*]**

Peggyann Chevalier’s ‘Neoegyannisms’ reminds me of a childhood book by Norman Hunter called *Professor Branestawm’s Dictionary*, a relatively late addition to the Branestawm canon (1973), which offered alternative definitions for various words. For some reason I remember ‘abandon’ (what a hat has) and ‘catastrophe’ (pussy wins a cup).

Lots to read in *SFC* 88, Bruce. Even if we have a read some of it before.

(2 January 2015)



# More music, music, music

**DOUG BARBOUR**

**11655-72nd Avenue, Edmonton,  
Alberta T6G 0B9, Canada**

I have, as chief first reader at NeWest Press, read the first 60 or so pages of about 60 manuscripts over the past month or so, which does take up a good portion of my time. As well as my review blog, and just reading, not to mention watching.

And listening, while I do the writing and reading, and I do have some CDs to mention, wondering if you, who have just about everything, have them all yet.

I have managed to read some SF, though more fantasy, lately, especially the Hannu Rajaniemi 'Quantum Thief' trilogy, as far out and fast moving a post-singularity adventure as anyone could wish. And Richard Morgan's dark fantasy trilogy and Jon Courtney Grimwood's alternate historical Venice trilogy, both very good. Also a few of Alan Furst's pre-World War II thrillers.

(10 March 2015)

I remember Australian 'winters' with great pleasure as I/we have always been there in your winter. What we call really nice weather (although today we're getting an early spring +25, to be followed tomorrow by a +10 and rain). Walking is good; but in our winter, the stationary bike works for me (and I get to read relaxingly for an hour).

(29 April 2015)

I'm getting more and more into classical piano music, thanks partly to a classical friend. But also picking up a number of chamber works by various lesser known late nineteenth and twentieth century composers such as York Bowen, Erno Dohnanyi, Roy Harris, and Alexander Zemlinsky. The Chopin, Liszt, and Schubert CDs are keeping me busy too.

Do you know Madison Violet (basically Brenley Maceachern and Lisa Macisaac, who write and sing together very well indeed)? We saw them last October.

**[\*brg\* No.\*]**

We saw Mary Gauthier back then too, and will be seeing her again tomorrow night, in a small venue here. Love her stuff.

Lucinda Williams's new double CD, *Down Where the Spirit Meets the Bone*, is one of her best, and we'll be seeing her in a couple of months.

I thought Aoife O'Donovan's *Fossils*, where she really left her bluegrass background behind and rocked out, was one of the best CDs of last year. Love her voice, a lot like Alison Krauss's.

I don't know if you know Frazey Ford, but her second CD, *Indian Ocean*, which she recorded in Memphis, is a bluesy triumph.

And I keep finding some new (old) Allman Brothers live albums. There's a concert recorded at a university

just a month before Duane died, and one from the early nineties. Both fabulous.

And Joe Bonamassa just keeps throwing them out there, including four live albums from various London venues.

A little different, but very fine, is *Looking into You: A Tribute to Jackson Browne*. Fine performances throughout, but a standout, for me, is Sara and Sean Watkins's version of 'Your Bright Baby Blues'. They're two-thirds of the bluegrass group Nickel Creek, but here they manage a suave rootsy sound I'd love to hear them do for a whole record. Actually, it seems they have solo careers.

I won't discuss recent jazz releases, as you seem to be not so interested in jazz.

(1 May 2015)

**[\*brg\* These days I like the CDs of Mary Gauthier even better than those of Lucinda Williams, although there are plenty of fine tracks on Lucinda's recent double CD.**

**A favourite CD of this year is the solo CD by Rhiannon Giddens.**

**The CD being given lots of publicity, and even some airplay on mainstream stations here, is the new Alabama Shakes CD.**

**Yes, I listen to a lot of piano music from time to time, although my favourite piano munchies remain the truly classical composers, Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven (with side orders of John Field, Hummel, and Mendelssohn). But I also enjoy a huge amount of great piano music from the twentieth century.**

**The trouble with jazz is that I don't really know what I'm listening to. I thought the Ken Burns Jazz DVD series would be an education. Yes, it is, but mainly about eras that are no longer covered well by CDs, especially the early big band era of the 1930s, before jazz turned into pop, and well before bebop burst on the scene. However, I heard a couple of magnificent electro-funk tracks the other night on radio, including a track from the latest Herbie Hancock CD.\*]**

Ah, I love them both, Bruce. But it's interesting. Mary Gauthier is happy to perform in a small venue solo, and comes across as really personable, and we can go up and say hi afterwards. The Williams show is at our great classical music venue, The Winspear Centre, with a full band. And she is great that way, too, but is I guess a bigger 'star'.

Oh, piano: one of my favourites is Andrea Schiff: *Leos Janacek, A Recollection*. I have a great box set of the Beethoven concertos by Christian Zacharias. Kathryn Stott's Fauré piano music: very fine. As is another box, by Estban Sanchez, Albéniz piano works. here sure is a lot out there. I recently got, on sale, a huge box set of every album by Leon Fleischer (23 CDs): something to look forward to.

Oh, although I am a bop fan, there are some really

good electric jazz albums you might enjoy if you like the Hancock, but they're probably very hard to find (especially the Mosaic sets, which one has to order from the US).

I don't know Rhiannon Giddens, but will see if I can track her down

(2 May 2015)

**[\*brg\* Rhiannon Giddens is also the lead singer of the Carolina Chocolate Drops, who were very much noticed when they toured the Australian folk and blues festivals a few years ago. Giddens' voice has a dark, passionate sound, very different from the shrill and/or oversweet qualities of many female singers in the blues or alt.country fields. My other great discovery has been Ruth Moody, an Australian who has been working in Canada and America (the Wailin' Jennys) for many years. Her most recent CD (2013 release date) was played on radio when she was touring recently around Australia.\*]**

I hadn't realised that Ruth Moody was from Oz, but I have The Wailin' Jennies' CDs (what a great name), and her solo one too. I like it a lot. Speaking of voices that stick: Natalie Merchant, whose latest CD just adds to her lustre.

Have you ever seen Mary Gauthier live? Last night, in what is an imitate setting, she became the consummate raconteur troubadour, introducing all her songs with stories, and involving us all. For a few years she has been with a group of songwriters working with veterans, getting their stories and turning them into songs, so began her two-hour show with a bunch of those, full of anger, frustration, pain, etc — all of the people she worked with. Powerful stuff, but also revealing her own capacity for compassion for these people. She said she's against war but very much for the vets, who are suffering from PTSD and being treated like shit. She gave us a lot of her huge songbook. It was a great show, finishing with one of her greatest songs, 'Mercy Now'. She probably plays lots of big stages, and has now appeared on the Grand Old Opry, but she sure shines in a small space.

That particular Janacek CD is on ECM from some years back. I have a close friend who collects everything classical; I don't, because I tend to play new CDs a lot, getting to know them, and also return a lot to the ones I like the most (as I do with jazz and roots/blues CDs as

well).

(3 May 2015)

SFC 89: I will try to find at least the three Graham Joyce novels you mention. I also read your ideas about 'Genres Work Both Ways', something I've long more or less lived (or read) by. I'm not sure how many of those books I'll get around to. I often wonder why some really well-written, intriguing, engaging works 'in the field' simply don't get noticed outside the genre. Neil Stephenson is one exception, and I think William Gibson, whose last trilogy (I haven't read his latest yet) was, yes, set in the near present, but still was clearly also in the Gibson 'world' of his earlier fiction. The fiction I most enjoy has some things in common, a way of seeing the world, perhaps, and a willingness to go at least somewhat beyond the closed walls of realism. For me, Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* settled in right beside the latest Guy Gavriel Kay or Iain M. Banks, for example. And there have been plenty of Canadian novels and stories that hit me in much the same way. After all, I taught Canadian Literature at the university. (Our library still has separate sections for mysteries, SF, and fantasy, but there are a lot of all three to be found on the General Fiction shelves.)

