

# SF COMMENTARY 93

December 2016

64 pages

## FASCINATING MARS: PART 1

John Litchen

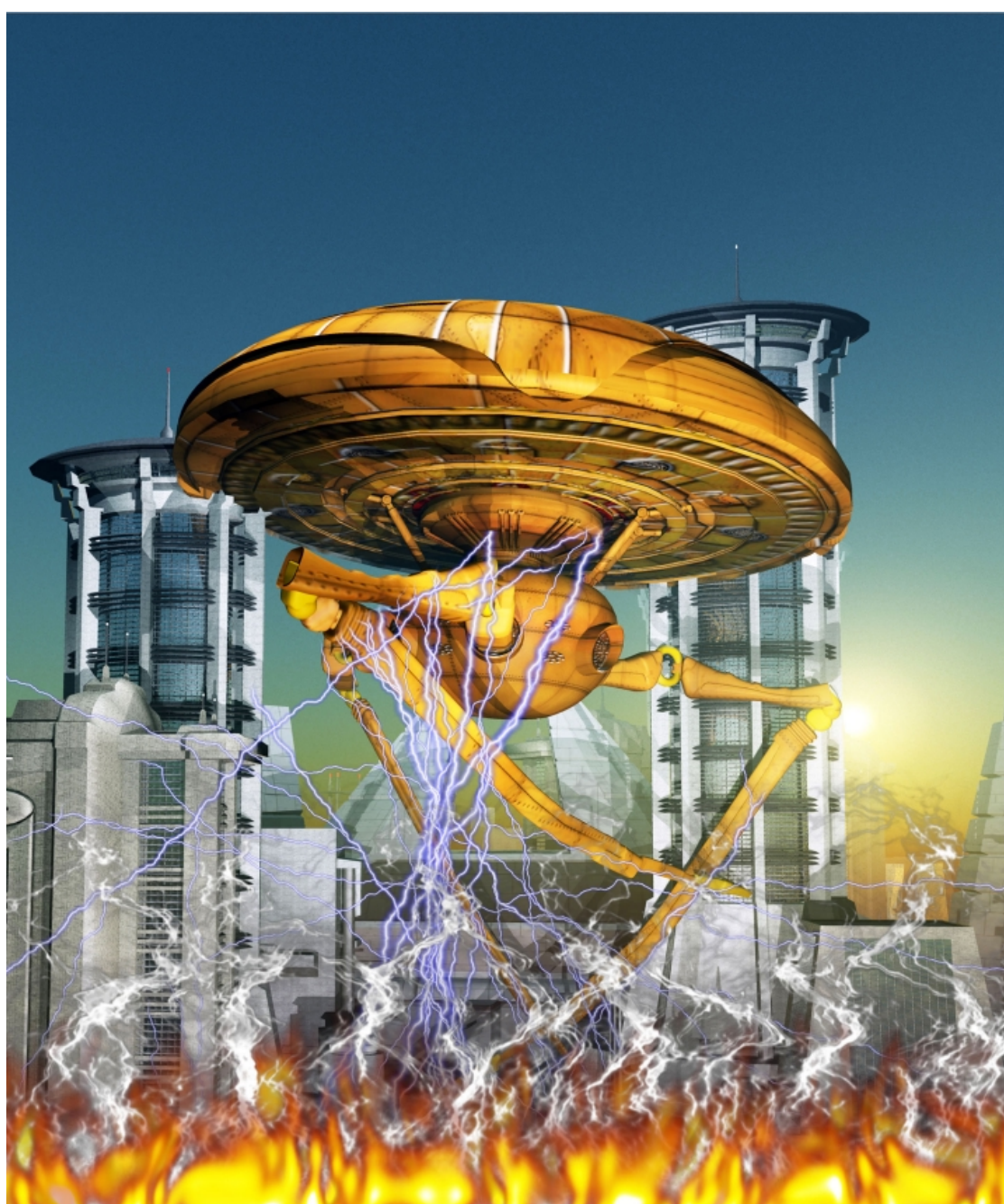
## THE FIELD

Colin Steele

## MY LIFE, SCIENCE FICTION, AND FANZINES

Bruce Gillespie

James  
'Jocko' Allen



Cover: Ditmar (Dick Jensen): 'Mars Attacks!'

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Front cover: Ditmar (Dick Jenssen): 'Mars Attacks!'. :: Back cover: Elaine Cochrane using DJFractals: 'Colony'.

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# I must be talking to my friends

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## Revelations:

## My life, science fiction, and fanzines

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by Bruce Gillespie

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**A talk delivered to the Book Collectors Society of Australia, Victorian branch, Hawthorn Library, 15 September 2016. Parts of this talk were based on a presentation to the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, 15 April 2016, or generated in answer to questions posed by David McDonald for the Snapshots Project and Van Ikin for a future issue of *Science Fiction*.**

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When Michel Faber, the Dutch–Australian–English writer, was in Melbourne in early 2015 in order to promote his novel *The Book of Strange New Things*, he was asked by a member of the audience, ‘Why didn’t you publish your book as a science fiction novel?’ He replied, ‘Because the publisher believed that the science fiction label would frighten away the readers.’ While Faber’s

novel is a very literary meditation about many matters, including the death of one’s loved one and indeed one’s whole world, it is certainly a science fiction novel. It tells of a missionary who travels to a far planet at the request of its native inhabitants, and what happens to him and them in this very strange environment. Why would readers have found this novel more intimidating if the science fiction label had been attached to it?

My favourite definition of science fiction is ‘realistic fiction that takes place in the future, or an alternative past or present, rather than in the past or present’. Nothing threatening in that definition. We are all used to the idea of writing historical novels based on the evidence we have about the past. However, very few science fiction novels are actually realistic novels in the way that, say, Tim Winton’s or Graham Swift’s are. They are realistic in that their authors try to present future possibilities based upon everything they know about the past and present. However, they tend not to concentrate on such traditional novelistic elements as character, plot, and setting. Perhaps the most famous SF novel that tries to present a future scenario is Olaf Stapledon’s *Last and First Men*, first published in 1930. It tells of the future of the human race during the next two million years. It carries such a weight of seeming documentary truth that, when first published in paperback, it was released by Penguin Books under its Pelican imprint — as a work of non-



Bruce Gillespie in 1970, the year after launching *SF Commentary*.  
(Photo: Gary Mason.)

fiction. It has no specific characters, but offers a panoramic history of future events.

So it is more accurate to say that science fiction books offer *propositions about possible futures*, rather than scenarios of ordinary human experience (although there are plenty of exceptions to that observation). Every science fiction novel or short story springs from a 'What if?' proposition. What if the world were invaded by creatures from Mars? H. G. Wells proposes this in *The War of the Worlds* in the 1890s. What if somebody invented a machine that would allow human beings to explore the far future? That's also an H. G. Wells proposition, in *The Time Machine*, his first great success. During the first ten years of his career Wells invented many of the SF propositions that are still with us today.

As someone who has been writing reviews and critical articles about science fiction since the late 1960s, I still find that many people in the literary community automatically reject the idea of reading a science fiction book. When pressed, their prejudices are usually based on inaccurate information. In other words, they don't like what they've never read, and they don't want to find out about what they are missing.

Science fiction is, to me, primarily a genre of books and magazines rather than films or TV series. Some science fiction films have offered intense speculative ideas, but most should more accurately be described as horror films. I have never watched SF-based television programs. I see many of them as offering merely pale copies of the ideas that can be found in science fiction books. Very few of the most famous science fiction novels and stories have been made into films or TV shows, because the ideas are too complex for most cinema audiences.

Early in its 130-year-old life, the river of SF (as we readers always call it — *never* 'sci-fi') divided into two similar but conflicting streams.

In Britain and Europe, most SF novels were published as part of general fiction lists until the 1950s. Faber & Faber, for instance, continued that practice until it almost stopped publishing SF in the 1980s. Faber's list included Brian Aldiss and Christopher Priest, both considered as major SF writers by the readers, but also marketed as major English novelists. It included William Golding, who regarded four of his novels as science fiction, including *Lord of the Flies*.

Victor Gollancz became the main supplier of science fiction hardbacks to British and Australian libraries, adopting their familiar yellow jackets. Go to the bookshelf and you could always reach for a Gollancz yellow jacket for a guaranteed 'good read'.

In the US, from the 1890s onward, a stream of science fiction writers, often trying to imitate H. G. Wells or Jules Verne, wrote for a wide variety of pulp magazines. Almost no SF hardbacks were issued in America until the 1940s,

and the paperback industry was only just beginning. The pulp magazines, covering every possible type of popular fiction, were published from the late 1800s until 1954. They were called pulps because they were printed on the cheapest possible pulp paper. Their covers were usually gaudy, violent, or sexy. In 1926, Hugo Gernsback established *Amazing Stories*, the first magazine specifically devoted to what he called 'scientifiction'. Other magazines sprang up, often edited by very young people, often budding authors themselves. Frederik Pohl edited his first SF pulp at the age of nineteen. *Astounding Stories* was the most successful of these magazines. Edited by John W. Campbell Jr, it set out to rescue science fiction from its pulp origins. The writers who appeared first in *Astounding*, such as Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and Arthur Clarke, have become the best-known names in the field. The *Astounding* period, from 1939 until the early 1950s, is still usually regarded as the 'Golden Age' of science fiction, much as the same period is usually regarded as the Golden Age of cinema.

Gaudy as the covers were, they disguised the variety of quality in the stories. Many of the stories that are still regarded as the best in the field appeared side by side with stories that merely obeyed the rules of pulp fiction — rapid-fire action and little else. But because of the magazines' covers and pulp paper, the fiction itself was completely disregarded by critics, and the magazines regarded as little better than comic books. People who loved science fiction, though, would do anything to get hold of the latest issue of *Astounding*, *Startling Stories*, or *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. They knew that the SF magazines were the only place they could find the Good Stuff.

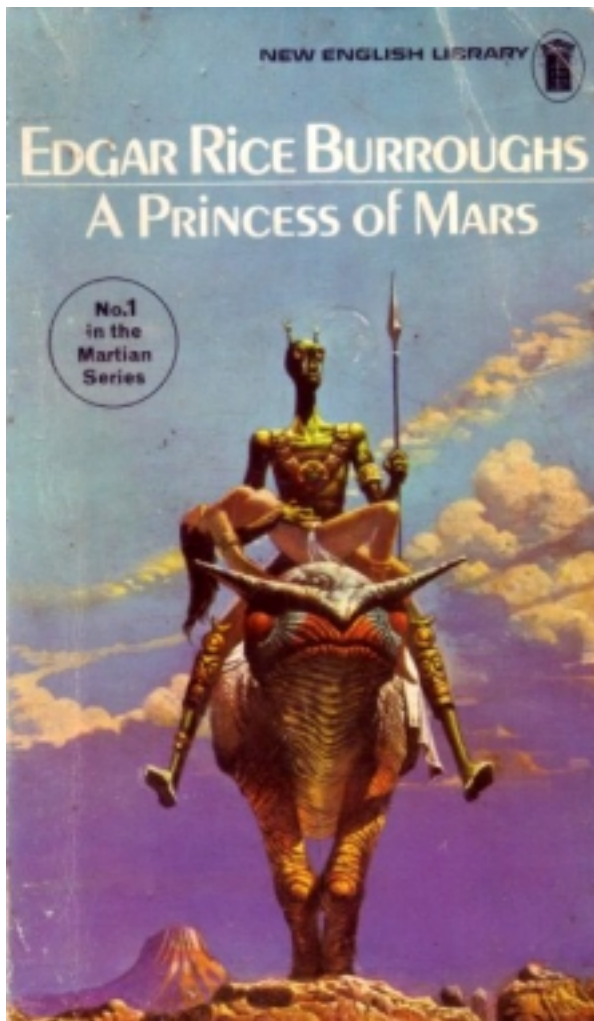
## A childhood revelation

I was born in 1947, in Oakleigh, a south-eastern suburb of Melbourne. I knew nothing of the world of science fiction that I've just described.

I owe my initial revelation about the possibilities of science fiction to the giant console radio set that sat in the corner in our living-room. My most vivid early SF-related memory is listening to an ABC radio serial, *The Moon Flower*, by G. K. Saunders, in 1952 or 1953, as part of the *Children's Hour*. In this serial, the first travellers from the Earth to the Moon find no life on there until they discover a tiny flower at the bottom of the deepest cave on the Moon. I was entranced by the idea of escaping from Earth, of finding life elsewhere in the universe — the idea that one's view of the world could be entirely transformed by new discoveries. Suburban life in Melbourne seemed very boring and predictable, but somewhere, I knew, there were visions and concepts I had not yet discovered.

I found little that was the equivalent of *The Moon Flower* during the 1950s, except for G. K.