I enjoy reading Colin Steele's gatherings, but many times I wish he had been able to say a bit more about the books in question. For example, I think people get little sense of how rich and darkly funny, as well as politically astute, a novel G. Willow Wilson's *Alif the Unseen* is from the few sentences he is able to devote to it. Would that he could have given it at least the space he gave (deservedly, I know) to Alan Garner's *Boneland*. Mind you, he puts me to shame in terms of how many books he manages to read. So I'm grateful for all the titles, even of books I won't bother with.

Gillian Polack, of course, writes review essays, and very useful they are. I found her thoughts on Big Fat Fantasies useful, even if I often enjoy such. I guess Richard Morgan has written such a trilogy but his is so fraught and brutal that it doesn't fit any schema.

(16 August 2015)

**[\*brg\* Colin Steele works within strict limitations imposed on him by Fairfax Press, which owns The Canberra Times. Like all the best writers, Colin performs well under severe constraints.\*]**

## Shots across the genre divide

**PATRICK MCGUIRE**

**7541-D Weather Worn Way,  
Columbia MD 21046, USA**

90F is a fairly common temperature here in summer (unusual highs are in the low 100s [ca. 38C]), but now, in winter, this morning it was 6F when I got up, and my thermometer, which records recent lows, said it had been 4F, or around -15C, overnight. It's now up to

around 20F, about -7C. I made a point of making a grocery shopping trip today to make sure my car would start (battery is a few years old), since the local SF book club meets tonight. (Not that any of these extremes would impress people in most parts of Canada, or even where I grew up in the US midwest.)

In any case, I'm sorry you had to face the heat when you were already uncomfortable from your back, and I hope that you get restored to normal soon. I'm still

facing a routine exam at my eye doctor's tomorrow (it should up warmer by then, 0C or so), and one with an ear doctor later this month re the bit of tinnitus I came down with lately. The audiologist who tested my hearing last month seemed unsure whether it was normal ageing or something else, but nothing looks seriously wrong.

As far as general energy level and ambition go, I seem to be almost back to normal, so I'll try to get the Strugatsky essay sent soon. Hopefully I'll also send the item I recently wrote for *NYRSF*, about a Russian SF film of the 1930s.

(9 January 2015)

I enjoyed Murray Moore's report on Brian Aldiss at Loncon, which I did not attend. I am now trying to remember if I ever saw Aldiss at a British con (or one elsewhere, if he attended overseas Worldcons or other events). Research tells me that I almost certainly saw him, since per the Internet he was GoH at Seacon in 1979, which I attended. I wish I had a better memory for such things.

I now skip over Michael Bishop on Philip Dick, since nothing there inspires a reaction. I have only a sentence or two to add about my own J. D. Robb article, which I remain delighted to see in print after its long wait in your huge article backlog. I continue to read the occasional Robb book, or to listen to the occasional audiobook, but my consumption of them has slowed down since 2010. Few TV shows are improved by binge viewing, and the Robb books resemble TV shows in many respects.

On the question of how forgotten Olaf Stapledon is: I was a bit surprised to find that there are several mentions of him in George Dyson's history of early computers, *Turing's Cathedral*. These are nearly gratuitous, since the only connection is that Stapledon served in the same ambulance unit during the First World War as someone who later was a pioneer of using computers for meteorological models. But Dyson wrings this out for all it is worth and even heads the following chapter with a quote from *Star Maker*. Not the sort of treatment one would give to a forgotten figure.

Steve Jeffery questions whether people really do ascend, as they read more, from cruder to more refined kinds of writing, and adduces *Fifty Shades of Grey* and the 'Harry Potter' series as counterexamples. I have two responses. One is that sometimes readers of 'refined' writing also enjoy something simpler, just as no one eats haute cuisine all the time and most lovers of classical music can also enjoy some one or another kind of simple tune — perhaps Christmas carols or nursery songs if nothing else. The second is that I think the successes of E. L. James and J. K. Rowling are based largely on expanding the usual audience of fiction readers, by recruiting people who rarely read fiction. It is scarcely surprising that that kind of reader will start with unsophisticated works. Many of them will stay at that level, but some will ascend. A not insignificant number (although a small proportion) of people who started with *Star Trek* became readers of worthier SF (and viewers of it on the rare occasions when there is worthy screen SF to view).

Martin Wooster on ebook-readers (which I know he does not own), or at least citing Karen Russell on same:

many e-readers use e-paper, and I can't see that that variety constitutes more of a 'screen' than does the page of a book. There is also a variety that in essence has a small computer screen, which perhaps might indeed be more insomnia-inducing, especially if it's heavy on the blue end of the spectrum, tricking one's brain into thinking it is still daylight out. An intermediate possibility is backlit e-paper, as in the Kindle Paperwhite. I think that is more like regular e-paper than like a computer screen, but the question may still be open. And of course even print books can be insomnia-inducing if they are gripping enough to keep you reading late into the night, or are filled with frightening images.

Martin Wooster also points out that one can get through *War and Peace* even in little pieces on a cell phone, if one is persistent enough. When I was still working, I used to read Russian books during my lunch hour, managing maybe 20 minutes a day five days a week — minus vacations, sick days, and days when something else was going on at lunch time. This was generally the only period I devoted to reading whatever book I was working on during lunch, both since it was easier to leave the book in my office rather than taking it home and bringing it back every day, and since after work I was generally too wiped out to concentrate enough to get through a foreign language. I read some Russian SF and mystery fiction at lunch, but I also got through *The Brothers Karamazov* in Russian (taking several years to do it, I think), and the first volume of a two-volume edition of *War and Peace*. (I had already read the latter novel in translation, and had seen the seven-hour Soviet film version, so I decided to give it a rest after Volume I, and somehow even now I have not yet gotten around to reading Volume II in Russian.)

Darrell Schweitzer notes that it would be hard to make a living writing SF 'with the net up'. This is true, although I doubt if I would agree with George Zebrowski on the definition of SF with the net up. However, it is worth noting that during the Golden Age, all but one or two authors worked a day job, wrote in other genres besides SF, or, in a few cases, had independent income to supplement their necessarily modest income from SF. Even Heinlein had his small Naval disability-retirement pay. The trouble may be that today too many authors want to be writers of Something, Anything, more than they want to be writers of worthy SF. I am disappointed that S. M. Stirling, for instance, seems to have retreated entirely from SF into fantasy. I have no doubt that he is making more money doing it, but it would be nice if he could manage at least a little SF on the side, like his Golden Age predecessors.

Darrell says that *The Martian Chronicles* and *The War of the Worlds* are equally obsolete, and equally will remain classics. To me, the difference is that, save for a little permissible arm-waving, *The War of the Worlds* was consistent with the science of the time it was written (which is all that one can really ask of SF), whereas *The Martian Chronicles* was glaringly, obviously, not. The pulp clichés that it adopts (and arguably elevates) were 20 years out of date even in 1950, at least within respectable SF. This bothered neither Bradbury nor his initial readership. The book became a success far beyond the bounds of genre SF, and I can understand why its failure to follow

the genre rules did not concern its out-of-genre readers, since they did not understand the rules in the first place, and probably were poorly grounded in science to boot. I find it harder to understand why the book was also a success within the genre — perhaps on the principle that in writing you can break any rule if you get away with it. Bradbury obviously got away with it overall. He did not get away with it for me, but I seem to be in a minority. (Somewhere, when writing about the SF genre, Asimov wrote something like, ‘This rule has an exception. The exception has a name. That name is Ray Bradbury.’)