Saunders' later serials on the ABC's *Children's Hour*, the *Brick Bradford* comic strip in *The Sun* every week, and some of the best *Uncle Scrooge* stories in the comic books. I also read the Edgar Rice Burroughs' 'Mars' books from the library I belonged to. They and the 'Tarzan' books by the same author were in the Children's section, so that I believed they were children's books. I was astonished to find in the late 1960s that Burroughs still has a huge following among adult science fiction fans.

## Science fiction books

For some years our family borrowed huge amounts of books from the Claremont Library in Malvern, one of the last of the private lending libraries. Except for the Edgar Rice Burroughs books, most of the books I borrowed were written by Enid Blyton. I had read all their Enid Blyton books twice by the time I turned twelve. I owe my second revelation to that library. In 1959, at the age of 12, I crossed over to the regular part of the library and found the Science Fiction section. The first book I borrowed was *World of Chance*, the British title of *Solar Lottery* (1954), Philip K. Dick's first novel. This set off in my twelve-year-old brain a storm of ideas about the world and its future. In Philip Dick's novel, America seems to be ruled by chance, with the president chosen by annual lottery. However, the main character discovers that this is not true; the actual way of choosing the next ruler is by assassinating the previous president. My life and Philip Dick's became intertwined from then on.

Other SF books I borrowed during that first year included Jack Williamson's *The Humanoids* and H. G. Wells' *Food of the Gods*. I suspect I first encountered H. G. Wells' other SF novels there as well. I knew that these books offered pleasures quite different from, and much headier than those offered by even the best of the classics, such as *Les Misérables* and *Great Expectations*.

## The science fiction magazines

My third great revelation was finding the science fiction magazines. At the end of 1959, I discovered the SF magazines on the front counter of McGill's Newsagency in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne. Little did I know that was because the man behind the counter was Mervyn Binns, also the president, secretary, and organiser of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, whose headquarters occupied the top floor of a building in Somerset Place, behind McGill's.

These magazines were not the pulps that I was describing earlier in this talk. The great pulp magazine distributors of America failed in 1954, probably affected by the advent of television, leaving many SF writers without incomes. The magazines that took their place were digest-sized





A page from *Cashbox & Chatter*, produced in 1961 by two fourteen-year-olds, Bruce Gillespie and Ron Sheldon.

monthly and bimonthly magazines. There were about eight of them distributed in Australia during the late fifties and early sixties, but very few of them are still published. I received just enough weekly pocket money to buy the English magazines, edited by John Carnell, such as *New Worlds* and *Science Fiction Adventures*. They were 2/6 each. They featured mainly English writers, such as Brian Aldiss, J. G. Ballard, and John Brunner, as well as some Australians, such as Lee Harding, John Baxter, David Rome, and Damien Broderick. Later I began reading the American magazines, such as *Amazing* and *Galaxy*. They were 5 shillings each, and I could not always afford to buy them. In these magazines, edited by Frederik Pohl, I discovered such remarkable authors as Cordwainer Smith, Robert Sheckley, R. A. Lafferty, Roger Zelazny, and Thomas Disch. I also became acutely aware that the average standard of writing in the SF magazines was low.

During the first half of the 1960s I had to rely on pocket money and birthday and Christmas presents to buy science fiction paperback books. My library occupied half a shelf until 1965, when

I received my first wage as a trainee teacher while I studied at Melbourne University. With my studentship allowance, I bought all the SF magazines, a small selection of books, mainly by Philip K. Dick, and the occasional LP record or single. In *Amazing Stories*, I read Sam Moskowitz's accounts of the lives of the famous SF authors.

And — my fourth revelation — in the March 1966 issue of *If* magazine I first read about the world of fanzines. It is this world that I will try to describe to you.

## How did I become involved in publishing fanzines?

I always wanted to produce a magazine of some sort, but it took awhile to find out how. I tried to publish a fanzine several years before I heard the term. In Grade 6, a friend and I typed three copies of a magazine, using carbon paper and my father's gigantic old Underwood typewriter. There's not much you can do with three copies of a magazine, so we kept one each and gave one to a friend. My copy disappeared many years ago. I don't even remember its name.

At the end of Form 2 (Year 8), I did the most useful thing I've ever done. I taught myself to touch type, using an old typing handbook given me by my aunt. A month or two later, I was confident enough of my typing ability to suggest the idea of publishing a magazine to a high school friend, Ron Sheldon. His father, a primary school principal; owned a spirit duplicator, a little machine that would print up to 100 copies from one stencil. In fact, we printed only about 20 copies of each issue, but sold them to both fellow students and teachers at Oakleigh High School in

Mervyn R. Binns, when he ran the Melbourne Science Fiction Club and also the front counter at McGill's Newagency, Melbourne. This shows him twirling the handle of an ink duplicator. (Photo: Dick Jensen.)





Melbourne. The first issue came out in February 1961, we published 21 issues during 1961, and made 10 shillings profit for the year — which Ron donated to charity. That's the first and last time I've made a profit on a fanzine.

My co-editor Ron was fond of puzzles and jokes, so he supplied a couple of pages of them each issue. Other friends contributed short stories and articles. I was already reading lots of science fiction, so I wrote episodes of science fiction serials for my own magazine.

My main hobby at the time, however, was collecting hit parades and scribbling in my diary the details of every new pop single I heard. So I published a fair bit about pop music. *Cashbox and Chatter* was the name of our little magazine. The 'Cashbox' was in honour of the major American music news magazine, whose weekly Top 100 pop chart was the bible of 3KZ's Stan Rofe, our favourite disc jockey at the time. The magazine contained material only we were interested in, but also stuff that interested only the audience. That's the paradox of fanzines:

*If you publish only material about what interests you, you run the risk of restricting your audience to yourself. If you write only for the audience, you might make a bit of money, but publishing your fanzine becomes a chore.*

## What is a fanzine?

The neatest definition of a fanzine I've heard is: 'A science fiction fanzine is an amateur magazine produced by SF fans for SF fans, but is not necessarily (and often not at all) about science fiction.'

First, that word 'amateur'. It means 'for the love of it', not 'second-rate' or 'slipshod'. Fanzines are produced for the love of doing so. In the early days, fanzine publishers did not charge for their magazines, and have never paid for contributions. They preferred to exchange their fanzines for written and artistic contributions, and traded fanzines. Until the current age of the Internet, most fanzines were printed on duplicators (called mimeographs in the USA) or by small offset machines in numbers that rarely went above 300 copies. Fanzines have traditionally been produced for a worldwide audience, not just for your friends or people who live in your own city or country. But many types of fanzines don't fit that statement.

It's hard to describe duplicating to anyone who has never such a machine in action. Duplicators have disappeared from the earth, because it's now impossible to buy the special inks, printing papers, and wax stencils that are needed in order to print on them. Yet for most of the twentieth century, duplicators were the main way of printing newspapers and magazines for schools, libraries, church groups, and any other people who could not afford commercial printing.

Briefly, quoting the article on 'Mimeography' on *Wikipedia*: 'The stencil duplicator or mimeograph machine (often abbreviated to mimeo) is a low-cost duplicating machine that works by forcing ink through a stencil onto paper.' You put the wax stencil into your typewriter (some writers still use typewriters instead of computers), type as hard as you can, and the typewriter key knocks out the wax from the stencil. You then place the stencil on the roller of the duplicator and turn the handle. The bottom roller picks up a sheet of paper, feeds it between the top and bottom rollers, and the ink comes through from the top roller onto the paper. Easy to do, provided you want to put a bit of muscle into your hobby. You then run the pages again through the duplicator to ink the other side, collate all the bits of paper, slam staples through each collated issue, and at the end of about a fortnight of hard work you had the next issue of your fanzine ready to send out in the mail.

But you can't do that any more, because nobody sells the ink, paper, or stencils, although some people still collect old duplicators and typewriters.

## Inspiration — Lin Carter, John Bangsund, and George Turner

I first read about real fanzines in the fan column published by Lin Carter in *If* magazine, March 1966. Here are a few sentences that inspired me for the rest of my life. You will notice that Lin Carter in 1966 refers to *guys*, although there were

The cover of *If* magazine, July 1966, which included Lin Carter's article about the world of fanzine publishing.





Cover of Australian Science Fiction Review 1, June 1966.

already famous fanzines published by women:

What makes a guy pour out all that time and money and effort that publishing a fanzine demands? Sure, fanzine usually charge a dollar or so for a year's subscription [\$50 in 2016's values], but hardly ever do they break even, what with paper prices, printing costs, postage, and so on. And it takes a lot of time, stencilling each page, running it off, collating, assembling, stapling, addressing, bundling, mailing. What does the editor get out of it, that makes it worth his time?

That's a hard question to answer. Anyone with a creative itch already knows the answer, but it's a tenuous and elusive thing to pin down on paper with mere words. Joe Fan-ed gets pride of accomplishment. Pride in a job well done. And if what he's produced is of value, he gets a certain prestige. Today, a decade after they went into limbo that swallows all fanzines eventually, we still have a fond regard for those really good fanzine editors of the past.

Never underestimate the prestigiousness of a fine fanzine. Many a pimply adolescent, ignored by girls, snickered at by football stars, was, unbeknownst to his classmates, an international celebrity in the science fiction world.

Fanzines have their constructive features ... They seek out and print all kinds of valuable material of permanent worth which no



Cover of Australian Science Fiction Review 2, August 1966.

commercial magazine in the field would dream of touching with a ten-foot blue pencil. They serve as natural vehicles for satire. They also print the sort of scholarly critiques of important words that could never appear in a professional magazine.

I discovered that the historical origins of fanzines were the correspondence columns of the SF pulp magazines of the 1930s. The magazines would publish not only the name of the letter-writer but also his address. (Nearly all SF fans were male in those days.) Often there would be only a few fans in each American city. The letter columns enabled them to form clubs, and the clubs would usually publish magazines. In 1940 a fan named Louis Chauvenet called them 'fanzines', to distinguish them from 'fan magazines', which were professional magazines devoted to particular film stars. The first Australian fanzines were published before World War II, but in small numbers.

Lin Carter's column in the April 1966 of *If* magazine lit up my mind, and the fire is still alight. *In a fanzine the editor can publish whatever he or she wants to publish, without paying attention to the demands of a commercial market place.* That's what has kept me publishing for the last 47 years.

This same article by Lin Carter informed me of all the practical difficulties that might be faced by someone like me living on a meagre income in Melbourne in 1966. Science fiction fans throughout the world, it seemed, exchanged magazines





John Bangsund, editor of Australian Science Fiction Review.  
(Photo: Gary Hoff, taken at Syncon 2, August 1972.)



Lee Harding, the other co-editor of Australian Science Fiction Review, 1982. (Photograph: Elaine Cochrane.)

produced on ink duplicators, and some of these magazines offered very high standards of production and writing. You could obtain them only by writing to their editors. Lacking addresses, I did not write away for any. In 1966, when I was doing second year of my university course, I could not afford a duplicator, stencils, ink, envelopes, or postage. I would have to wait until I was earning a real salary in order to publish anything.

Lin Carter's article had been the first revelation of my fanzine career. The second revelation happened just a few months after I read Carter's



John Foyster, co-editor of Australian Science Fiction Review.  
(Photographer unknown. Taken during early 1970s.)

article. One day in July 1966, on the counter of McGill's Newsagency in Melbourne, I found copies of a new magazine called *Australian Science Fiction Review*. It was not a regular magazine. Its cover was not glossy; it featured a plain black-and-white photo. The interior pages were typed on a typewriter. It sold for 40 cents a copy. Believe it or not, that seemed too expensive for me on the day. The cheapest SF pro magazines were 25 or 35 cents each, so I did not buy *ASFR* 1.

When *Australian Science Fiction Review* No. 2 appeared a month later, it was irresistible. As I read it in the train, I realised that I had arrived at my true destination. This 'fanzine', as it called itself, was my spiritual home. These were the only people in the world who were on my wavelength. The *ASFR* critics were real critics, analysing and tearing apart the new book releases. The magazine featured major essays on important writers. The editor, John Bangsund, wrote editorials and answers to correspondents that were witty, urbane, self-effacing, reassuring. When John Bangsund was feeling relaxed and writing about some subject that delighted him, he was the best writer in the world. He still is — although you can only find him on Facebook these days.

John Bangsund's partners were also no slouch as writers. John Foyster, John Bangsund's co-editor, could be funny, but also ferocious and dismissive about poor writing. Most importantly, he did not whinge and make excuses for science fiction, as the writers in the American pro magazines did. He assumed that nobody should be called a good writer unless he or she actually wrote well. Lee Harding was the other co-editor. I had read his stories in the English *New Worlds* and *Science Fiction Adventures* magazines. He was also a highly entertaining and perceptive reviewer. When he wrote about his personal experiences, such as his account of appearing on a TV show as the token SF writer, he was very

amusing. There were other writers, such as K. U. F. Widdershins and Alan Reynard. Later I found out they were Foyster and Harding in disguise.