On the subject of writing in genres in addition to SF, I have been meaning to mention that I stumbled onto a clerical mystery novel written by an author mostly of SF/F who is an immigrant to Australia. This is Dave Freer’s *Joy Cometh with the Mourning*, a cozy mystery set in a small Australian village and with an Anglican woman priest as crime-solver. I didn’t think it was perfect, but it was enjoyable and well worth the modest cost of the e-book. I would certainly try later books in the same series if Freer writes them. (I liked *Joy* better than most of Freer’s work in his main genres of SF and F, to tell the truth.) Freer emigrated from South Africa and now lives on Flinders Island, off the coast of Tasmania, and is donating profits from the book to the cause of building up enough of an endowment to hire a priest for the local Anglican congregation, which is currently dependent on lay leaders. SF, including allusions to a small convention in Hobart, figures in the book in a minor way.

**[\*brg\* Dave Freer has been a guest of honour at two Melbourne conventions during the last 15 years, and seems to have a large following in Australia. I should have attended his Guest of Honour speeches, I suppose, but since I had never heard of him, didn’t. Thanks for this extra information about him and his work.\*]**

I also recently stumbled upon *The Anthony Boucher Chronicles*, which is a collection of the reviews that Boucher wrote for the *San Francisco Chronicle* from 1942 to 1947. This collection had been pricey in print, but has appeared as a more affordable e-book. They are mostly mystery reviews — Boucher was substituting for the regular mystery reviewer who was now in the military, and he gave up the job when the regular guy returned. (Boucher then wrote reviews for out-of-town papers, but those have not been collected.) They make for very interesting reading at this remove in time. I was surprised at how many SF writers were also turning out mysteries (although those seem not to have survived as well as their SF). Boucher does occasional also manage non-mystery reviews, more of fantasy than of SF, since little SF was making it into book form at the time, plus a few general ones.

I have also recently read a few ‘Perry Mason’ books from about the same era, or actually from the 1930s, from near the start of the series. These used to be easily available on the paperback racks when I was young, but I don’t think I then was old enough to appreciate them, although I did read one or two. Some Mason books are still in print, and many seem to be available very cheap as used books over the internet. Many are also included

for borrowing in the Kindle subscription library. (Although one has to get through several e-books a month to make the latter a rational proposition.) At least in the early books, Mason gets a lot closer to the edge of what is legal than in the later TV show, and sometimes he steps over it. His diction is also different than in the TV show (he uses more slang).

My own loc contains some comments attempting to contrast Australian, British, and American English. I remarked on Australian use of the word ‘removalist’. In an Australian novel, I recently came across the expression ‘house mover’ used in the same sense. As an American, my first thought would be that a ‘house mover’ is one of those people who jacks a house up off of its foundation, lowers it onto a heavy trailer, and hauls it off to a different lot (a process I was once fascinated to observe as a child). In YankSpeak you can say ‘move house’ if the more common intransitive ‘move’ would be ambiguous in context, but the person you hire is still just a ‘mover’. I believe the same Australian author also used ‘furniture mover’, which is even odder, since most of a household move will consist of boxes of stuff (for fans, including lots of books), not furniture. The same Australian author also used the expression ‘interstate driver’. To an American, this suggests a driver on a highway that is part of the ‘Interstate’ system of expressways (motorways) built from the 1950s onward. A little more context indicated that the driver in question was actually having trouble navigating in the central part of Sydney; that is, he was in YankSpeak an ‘out-of-state’ driver. In several Australian sources I also found the expression ‘macaroni cheese’ instead of the American form ‘macaroni and cheese’. I first thought this was an Australianism, but I found it in a British dictionary. Since I have read far more British material than Australian, I am not sure why I first noticed it in stuff from your country.

Casey Wolf says she turned to podcasts because of the decline of the CBC. In my own case, as best I recall, it was more because of the decline of shortwave radio, as the more interesting broadcasters, such as the BBC World Service and Radio Canada International and Radio Australia, stopped their expensive broadcasts and instead put programming on the Internet. Since I still haven’t broken down and subscribed to broadband, I make use of the public library’s broadband to download one or two weeks’ worth of podcasts. I started out with the ones directly replacing the broadcasts I had been listening to, but then gradually moved into other sorts, largely amateur. I was happy eventually to discover that the CBC’s science show *Quirks and Quarks* also comes as a ‘segmented’ podcast, allowing one to select which topics within a show to listen to. *Q&Q* devotes a lot of airtime to describing what they fondly believe are the fascinatingly odd behaviours of one animal or another. Those segments have always bored me to tears. Now I simply do not download those segments. I did listen to the Australian *Science Show* for a while, but I eventually gave it up, partly because of what struck me as the snideness of its host.

**[\*brg\* I’ve been listening to Robin Williams on the ABC’s *The Science Show* for 40 years, and have always found his very British humour (heavily**



**influenced by *Monty Python*) enjoyable, especially as it provides a balance to his very serious commitment to interviewing specialist scientists who can speak succinctly and entertainingly about their specialties.\*]**

Several loccers mention *Predestination*. I did not see it during its limited theatre run here, but I am on the waiting list for a DVD from the library. I was surprised to see how long the waiting list was, considering how little buzz the film had generated here. There are over half as many requests at the library as there would be for a popular feature film. (As I write this, there are 185 requests. A popular film would draw something over 300. And since the library bought fewer copies, the wait may be just as long as for the popular film.)

The situation with Americans and health insurance strikes even a fairly conservative person like me as being strange, but it is not quite as Franz Rottensteiner supposes. Even prior to Obamacare, most Americans did have health insurance limiting their out-of-pocket expenses. For historical reasons having to do with minimising the bite of income tax in the 1940s, this was provided for the whole family by employers (and largely by the Federal Government for retired seniors and for the very poor and the disabled). Many people, especially the unemployed, self-employed, and those with some kinds of low-paying jobs, fell through the cracks, but this never particularly bothered the mass of voters, since they themselves were covered (and since various vested interests were trying to preserve the status quo).

When I was in Melbourne in 1999, I bought a lot of fairly contemporary paperbacks (mostly Australian mysteries) at a used bookstore near Flinders Street Station. I am now wondering if that has become the location of the bookshop you mention, Collected Works. Ray Wood reminisces about bookshops near Adelaide Uni. We had good bookstores, both new and used, near the University of Chicago when I was an undergraduate there, but the situation in my day in Princeton, where I attended grad school, was surprisingly different. I later learned that the University owned a lot of the land in town and had a deliberate policy of not allowing it to turn into the usual university-town student-oriented strip. (Many of the non-student residents of Princeton were filthy rich, and wanted to keep up the tone of the town.) As I recall, there was only one used bookstore within walking distance for most of the time I lived there, although I seem to recall that a second one opened up in my last year. (Science grad students tended to have fellowships or teaching/lab assistantships large enough to afford to own cars, but not so the rest of us.) The older used bookstore was operated by an aged couple who evidently had run it as a hobby, and who seemingly had grown too old to make much of an effort at acquiring new stock or otherwise behaving in a businesslike fashion. I did find a couple of curious things while browsing, however. In one or the other of the bookstores I bought a western Bible Society edition of a Russian Bible, inscribed (in Russian), 'so that you do not completely forget how to read Russian.' Since it ended up in the store, presumably it didn't work. Princeton did have a university bookstore that was strong in material for general reading, not just for textbooks or

other scholarly works. Of course, my time there was in the 1970s, and the situation is probably different today. In fact, through the magic of the Internet, I find that Princeton now has what must be one of the few surviving specialist mystery bookstores.