To me, John Bangsund's *Australian Science Fiction Review* is the greatest fanzine ever published. *ASFR*, as it was known, was obviously the product of great dedication and love, but its writers also believed in entertaining the readers. Better still, the magazine came out regularly every month for two years, although its schedule began to falter toward the middle of 1968. It featured articles and letters by the top writers in Australia, as well as famous writers from all over the world (including Brian Aldiss, Michael Moorcock, Ursula Le Guin, and Samuel Delany).

In *ASFR* 10, July 1967, the First Anniversary Issue, the magazine introduced the most startling critic of all, George Turner. In his first essay, 'The Double Standard', he lambasted Alfred Bester, one of SF's most revered writers, and set up what seemed like ludicrously elevated criteria for criticising science fiction. Turner was a well-known Australian literary writer who had won the Miles Franklin Award in 1962. He had been reading and thinking about SF for nearly 50 years before being introduced to John Bangsund in 1966. That friendship led to the fabled critical and reviewing career of George Turner, which did much to put Australia on the SF world map, and eventually to George Turner writing eight science fiction novels.

The lively letter column of *ASFR* made it plain that something else was going on. Because it was appearing regularly and finding its way all over Australia, the magazine was re-creating a phenomenon — Australian fandom. After the 1958 SF convention held in Melbourne, there were no more Australian conventions until 1966. At that 1966 convention, held at Easter in Melbourne, the idea of publishing *ASFR* was born. Soon fans we'd never heard of were writing from Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart and Sydney. There was even a lively group in Wodonga. These new fans were forming active new groups, such as the Sydney Science Fiction Foundation and the Adelaide University Science Fiction Association. In January 1970, Sydney staged Syncon 1, the first convention held there since the mid 1950s. Adelaide held its first convention at the beginning of 1972; Brisbane in 1973.

In November 1967, after exams had finished for the year, I wrote two articles about the then little-known American SF writer Philip K. Dick. Until then, my essays had only been seen by university tutors. This was the first time I had sent material to an outside editor: John Bangsund, editor of *ASFR*. I did not receive the rejection letter I expected. Instead, John rang me in Bacchus Marsh from Ferntree Gully inviting me to visit his place the next weekend in order to 'meet the gang', that is, the group who wrote and produced the magazine. This I did. There I met many of the people who have had most influence

on my life during the last 47 years: John Bangsund, Lee Harding, Rob Gerrand, George Turner, Tony Thomas, and John Foyster and his then wife Elizabeth. Not that the weekend had been staged in my honour; it was actually a gathering to introduce George Turner, who had thus far met only John Bangsund, to the *ASFR* gang.

## Beginnings of *SF Commentary*

So how did I get into fanzine publishing? At the end of 1968, I finished my teacher training. From the first week of 1969 I would be earning a salary — the princely sum of \$4700 a year, which would be worth about \$60,000 a year now. I wonder how much first-year-out teachers are now paid?

My sister lent me her Olivetti portable typewriter, and I typed 66 stencils for the first issue of *SF Commentary*. My intentions were very serious. I wanted to publish a magazine that succeeded *ASFR*, which had almost stopped publication. I wanted to uphold my Eng. Lit. ideals, believing that SF genre fiction could achieve the quality of great mainstream literature if only there were critics inside the SF world who could tell the writers how to improve. And I seemed to be one of the few people in the world who was nuts about the work of Philip K. Dick, who was then pounding out novels in California at the rate of five a year just to make a living. At the end of 1967 I had written those two long articles about Philip Dick's



The worst first issue cover ever?





The Underwood typewriter on which I typed several fanzines during 1961, then in 1968 and 1969.

work for John Bangsund at *ASFR*, but he was unable to publish them before the magazine closed down. I grabbed them back, and John was kind enough to give me all the articles still in the *ASFR* files. In that way I was able to publish in my first issue writers such as John Foyster, George Turner, and Damien Broderick.

Even better, when I phoned George Turner to tell him that I was starting *SFC*, he immediately sent me three reviews written especially for my magazine.

I knew little or nothing about production values. The front cover was hand-drawn and looks awful. I had typed the stencils on a machine not designed for cutting stencils, so each page was so faint as to be almost unreadable. Leigh Edmonds and Lee Harding were kind enough to print and collate the first issue for me, a favour I have never been able to repay. The first issue, dated January 1969, was sent out in March 1969. Despite looking like the most amateurish amateur magazine of all time, it produced dozens of letters of comment, including one from my favourite SF writer, Philip K. Dick. He also arranged to send me hardback copies of his three latest novels.

I was now hooked on this fanzine publishing business. All I had to do was find a way of buying my own duplicator, and to learn to produce the whole thing myself. The story of the first year of *SF Commentary*, including the entire first eight issues, can be found in a book I published in 1981: *SF Commentary Reprint Edition: First Year 1969*.

## An amateur career

I quickly discovered that some people in international fandom had little time for what I was doing because my magazine was unsufficiently 'fan-nish'. I was treated as an ultra-serious beast when I began publishing *SF Commentary* at the



Cover of *SF Commentary* 30, 1972. Lee Harding, Lesleigh Luttrell, and Bruce Gillespie picking up Ditmar Awards at Syncon 1, August 1972. (Photographer unknown.)



Peter Weston's *Speculation* magazine. This British-produced magazine was another great inspiration (beside *ASFR*) for *SF Commentary*. (Cover art: Richard Bergeron.)





One of my favourite SFC covers: Irene Pagram's front cover illustration for Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*: SFC 35/36/37/38

beginning of 1969, but my magazine evolved into a 'perszine' (= 'personal zine', i.e. a magazine revolving around the personal interests of the editor) during the 1970s, then evolved into two magazines, *SF Commentary* (reviews of SF and fantasy books) and *The Metaphysical Review* (personal essays about everything else I was interested in other than SF or fantasy) in the 1980s. Many of the pro writers and critics who supported me during the early 1970s were snapped up by the academic magazines, which began publishing in the mid 1970s, but that left me free to develop a style of criticism that owed little to the pretensions of academia. During the 1980s, however, the cheap technology of the duplicator and stencil disappeared, to be replaced by the much more expensive technology of offset printing and computer composition. But that has evolved into the very inexpensive technology of publishing directly to PDF files. The *idea* of the fanzine, as SF's 'great vehicle of thought', continues.

I have never earned any money for publishing my fanzines, except for the occasional subscription and the even more occasional large donation. (Those donations have been lifesavers). Over the years I've probably spent \$100,000 or more to keep my magazines going. I've received no government literary grants.



Cover of SF Commentary 79, February 2004, celebrating the life and career of Wilson Tucker (Bob Tucker). (Cover: Ditmar (Dick Jenssen).)