(7 April 2015)

I regret to say that when I got back from Balticon, ambition pretty much deserted me. I was pretty wiped out from the con (not as young as I once was!). Additional contributing factors were probably a stint of unseasonably early hot weather. The weather is still hot, with occasional cooler breaks, but by now it is normal for the time of year and my body has had time to adjust. Chores had also piled up at home, which I am still digging through. To crown it all, in the course of either packing for Balticon or of unpacking when I got back, I managed to bury *SFC* in the clutter in the living room. During a determined effort to straighten up there, I finally unearthed the issue. Oh, well. I did get a lot of reading done in the meantime. Later: I just yesterday (5 July) found what I had done with my portable alarm clock, which I had taken to the con. It turned out my suitcase had not been completely unpacked when I got back and it was still in there!

I am also in the process of reloading software onto my desk computer, now that a crashed disk has been replaced. I now have enough loaded to write with it, and you are getting my first loc composed on it. Some of the issue is devoted to subjects of no interest to me, but we shall see how long I manage to go on about the remain

I suspect that I am a more nearly typical genre-SF reader than you, Bruce (although I may or may not qualify by your definition of a 'hungrier reader') and I can assure you that, on the basis of the information you present about their work in your Nova Mob talk, I have not the least ghost of a desire to read Karen Russell or Jennifer Egan. If you want to read out-of-genre work with a few SFnal elements, by all means do so. But why pretend it's SF, or even within the broader quasi-genre of 'speculative fiction' as commonly understood? Tennis is played with the net up. Soccer has no midfield net and is a very worthy game, but it is not tennis. Similarly, your analysis of Faber's *The Book of Strange New Things* coincides with what I have heard elsewhere, namely that its essence resides not in any scientific or social speculation or commentary, nor in anything else characteristically sfnal, but in the portrayal of two people widely separated, evidently as a metaphor for the situation of Faber and his dying wife. This is mainstream literature. It is not SF. (Actually, one review, possibly the one on *Galactic Suburbia*, gave more weight to the idea that the ansible-oid correspondence gradually reveals that the clergyman protagonist is a much worse person than he thinks he is. But that is still a mainstream character study, not SF.) SF typically does have a personal plotline running in parallel to a more cerebral speculative one, but when a character-study personal plotline dominates, and especially when it does not really arise out of the speculation, the result is a novel of character, not SF. *The Dispossessed* is SF and Faber's book is not, and its publisher has correctly labeled it as 'literary' fiction. At least I so judge Faber at second hand — I did read the Kindle sample, but I would

finish the book only if someone convinced it that its SFnal elements had more weight than I have gathered that they do. Or, of course, if I was in the mood for a mainstream character study with a few SFnal borrowings. I do read fiction other than SF, although admittedly more often other kinds of genre fiction than the 'literary' sort, particularly if the latter was written in or after the twentieth century.

I greatly enjoyed Kim Huett's article on J. M. Walsh. I had heard of *Vandals of the Void*, perhaps because of its splendidly lurid title, but I had never read it. Now inspired, I found it online without much difficulty and downloaded and read it. I am not sure how original it was for its time, but it certainly seems more advanced than I would have expected for a 1931 space opera. The space patrol, the Earth-Venus-Mars confederation, and the parallel between passenger-carrying spaceships and ocean liners are already in place. Attitudes toward the (admittedly ridiculously humanoid) Venusians and Martians are enlightened, as even is the author's position on women in the workplace. (Common on Earth, although not on Mars.) It is specifically mentioned that various races of Terrans have visited Mars (not just the usual white Americans and Europeans). On the other hand, Walsh's science is decidedly shaky. His idea of using Latin as a secret Patrol code is also odd, even though he posits that in The Future, Latin will no longer be taught in schools (and indeed, both my parents learned at least a bit of it in school, but I never did, although the course was offered in my high school as an elective). Anyone knowing any Romance language could puzzle out the gist of most Patrol missives in Latin, even though they could not compose a grammatically correct one. Most of Walsh's work must be out of copyright, at least in the US and Australia (UK copyright is more unreasonable), but I am not sure that any SF beyond *Vandals* is available online, evidently not ever having been scanned in. Some of the author's mystery fiction under the Stephen Mad-dock pseudonym is available fairly cheap as used books, although a lot of the books would be sent from the UK, which increases the postage charge.

From a different Nova Mob talk by you, Bruce, I find nothing of interest to me in Graham Joyce's adult fiction as described. The YA work covered by Tony Thomas doesn't strike me as hugely interesting either, but I might try it if nothing more attractive were on offer, since it evidently is a bit more optimistic and less convoluted than Joyce's adult work. Tony mentions the mysterious *Spiderbite*. From what I could quickly find out online, it was SF rather than fantasy and was intended as the first in a series, but was not continued. Joyce might have decided it was pointless to steer readers to it since the plot arc never got resolved. Or, of course, it might be genuinely bad, which could explain both why the series was not continued and why Joyce has tossed it down the memory hole.

Previous Colin Steele short-review offerings have been labelled as reprints from the *Canberra Times*. These are not so marked, but Steele seems to have seen a whole lot of recent books from somewhere, some of them expensive, so I conclude that the reviews in issue 89 are either uncredited reprints or material written for the *Times* that it ended up not using.

**[\*I thought it had always been understood that Colin Steele's reviews were reprints from (mainly) *The Canberra Times* or (occasionally) other publications. He started sending them to me in 1979 (he reminded me recently). This seemed to me a very practical way of covering the SF field at a time when large numbers of titles appear every month.\*]**

Steele falls into the 'Conan Doyle' trap, of assuming that a middle name that resembles a surname is part of an aristocratic double surname, so that he refers to 'Wynne Jones'. The author Diana Wynne Jones is alphabetized under Jones in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, which I take to be authoritative. I would take Steele to be a cultural-cringing Australian, afraid of setting a foot wrong with his aristo betters from Mother England, but since he mentions having seen the very first *Doctor Who* broadcast in England, perhaps he is an immigrant who learned to keep his place in the old country before emigrating to a more democratic land. Or could the cultural cringer be you, Bruce, the one who, some issues back, changed my Doyle to Conan Doyle?

**[\*brg\* Almost certainly, but only because I had always heard him referred to as 'Sir Arthur Conan Doyle', much as I always hear 'Ralph Vaughan Williams' as one name on radio. It did not occur to me, until you pointed it out, that his name really is Doyle, and that's how he is usually filed on bookshelves.\*]**

I have said earlier that I doubt the utility for the *SFC* readership of capsule reviews such as Steele's, but quite a few of this bunch were of nonfiction works I had not in fact seen reviewed elsewhere, which added some interest. I checked to see if Decker's book on the philosophy of *Doctor Who* was available on Kindle. Not at present, at least. From the review, it appears that the *Who* book is a solo effort, but Decker had earlier edited numerous multi-author essay collections about philosophy and other TV shows or films. One of the two collections on *Star Trek* is subtitled *The Wrath of Kant*, which has a certain ring to it.

It is curious that now there seem to be a raft of alternate-universe novels in which the pro-German faction of the British aristocracy either concludes a dishonourable peace with Germany soon after the start of World War II, or at least credibly poses the danger of such an outcome. Steele reviews both *Dominion* and *The Windsor Faction*. I would have thought that Jo Walton had already done enough with this gambit for the next decade or two, and that other authors would have sought less well-worn ways to depict, or at least threaten, a German victory. But when it's steam-engine time, people invent steam engines.

Neither Michael Bishop nor P. K. Dick is my cup of tea, so I quickly arrive at Gillian Polack, and in particular at her second essay. As a rule I am not a reader of Big Fat Fantasies, and my comments have more to do with individual points than with her overall thesis. Pollack's comment on the gender of shirts (which side crosses on top) in Wooding's fantasy world seems to display no aware-

ness of the fact that this gender marker holds true in real-world Western culture. Men's shirts and coats button up with the left side on top. Women's traditionally button with the right side on top, although probably not always today, with women often wearing men's clothing and with women's clothing often styled to resemble men's. (And of course with women's tops often not fastening up the front in the first place.) Wooding could probably be charged with lack of imagination for choosing essentially the same marker for the fantasy world. Pollack is also surprised that there could be a language with no tenses, asking how it could 'indicate time and action'. I am surprised at her surprise. As I understand it, Biblical Hebrew has no time-related tenses, just perfective and imperfective ones (indicating either completed or ongoing action). I understand that Chinese has no tenses at all, instead using context and time adverbs to establish temporal setting. This sort of works even in broken English. 'Yesterday I go to store, buy many things. Right now I be on way, go to store again because yesterday I forget one important thing. I go again tomorrow if I have to.'

Polack's complaint seems justified that Wooding's oriental-flavoured fantasy culture is formal only at intervals, seemingly whenever the author remembers, or wants to invoke formality for a special purpose. By 'justified', I mean 'a valid criticism if true' — I have not actually read Wooding. To play the game, the minimum standard that a genre fantasy has to meet is self-consistency. There are few other constraints. It would be nice if genre fantasy were also socially realistic, but this aspiration is unsatisfied so often that we must assume there are exceptions built into the genre: settings turning out like the European Middle Ages, despite the absence of institutional Christianity or of any close analogue playing the same social role (even the devoutly Catholic Tolkien offends here), and all those female soldiers (not in Tolkien but in his successors); often a suspicious degree of altruism on the part of the ruling class, the aristocratic bad guys excepted. I also get annoyed by all those plants native to the Americas in pseudo-medieval-Europe (usually potatoes, sometimes tomatoes, often tobacco — pipeweed even in Tolkien). But, hey, it's a fantasy world, and if the author wants potatoes there, who is to gainsay him or her? Many of the complaints Polack makes could also be made of science fiction, which purportedly has a greater allegiance to the real world. This is less of a problem with human societies (which in SF often are said to be descended from the contemporary West) than with aliens. As Polack says, the invented 'world is never too alien for comfort, because there is always a little of the reader's reality peeking through'. At least for a modern SF reader versed in the genre, there can be a struggle between verisimilitude (any proper alien is going to be alien) and the need to have an entry point that will allow the reader to understand what is going on, and to care about it. Polack also says of Wooding, 'as the series progresses, the clunkiness in the world-building fades'. I had noticed the same thing in David Weber's 'Honor Harrington' space operas. (Well, I would not say that there the clunkiness ever fades to nothing, but it considerably diminishes.) When they start out, Weber's space-going warships have been transparently designed so that

combat tactics will be closely analogous to those of the late Age of Sail. However, as the series continues, we get things like towed missile pods that alter tactics and diverge from the Nelsonian starting point. Of course, it often takes several efforts before stories in even contemporary-set series begin to click. No one would consider *A Study in Scarlet* to be Doyle's best work.

(6 July 2015)

Beyond non-purposeful reading, I am still trying to work myself into something beyond participation in local fan groups and the reading necessary for the local SF book club I belong to. (I've got to finish MacLeod's *Fractions* by Thursday. This is an omnibus of *The Star Fraction*, which novel I thought more unsuccessful than not, and *The Stone Canal*, which I like much better and did read earlier, although only long ago.) Okay, as stated in my loc, also I did read *Vandals of the Void* partly in order to comment on it, and I suppose that too counts as purposeful reading. But I have several incomplete essays aimed at *NYRSF* in progress, and I have not made significant progress on them in months. Maybe today or tomorrow I will try to get back into one of them, now that my desktop computer is working again and the noise problem is more or less resolved. But the backlogged chores are still there, only slightly whittled down by my efforts so far.

It is well known that in writing you can break any rule if you get away with it, and someone may yet write something that I would acknowledge as science fiction that is no more than a character study set in a sketched-in conventional SFnal setting, or someone may remind me of such a study that I have already read and liked. But on the whole, I would say that SF has to excite a sense of wonder through scientific or at least social extrapolations or (especially in alternate history) through thought experiments. An SF novel can be heavily dependent on character study, but only if the character has been formed by or is reacting to an SFnal environment. I would have to think about how little character one could get away with in a generally successful SF work. Very little, I would conjecture, as in Stapledon's *First and Last Men*, or as in Tenn's 'Null-P.'

I am probably a lot more tolerant than you are of suboptimal characterisation and prose no better than functional, but I have noticed that people seem to disagree a lot more on just which deviations from the ideal they are willing to tolerate than they are on the nature of the ideal. You will recall that Yvonne Rousseau argued that *Blackout/All Clear* was a fairy tale rather than SF, whereas I disagreed, arguing that in the first place it was perfectly possible to encompass a fairy-tale-like framework within SF, as in Le Guin's 'Semley's Necklace' or (with a happier ending made possible by improbable coincidence) in Heinlein's *Orphans of the Sky*, and that in the second place the Willis novel, for all its faults, was sufficiently ambiguous as to the source and nature of the reasonably happy ending that I did not think it constituted a fairy tale at all.

(8 July 2015)

Sorry about my mangled Stapledon title; doubt began to sink in after I sent the email. You say *Sirius* and *Odd John*

are S's only 'real novels'. SF often fails to satisfy the 'novel' definition according to various literary definitions. Some academic critics prefer to call long SFnal works 'romances', 'tales', or what have you. I'm not fussy, and would call a 'novel' almost any long fictional prose narrative. Even I might have some doubt about pseudo-scholarly histories of the future in the format of text-books, or alternate histories in the same format, such as *For Want of a Nail*. (If you saw my 'Two Future Wars' essay in *NYRSF*, you will recall that the question arose regarding Ruffin's 1860 *Anticipations of the Future*, in the format of future submissions by a journalist to the London *Times*, but that Ruffin himself called his work a novel.) I'm still a little surprised to learn that Pelican published *Last* as nonfiction. As far as I recall, my own copy (which I hope is around somewhere), a Dover reprint from the 1960s or so, was labelled as fiction. Of course, some collections of 'counterfactual history' essays by professional historians even today are categorised as nonfiction.

I agree with you both that the two novels you cited have more characterisation than S's others and that they are lesser works. All of S's work is moderately obscure today, but I don't think the cited novels are less obscure

than the other work. The opposite, in fact, so I think my point stands that SF does not necessarily depend on excellence of depiction of character. (To my mind, all of S's work presents him as contemptibly amoral, and of course in his last years he came out as a Stalinist, so I am not too unhappy about his obscurity despite his artistic gifts.)