Cover of SF Commentary 81, June 2011. Another example of the cover artwork of Ditmar (Dick Jenssen).

## Rewards

There are two kinds of rewards I've received over the years.

By far the most valuable reward has been the connections I've made with science fiction fans all over the world, as well as with friends in Melbourne and interstate. I would never have met Elaine, my long-suffering wife, if I had not become friendly with the members of the Melbourne University Science Fiction Association (MUSFA) in the 1970s. And I would not have met her or them except through Charles Taylor, who came up to me at the 1972 Easter Convention in Melbourne, gave me money for a subscription, and expressed his own interest in the works of Philip K. Dick. Two years later, he introduced me to Elaine, and several years later Elaine and I got together. (It's a long story.)

The main engine of *SF Commentary* and my other fanzines has been the column 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'. This column, named after a stage show written by Michael MacLiammoir, combines my long journal entries, news about what's happening to my friends in fandom, letters of comment, and my replies to letters. Sometimes the letters of comment fill an entire issue, as happened in *SF Commentary* 90 last year. Fans don't want necessarily to chatter or twitter among themselves in the trivial way that occurs on social media. My correspondents take a lot of trouble to write mini-essays, so much so that the Feature Letters (extra-long letters) now fill much of the 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' each issue.

Articles keep flooding in, which means that I am usually several years behind in using all the reviews and articles that are sitting in my computer files. The first guest writer who really put my magazines on the map was George Turner, followed by Stanislaw Lem, the great Polish SF writer who might have won the Nobel Prize if he had stayed alive a bit longer. John Foyster arranged that I would be able to publish Franz Rottensteiner's translations of Lem's early articles. Since 1979, I've been republishing all the SF and fantasy reviews that Colin Steele writes for his review column in *The Canberra Times*. You will be familiar with Colin's reviews and long articles in each issue of *Biblionews*. It was Colin who put me in touch with the Book Collectors Society.

Since the early 1990s, my fanzines have vastly improved in appearance because of computer technology. I've been able to use fonts and other design features that were not available when running a duplicator. I've been particularly inspired by the computer graphics of Ditmar (Dick Jenssen), whose brilliant works have given a distinct appearance to my magazines. Also, I've received artwork from many of the top fan artists, such as Steve Stiles and Brad Foster, and our Victorian artists, such as David Russell, Stephen Campbell (whose first *SFC* cover was for No 4 in

1969), Carol Kewley, and the much-missed Ian Gunn (who died in 1998 at the age of 41).

The second kind of rewards are the awards, the glittering prizes. Few of them are worth much in dollar terms, but all of them are valuable for what we in fandom call 'egoboo', i.e. ego-boost.

The Ditmar is the annual Australian SF Achievement Award. It covers quite a few categories, both for pro writing and for fan activity. I won my first Ditmar Award for Best Fanzine in 1972 in Sydney. It was one of the high points of my life. Since then (I've been told by a fan statistician) I or my magazines have won more Ditmars than anybody else (21), and lost more times than anyone else (25). Ghod bless the statistics — and the Ditmar voters.

The Hugo Award is the World SF Achievement Award given every year at the World SF Convention. *SF Commentary* has been nominated three times for that award, but I'm told I just missed out in 1975.

However, I thought most Australian fans had forgotten me during the 1980s. Then, at the beginning of the 1990s, people seemed to think I was sufficiently ancient and venerable for them to start giving me some much-valued awards. I was asked to be Fan Guest of Honour at Aussiecon 3 in 1999. For the first time in my life I spoke to more than 1000 people, and enjoyed that long weekend very much. (Melbourne has won the right to stage the World SF Convention four times — in 1975, 1985, 1999, and 2010.)

In 2004 fans of Australia and America (Arnie and Joyce Katz, Robert Lichtman, and Bill Wright) set up and financed the Bring Bruce Bayside Fund. I was able to toddle off to the West Coast of USA for a month, attending both of the great fannish conventions, Corflu and Potlatch, in San Francisco in March 2005. I had a wonderful week in Seattle, then in San Francisco, with brief visits to Las Vegas, and then to Los Angeles.

In recent years Australians have given me both of our important awards for lifelong achievement: the A. Bertram Chandler Award, given by the Australian SF Foundation, and the Peter McNamara Award, named in honour of Peter McNamara, one of the great Australian SF publishers.

And in 2007, the fanzine fans of America and Britain awarded me the FAAN Award for Best Fan Writer.

Dizzying stuff, but the glittering prizes are only marginal to the enjoyment of publishing fanzines. Perhaps I was expected to fade away after winning them. Not so. I enjoy publishing fanzines as much as ever, even if I can't afford overseas postage rates, and therefore need to post my magazines on an internet site called eFanzines.com. I just wish I had far more Australian competitors and co-fanzine publishers. I also wish I had a guaranteed income.





Etherline 6, 1952, edited by Ian Crozier. Etherline was the fanzine of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club throughout the 1950s. The Monash Rare Books Collection now has a complete set. (Cover art: Ditmar (Dick Jenssen).)

## Science fiction as collectables

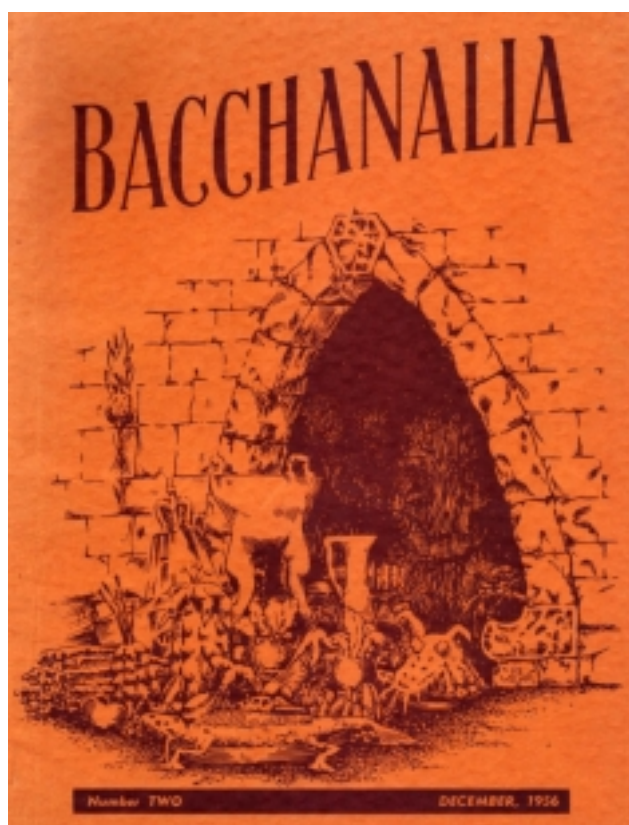
As a newcomer to the Book Collectors Society of Australia, I'm not familiar with the ins and outs of book collecting in this country. Two words, 'old' and 'historical' come to mind. I am not the person who can tell you much about the collectability status of science fiction in Australia. The person you should invite is Sean McMullen, well-known Melbourne SF writer, who was the main researcher for *The MUP Encyclopedia of Australian Science Fiction & Fantasy* (Melbourne University Press; 1998), edited by Paul Collins.