(8 July 2015)

**[\*brg\* As you can guess from the above, Patrick and I had quite an argument via the internet about the problem of genre in SF. If I can summarise my own position, it is that 'science fiction' or 'fantasy' novels are still subsets of fiction literature. To me, a good story needs to happen to somebody interesting (either one character or lots of them). It's hard to generate a sense of wonder without a viewpoint character who can experience that sense of wonder. I also like to read writers who can write interesting and enjoyable sentences and paragraphs. When I pick up a novel of any type in a bookshop and leaf through it, I find that this is a rare achievement.\*]**

## Home on the Ballarat train

**LEIGH EDMONDS**  
**Ballarat East VIC 3350**

It must be summer. It's hot outside and there's the sound of women screaming coming from the lounge room because Valma is watching the tennis on the TV. On top of this, you must be a mind reader. You must have known that I am planning a trip down to Melbourne tomorrow and so you've sent me *SFC* 88 to read on the train. Robert Lichtman must have known too, because he sent me a copy of *Trap Door* last week just to make sure I had enough to occupy my time on the trip from the city centre out to Essendon Airport and back.

What neither Robert or you did not know, and I did not know until a couple of weeks ago, was that my eyes have changed and I need new glasses. Once I discovered this I realised that I must have stopped reading for pleasure a few months back and now I only read when I have to. Not to worry. I'll have new glasses in a week or two and then things should be back to normal again. I will have to put this issue of *SFC* to one side and save it until I make another trip on the train to Melbourne. That shouldn't be too far off.

By the way, I'm going to have to spend a day or two at the State Library in the coming couple of months checking old *Commonwealth Year Books* and reading up on the history of tourism. So perhaps we can coordinate trips into town and catch up for lunch or some such.

(12 January 2015)

At the moment it looks as though I will have to postpone our lunch for a while because the project that I'm work-

ing on at Essendon Airport is going to take longer than I had expected. I'm trying to photograph all the papers in the old Department of Civil Aviation (and its successors) press cutting collection, and it looks like this will take another 10 or so visits to Essendon to complete. And I'd like to complete that before moving on to raiding the contents of the State Library.

I now have new glasses and can read again. I hadn't realised that my vision was changing because it must have happened over the past year or two and so I hadn't noticed the change. It really is nice to be able to make sense of writing again without having to peer real hard at the page and guess what the blurry black smudges mean.

Which brings me to yesterday's trip. I have an alarm clock that gets rarely used but is these days necessary to wake me to get ready to travel down to Essendon. The 0645 train pulls out just as the sun is getting up and is not particularly crowded when it leaves Ballarat but is fully by the time it stops at places along the way, including one of your former homes, Bacchus Marsh. These days there is a dedicated service between there and Melbourne, so I suppose it has become a dormitory suburb of Melbourne.

Waiting on the platform at Ballarat I open *SFC* 88 and read about Polly. Most humans would be lucky to get such an excellent obituary. Do you make notes of everything you do so that your recall is so vivid on things like the arrival of the kittens in your house? These things have almost entirely evaporated from my memory. Valma has a much better memory for these things and tells me the time when the person who was giving us (well, selling,



actually) Lily Belle arrived. This little ginger kitten ran into the dining room and I came through the other door, scooped her up and said something like 'You'll do me.' And that was that. These days she and Jo Jo (sister and brother; we got Jo Jo later) are 14 or 15 and, while Jo Jo lies around a lot Lily Belle still does a lot of hurtling. She has a track in the house that runs from on top of the fridge in the kitchen to a little empty box that sits high up on the shelves in my room and, when she is in the mood she will dash back and forth between the two spots. Due to their deprived lives Lily Belle only discovered the joys of tummy rubs in middle age (they are called 'rummy tubs' around here) and is now making up for lost time by demanding lots more these days. Jo Jo discovered rummy tubs by seeing Lily Belle get them and wanting some too. I could spend all morning rubbing cat tummies if the sun didn't come out and light up the bed where they like to go and lie instead. The only reason I'm writing this is because the sun has come out and both cats are exposing their tummies to its warming rays instead.

I enjoyed your recounting of your wandering around Oakleigh. When I got my first digital camera and was spending some time in Melbourne I went out of my way to find the places where we had lived and taking a photo of them. Some of them no longer exist, and I was particularly sad to see that the place in Edmonds Street in Brunswick has been knocked down and a nursing home now occupies that part of the street. Sydney Road around the corner where we used to do our Saturday morning shopping has changed remarkably, and the butcher shop where we used to get out good old Aussie sausages is now halal so I guess the sausages are different. (I'm assuming there is such a thing as halal sausages.)

On to the two highlights of the issue. Murray Moore's commentary on Brian Aldiss's birthday and conversation was a delight. If what Aldiss said is so, I might have missed the point of *Report on Probability A*, but that didn't mean that I didn't enjoy it immensely. That and *Barefoot in the Head* might have both been very unusual books but I enjoyed them, perhaps for the way that they encapsulated for me the New Wave in ways that worked for me. There was also Norman Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron*, which is, when you look back on it, more a precursor to cyberpunk. Another book by Thomas Disch, the name of which now escapes me, that had a similar impact on the young me. This reminds me also of the stunning Ballard *Vermillion Sands* collection. I thought it was a pity that SF pulled back from the excesses of this period, but perhaps there was little further to push and remain at all comprehensible.

Michael Bishop's commentary on Philip K. Dick was also thoroughly informative and enjoyable. It is a pity that people like Dick have to struggle on in obscurity and poverty while alive and become wealthy and popular when they are dead. I can't remember when *Ubik* came out. It, like the New Wave works I mentioned above, made



a very strong impression on me. I didn't think of Dick as a poor writer. His plain prose is the style that I like so that, unlike so many over-written and florid stories, the words don't get in the way of the ideas.

This brings to mind some ideas that came up later in thisish. One was the mention of Arthur C. Clarke and, in particular *Rendezvous with Rama*. In it, the plain style lets the unending flow of ideas stand out unadorned for us to enjoy. Had Clarke tried to impress us with his style rather than his ideas the enjoyment of the book, to me at least, would have been obscured.

At this point Lily Belle turned up for her morning rummy tub, which left me time to reflect on the point about complexity of simplicity in writing. I, for example, found no pleasure at all in the poem about Dick. Somewhere else in thisish you say that you like poetry because it says the most with the least number of words. That doesn't work for me. If you want to say a lot without too many words, then let's go straight on to music and miss out on the middleman. I'm reminded of the response I got when I showed the first volume of the history I'm writing to somebody for comment. Apart from some very useful technical points, he also said that he thought the history had been written in a style for school students or as a text book. I was taken aback by this at first, but when I thought about it later I realised that his comment had been appropriate, because I've gone through goodness knows how many drafts simplifying the text to make everything as clear as possible. If I'm going to so much trouble to do this then I must like my prose as clear and crystalline as possible.