I'm struggling to think of Australian science fiction books that might have achieved collectability status. According to Van Ikin's book *Portable Australian Authors: Australian Science Fiction* (University of Queensland Press; 1983), only a few Australian SF books and short stories were published in the years between the late 1800s and the early 1950s. Three books that have been republished in facsimile or new editions are Robert Potter's *The Germ Growers* (1892), Erle Cox's *Out of the Silence* (1925), and M. Barnard Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1947). Also, I have a strong feeling J. M. Walsh's *Vandals of the Void* (1931) has been reprinted in a facsimile edition.

Cox's *Out of the Silence*, which sold a reported million copies throughout the world in the 1920s, is downright unreadable today, but copies of early

editions should be worth a bit to collectors. M. Barnard Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1947) was republished by Virago Modern Classics in 1983 as *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, its original title, in an uncensored version. The original edition, written in the early part of World War II, made predictions about the progress of the war that were considered censorable. 139 deleted lines of text were not restored until the 1983 edition. It is probable that the Virago edition is now as scarce as the original 1947 edition.

From the 1950s onward, Australian writers began to sell their stories to the British SF magazines, and finally, in the early 1970s, to some of the American magazines. Very few SF books were published here. Horwitz, a publisher considered very lowbrow in the 1960s, published *The God Killers* (1965), a novel by John Baxter, as well as Damien Broderick's first book of short stories (*A Man Returned*, 1965). Angus & Robertson published two volumes of *The Pacific Book of Australian SF*, edited by John Baxter, in the late 1960s. His makes a fine selection of the Australian SF short fiction that had been published between the 1930s and the mid 1960s.



Bacchanalia 2, 1954, one of the few fanzines produced by Dr Race Mathews when he was a teenager, long before he became a member of both the Whitlam Federal Labor Government (1972–75) and Victoria's Cain–Kerner Labor Government (1983–92). (Cover: Keith McLelland.)



It is not until the 1970s that SF novels and anthologies begin to be published locally, mainly from the small publishers. In particular, Lee Harding's *Beyond Tomorrow* (Wren; 1976) and *The Rooms of Paradise* (Quartet Melbourne; 1978) are enterprising anthologies of high-quality stories from both Australian and overseas writers. An inspiration to us all were Ann Godden and Al Knight, editors at Cassell Australia during its dying days, who then established Hyland House. They were strong supporters of Australian SF. They published Lee Harding's *Displaced Person* in 1979. Not only did this win the Australian Children's Book of the Year Award, but in paperback it stayed in print for more than 20 years. Another important figure in local SF publishing was Jackie Yowell during her years as an editor at both Wren and Penguin in Melbourne.

Two Australian small publishers began in 1975, around the time Australia first gained the right to hold the World SF Convention in Melbourne. Rob Gerrard, Carey Handfield, and I formed Norstrilia Press. Our first publication was a book of essays about the work of Philip K. Dick called *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd*.

At the same time, Paul Collins and his then partner Rowena Cory began *Void* magazine, which became Void Publications, then Cory & Collins. Both our publishers lasted until the mid 1980s, when Peter McNamara began his Aphelion Press in Adelaide. Rob, Carey, and I gave up publishing in 1985, but Paul Collins still publishes at Ford Street Publishing. Peter McNamara died in 2004, leaving an enormous gap in Australia's SF world.

The aim of our enterprises was to publish SF and fantasy titles that were unlikely to be published by the mainstream publishers. In the case of Paul and Rowena, they launched the novelistic careers of people such as David Lake and Jack Wodhams, and re-launched the career of Wynne Whiteford, who had sold his first story in America in the 1930s. In the case of Norstrilia Press, we did not stick to critical books, but published a wide range of material over ten years. Our most successful book has been *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd*, a book of essays culled from *SF Commentary*. People are still asking for it, long after stocks have disappeared. We also published the original edition of Gerald Murnane's third book of fiction, *The Plains*, which nearly won the Age Book of the Year Award in 1982, and has been re-published in at least four different paperback formats since then. We also published *In the Heart or in the Head*, George Turner's literary memoir, in 1984.

All these books were published in small print runs, and were never republished in hardback in Australia, so must be considered rare and collectable these days. The same goes for the next generation of small publishers, the post-1990 generation. Eidolon Publications in Western Australia and *Aurealis* magazine in Melbourne, as

well as Aphelion Press in Adelaide, encouraged a huge new group of writers to begin their careers. *Aurealis* discovered Shaun Tan and Trudy Canavan. Aphelion discovered Terry Dowling. The trouble is that most of their publications are now available only over the internet, and have never been distributed in regular bookshops. Some may have made it into the secondhand shops, but even the secondhand bookshops have disappeared.

There is another important group of Australian SF authors whose books will be hard to find these days. They are the authors who have been published only overseas. In the 1970s, George Turner, who had not written much fiction since he began to write reviews and critical articles for *ASFR* and *SF Commentary*, announced that he would do what he had said he would never do: write a science fiction novel. The result, *Beloved Son* (1978), sold immediately to Faber & Faber in London, and gained high praise in the British press. It appeared in the year in which George turned 62. From then until he died at the age of 80 in 1997, he published eight more science fiction novels. One of them, *The Sea and Summer* (renamed as *Drowning Towers* when published in New York) (Faber & Faber) is usually considered his best novel since his Miles Franklin Award-winning *The Cupboard Under the Stairs*. Few copies were imported to Australia. So consider this one of the most collectable Australian SF novels.

Other Australian writers who have suffered the same fate — celebration overseas, especially in America, but obscurity here — include Sean McMullen, who published a long series of novels with Tor in New York, and Greg Egan, who has had great success with his novels and short stories in Britain and America, but has been little noticed here. If you can find copies of books of people such as these, you must consider yourself lucky.