You will recall the time when Chris Priest and Vonda Macintyre came to Melbourne for a writers' workshop. Valma and I had Chris stay with us for a while, and then

Vonda (I still have the scrabble scores to prove it). On the day that Chris was to come to stay with us I thought I'd better read something he'd written, and took a collection of short stories with me to read on the tram. On the way home I read a story in which an artist's art is in cutting off parts of his body as public performance. What struck me was the clarity and the sterility of the prose (in a medical rather than literary sense) and I was stunned. There seemed to be no adverbs or adjectives in the text to spoil it (there probably were but they didn't stand in the way) so that instead of seeing the writer's cleverness with words I was placed on the platform personally as the artist lopped off another part of his body, in the persona of his aide (or whatever the role might have been in the story). The clarity of that story has stayed with me as has, for example, the sense of bewilderment in the cabin of the airliner at the end of *Ubik* when we learn that the descent through realities is not over. Or the sense of seeing the interior of Rama for the first time when described through Clarke's plain prose. (I'm reminded that I read *Rama* when we were travelling around the US on my 1974 DUFF trip, and my memory now is that I spent an hour or so reading it in a park in front of a cathedral in San Francisco which, I would swear, is the setting for one of the memorable scenes in *Dirty Harry*.)

You may have noticed that there is a lot of tennis on the TV at the moment (or perhaps you haven't, but let me assure me that there is.) Valma likes her tennis, so she has been watching a lot of it. I'm not so keen. Tennis seems like a very strange reality indeed, and would be if you didn't know the rules. Two people stand and hit a ball back and forth between them for a while and then stop and everyone in the audience applauds. They they do it again in an apparently endless cycle until they stop completely, everyone applauds a lot, then everyone goes home. I go and watch a bit of it and the bits of the broadcast that I enjoy the most are the shots of the game from court level. From that view you see the ball being hit and then going up and over the net (most of the time) and then going down again in a graceful curve. Good old gravity, I think to myself; what would tennis be without it? The other bit of physics that comes into the equation is the air resistance experienced by the ball on its trajectory so that as it slows it drops more rapidly on its curve over the net. The tennis players take all this for granted, as do most of the audience, but it makes me wonder at the simple complexity of the world that we live in and take absolutely for granted. Imagine what a game of tennis would be like if there was no gravity (or if it was of variable strength) and no air resistance, or both.

Where was I? Sorry about that. Where I was in terms of my cruise through *SFC* was on the train as it pulled into Bacchus Marsh. This is memorable, because at this stop a rather gorgeous-looking very tall young woman came and sat next to me. What was memorable about this was that she pulled from her bag one of those big doorstopper novels you buy in airports and proceeded to hold it about three inches from her nose to read it, in the way that I used to read before I got the magnifying lens put in my eye. I chuckled at the remembrance of what that was like.

Onwards to Patrick McGuire's essay on J. D. Robb.

I'm sure it is a very worthy article but, just as happens if I watch more than a few games of tennis at a time, my concentration wavered and I lost interest. This is my responsibility, not Patrick's. So I flick over a few pages to the letters and what do I find, OMG, my musings to you have become a feature letter! Why me? What have I done! Just because I happened to recount to you probably the most exciting thing that happened to me that year and the most interesting thought I had as a result of it ... The thing I find about *SFC* is not so much its conversations about SF but the ways in which the ideas in an issue spark my own reflections and thinking (as the above musings probably demonstrate).

While I'm reading about J. D. Robb and then reliving my own experience and thoughts in that letter the train has pulled up at the Melbourne station and I've walked over to the suburban platforms and caught another train, this time taking me to the Essendon Railway Station. From there I walk a little way to the tram stop and catch the tram to the stop outside Essendon Airport. I don't read on the tram trip, mainly because I want to stay alert so I don't miss seeing the aeroplanes there. The past couple of times there's been an ancient DC-3 (probably a C-47 in reality) and a few other things of note. Getting out of the tram at the next stop I have to climb some steep steps to a walkway over the freeway (not as easy a task as it used to be) and what do I see as I cross the freeway — and this is *really exciting*, Bruce — a lovely big business jet sitting on the tarmac outside the Executive Jets hangar. I wandered over and took some more pictures, marvelled at its beauty and wondered why such a magnificent piece of equipment was in Melbourne. On the evening news I learned that some supermodel or other had made a flying visit to Melbourne to promote her new line of lingerie so I surmise that the bizjet was for her. I looked up the registration number later on Google and found that the aeroplane was registered to the Wells Fargo Bank in Salt Lake City. So while I think this Bombardier Global Express is a magnificent looking thing it also reminds me of the excesses of capitalism that it would be used to make a profit from selling women clothing that they really don't need on the other side of the world. (I bet even Philip Dick would not have thought of that.)

After that I arrived at the Airways museum and spent the next six and a half hours taking photographs of every page of cutting books made by the old Department of Civil Aviation and its successors of cuttings from newspapers about civil aviation from the mid 1950s to the mid 1980s. There are twelve shelves of these and about half a dozen thick folders on each shelf. At the end of the day I'd gone through six or seven folders and taken about 2500 photographs that I will now be able to go through in the comfort of my own little room. The only way I can describe this process of turning a page, photographing it, turning the page, taking a photograph, turning the page, etc. etc. is hard work and very tedious, but also very necessary and only possible through the invention of the digital camera. (Did Philip Dick think of that?)

Talk about stfnal — even the simple process of historical research has been revolutionised in my short period as a historian. When I did my PhD between 1988 and 1993 all the research material had to be obtained

either through photocopies or by hand-written notes, and there were some days in the archives when I'd done so much transcribing that the pain from holding the pencil was so bad that I could barely hold it any more. When I completed the Main Roads history in about '96 I left them with two filing cabinets of photocopies and other stuff. When I did the Barwon Water history I had a huge stack of photocopies that I had to shred at the end, and wore out the shredder. By the time I got to the Tax Office history I was using a digital camera for almost all of the archival research and wore out the camera. I did as much of the data collection as possible, and when the project came to an end I gave them a copy of everything I'd collected, including the oral histories and photographs, on an external hard drive that came to 186 gigabytes. For that project I'd had to use a camera that took greyscale images to keep down on file sizes, but this time around I'm taking photos in colour so that yesterday's collection exercise takes up 10.2 GB of computer memory. This is nothing by today's standards, but an unthinkable amount in terms of even only 10 years ago. So while we don't have a colony on Mars yet, we are still doing some pretty amazing stuff.

On the way home I grazed the letter column. I enjoyed Greg Benford's letter and actually understood his calculations that demonstrated why our reality is not a computer simulation. Much more satisfying than a philosophical argument, to me at least. Lots more that was interesting. I was really delighted to read David Grigg's letter and see that he has returned to writing. If I was half the writer that David is I would be really pleased with myself. And a few other names from times well remembered. Lots of friends that I've drifted out of touch with. Regrets, but there just aren't enough hours in the day.

Speaking of which, this LoC is probably long enough to keep you occupied for some time, not to mention the time it took me to write it. As I probably said above, the nice thing about *SFC* is that it triggers all kinds of remembrances and musings that have little to do with sf or even the other material in an issue. I will be disappointed that future issues will be PDFs, but that's the future for you.  
(28 January 2015)

I had about half an hour to spend between the train from Essendon pulling in and the train to Ballarat pulling out so I had a look around Southern Cross Station (which was Spencer Street Station). When it was completed there was plenty of empty space there under the big mattress, which I thought was nice but not it is all filled up with lots of little shops selling stuff. I had a look around and found that almost all of them were selling a wide variety of fast food. So if people are in the station with some time to spend, or even if they are feeling a tad peckish, there is a little stall somewhere in there that will take your money and give you calories. No wonder we're all getting fat. Temptation, temptation everywhere. Thinking about the Philip Dick definition of SF, I wondered what the world would be like if, instead of selling us stuff to make us fat, they sold us stuff to make us thin. Not pills but exercise. Instead of all the food stalls there could be rows of exercise bikes and rowing machines

and, instead of having a feed, people could spend a few minutes getting a bit of exercise. I liked the idea. I could quite happily have spent 15 minutes getting a bit of exercise instead of hanging around with time on my hand. It then occurred to me that if you hooked the bikes and rowing machines up to the national grid you could generate a little energy too and perhaps one could put one's credit (or debit) card into a slot and earn a dollar or so while you were at it. Sadly, this is unlikely to happen because people love food more than they like exercise.  
(2 February 2015)

Thanks for sending me that paper copy of *SFC* 89 which I appreciated — the gesture, not the ish itself. Sadly, over the past year or so something has been going on with my vision and so I now find it very difficult to read small print. I've been to an optometrist and an eye specialist and I'm told my eyes are quite healthy (for a person of my age) so the vision problem is a bit of a mystery. Off to another specialist in a couple of weeks to see what he has to say.

In the meantime, something had to be done to remedy the situation. I had put off buying an iPad or Android because I didn't feel the need for one. Now I have the need, so I now have a nice new Samsung with a 10.5-inch screen. I've had it for less than a week, and the thing drives me nuts because it wants me to do all kinds of fancy things that I don't want to do. Today I finally figured out how to download stuff to read — first was a copy of E. E. Smith's *Triplanetary* (which I haven't read in decades because I've feared that my copy would self-destruct if I tried to open it). Then some articles from *Technology and Culture* and then an electronic copy of *SFC* 89.

I'm looking at this piece of equipment and thinking that even though Kimball Kinnison and his mates could move planets using the power of their minds, they didn't have anything half as fabulous as this little thing. Even 10 years ago this vision problem would have been a serious problem; now it is simply an inconvenience.  
(19 October 2015)

In relation to electronic publishing, I've also come to the conclusion that the future of publishing, particularly for books of limited interest, is electronic. I've finished off the first volume of my history of Australian civil aviation and it should be published electronically in the coming month or so. It saves all the problem with finding the money to get the thing printed, then the business of getting orders in and having to store the remainders. There are disadvantages, mainly in not having something to hold in your hand.

Talking of which, I took my new infernal device on the train yesterday and read *SFC*. The only technical problem was that at the magnification I liked the reader wanted to jump over the photos of book covers. Still, nothing too serious, and it made reading a pleasure again.

Your article on the genre barrier was interesting in showing that there is still a ghetto after all these years. Later on in this issue there was a review of a book about SF films, and it occurred to me that while there still seems to be a divide in written SF that does not remain in movies.

The gates of the ghetto are open and it seems that writers come and go as they please, but what about the readers? Is there still some kind of snobbery attached to what people read, so that those who don't read SF or fantasy feel a bit elevated from those who do? The question that comes to my mind is: is there a particular kind of personality that is drawn to SF sufficiently that it will make it a key feature of their reading, and are they the kind of people who can adapt to the different shapes of reality that SF and fantasy offer? Or are there people who simply don't have the sensibility to be able to understand the validity (or otherwise) of fiction in which the norms of daily life can be transcended?

I also wonder about the gatekeepers and the people who shape public opinion. Thinking along these lines, yesterday I was listening to the ABC's Radio 774 and John Faine's Conversation Hour. The guests were a couple of astrophysicists, one of who could explain the fundamentals of universe creation and the other who could not. The thing that struck me about the conversation was — first — Faine's apparent ignorance of simple scientific facts and ways of thinking and — second — the way in which he supposed that the concepts being dealt with were beyond the understanding of ordinary folks. This made it clear to me that the level of science literacy in the community is still very poor. And if the popular understanding of science is so poor, and there is also a poor level of literacy, where does that leave a fiction that involves reading about science (in part anyhow)?

Gatekeepers: the lovely thing about Colin Steele is that his reviews invite readers in to share his world. His reviews are clear and to the point but, sadly, so many books, so little time. But when it comes to published reviews where the public will see them, SF and fantasy are still off in their own little world. I went into a book shop the other day (which I rarely do because, if I do, I emerge with more books to add to the shelves full of books that I hope to read one of these days) and noted that there is still an SF and fantasy section so that potential readers know to go there or stay away for fear of contamination. So perhaps there are two kinds of gatekeepers, the reviewers and the sellers, and since marketing these days seems to be about market segmentation, keeping SF as a separate genre to make more money out of it is probably going to be with us for a long time.

I was intrigued that you followed that article with the interview with Graham Stone. You mention Chris Nelson's *Mumblings from Munchkinland* issue about Graham Stone, which was a very good piece of writing and history. Is it in the same issue of *Mumblings*, or an earlier one, where Chris has an excellent article about Ian Crozier and the early days of the Melbourne SF Group? (I wrote to him about both articles but have not heard back, so I hope the email got through.) It struck me from Chris's article that Graham Stone was very keen for people in the mundane world to take SF seriously and worked very hard to present it in a grown-up and sensible fashion. Graham wanted to extend SF beyond the ghetto but really wasn't successful; not his fault. On the other hand, Ian Crozier, AFPA, and the Melbourne SF Group seem to have been more content to work within the confines of the ghetto. Since the walls of the ghetto were too big

and strong for either Graham and his group of the Melbourne group to break down, Graham couldn't win, and was ultimately unsuccessful, whereas the Melbourne group was successful, and things like *ASFR*, *SFC*, and Aussiecon were the result. None of these has broken down the ghetto wall either, but all three were helpful in opening the gates to allow a much greater tourist trade to and from the ghetto.

The interview with Graham Stone seemed rather short. It seemed to just get going and then stopped. Is there more? Or did the battery on the recorder go flat just as things started to get interesting? (It has happened.)

On to Kim Huett. I thought his contribution interesting, but I'm not sure that it was a good idea to dress it up in a moral tale about research. Research, he calls a quick whip around *Trove* research!! That's the trouble with this younger generation. They've gone soft! Soft, do you hear! SOFT! In my day research meant sitting in a library or archive all day making notes on pieces of paper with a pencil, so much writing that the pain became so intense that it was almost unbearable to keep going, and only the strong survived.

Of course the technology has moved on, so that when I was in Melbourne yesterday I could photograph everything with a digital camera. It is still hard work, and I wore out a camera in photographing everything for the Tax Office history. Why, even yesterday, I stood for over five hours photographing endless pages of press clippings from cutting books until my feet were killing me and the shutter finger was starting to seriously hurt. Now I have to sort and read it all, which will take days or weeks.

That, young Huett, is research!

I read some of Colin Steele's reviews. He is, as I may have said above, a master of his craft. Give me another five hours in the day and I will take him up on some of his suggestions. I guess he is retired these days, but I wonder where he gets the time to read and review so much material. Surely he has to sleep as well.

The rest of the issue sailed over my head. A book about books about Dick and written by him? Really? I'm also intrigued by all this reading and writing about books that are not really first rate, the non-SF works of Dick and a not so great novel by LeGuin. That folks go to so much work on these stories shows us, I suppose, how much people love these writers and what they are willing to endure to read more of their work.

In some ways this thought brings me back to the beginning of this issue of *SFC* and the business of the ghetto wall still existing. Partly, it seems to me, it is because some people love SF and others are just readers. Some people are willing to wade through second-rate books because they love the genre or the particular kinds of stories and themes. Some folks go out exploring and others are followers so that there are even the contributors to *SFC* who suggest to others what they might like to read in the future, and then those who are quite content to follow those suggestions. Bruce Gillespie the gatekeeper, eh?

Enough. Time to get on with some real research.

(21 October 2015)