## Postscript: George Turner and me

It was a great surprise when George Turner named me as his literary executor and heir when he died in 1997. George was a reticent chap. To many people he seemed severe, intimidating, even frightening. If you saw through the disguise, you gained his respect. Even if you earned his respect, he was not going to give away much of himself or his past. George Turner was the first person who believed in my new enterprise, sending me some excellent reviews for *SFC* 1. He kept sending me a steady stream of articles and reviews for the next ten years or more, and occasionally consulted me about whichever novel was writing at the time. He also got along well with Elaine, my wife, but he was hardly a man who offered easy affection. As I say, I was very surprised when he made me his literary executor.



George Turner, late 1970s. (Photographer unknown.)

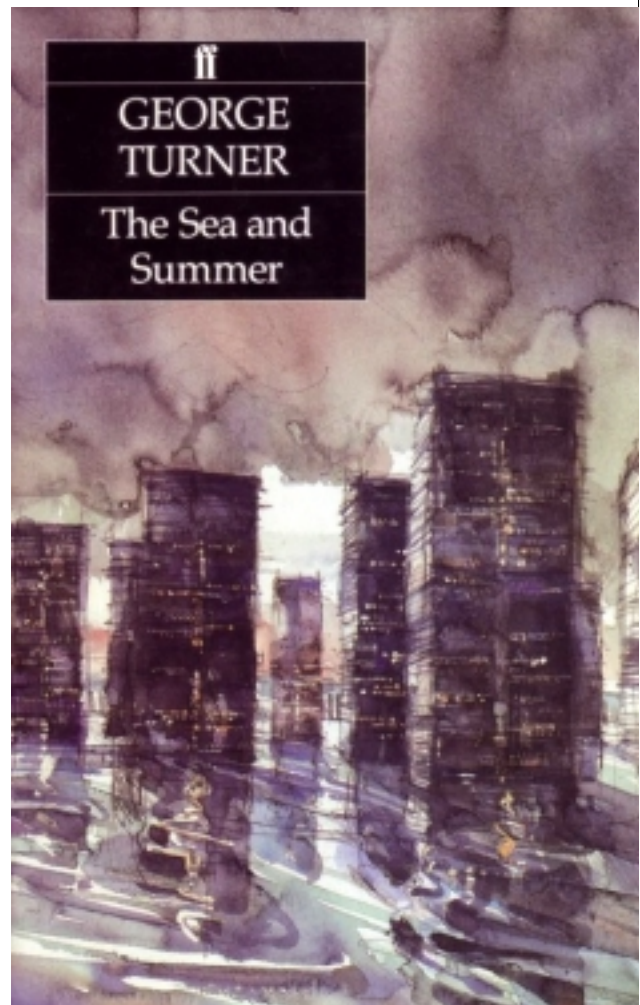
I have always enjoyed George Turner's early-career non-SF novels, which appeared between 1958 and 1979. George always began his novels in a well-considered way that some people found a bit ponderous. Slowly he would build his story, finishing with an exciting setpiece ending. The models for his fiction were the great nineteenth-century story-tellers and the best Golden Age SF writers. During the period when he wrote enormous amounts of criticism and reviews for various magazines (1967 until the early 1980s), he abandoned his 'mainstream' career (six novels, including *The Cupboard Under the Stairs*, *A Stranger and Afraid*, and *The Lane Dog Man*). He was often challenged to match his criticism of SF writing with some creative writing of his own. So he wrote his first SF novel, *Beloved Son* (1978), which drew remarkably favourable reviews, especially in Britain, where it was published by Faber.

In 1984 he wrote for Norstrilia Press (a small Australian press, of which I was a partner), a literary memoir called *In the Heart or in the Head*. The long last chapter of this book comprised a manifesto: George's description of what a serious SF writer should be writing about. George believed that few SF writers actually thought much about our possible futures, so somebody should do it. This led George to produce in 1987 his finest novel, *The Sea and Summer* (retitled *Drowning Towers* in US). In this novel, world currencies have failed, and many people have died, so those who remain in power, the Swells, have confined much of the remainder of the population, whom they call the Swill, to giant tower blocks, which look much like the public housing towers that George knew from the Melbourne of the 1950s and 1960s. This has proved to be a temporary solution, because the seas are rising steadily,

invading the lower reaches of the towers. The book itself is told from the point of view of a few characters, and it is this close concentration on human behaviour under stress that gives the novel its narrative power. George Turner produced eight wonderful SF novels between the ages of 62 and 80. A posthumous novel, *Down There in Darkness*, appeared in 1999. He had written 20,000 words of yet another novel; this extract appears in *Dreaming Down Under*, edited by Jack Dann and Janeen Webb.

For a decade after his death, I thought that George Turner had had little influence on today's Australian SF writers. However, those writers who are still working seriously in SF have shown an increasing interest in the results of climate change and consequent social breakdown. Few Australian novelists of any kind retain George Turner's ability to live in a future society, sink himself into it, and write a real novel about what he found there.

— **Bruce Gillespie**  
September 2016



Cover of George Turner's *The Sea and Summer*, first edition, Faber & Faber, 1987, which won the Arthur C. Clarke Award, 1988.

## James 'Jocko' Allen

**Bruce writes:** Jocko is famous for many things. No wonder the **Australian SF Foundation** awarded him the **A. Bertram Chandler for Lifetime Achievement** in 2016. He is most famous for being the person who spotted the availability of St David's Church Hall in West Brunswick, which became the home of the Melbourne SF Club for many years (until we were forced to move). He has been the backbone of the Club itself for over 30 years, as well as being a member of many convention committees, publishing his fanzines, being a member of ANZAPA, etc.

# My life in fanzines

by James 'Jocko' Allen

**Jocko writes:** James Allen, usually known as Jocko, has been editor of *Kalien*, *Australian Playbeing* (with KRin and Ian Gunn, and Edwina), *Get Stuffed* (as part of Jacob Blake — a composite fake fan with Danny Oz and help from Phil Wlodarczyk), and *Ethel the Aardvark* 19. He has published many zines as Singular Productions, including *CHEVWIZL* (with Phil Wlodarczyk) and *Psychodaleks* (also with Phil), and *Babbling On* (with Glen Tilley for the Australian Babylon 5 Fan Club).

This article was inspired by Bruce Gillespie's article 'My Life in Fanzines' in *Ethel the Aardvark* (April 2016). It is not the first time I have drawn upon his work for inspiration, but I am always reminded just how hard Bruce works to create long detailed articles and fanzines. They are symphonies in several parts to my short improvised three-minute punk songs. He thoroughly works through a topic. I try to say something and convey my impression of a topic. Vive la difference.



James 'Jocko' Allen, 1980s.

## Begin at the beginning

I have almost always photocopied the fanzines I have worked on. Just before Easter 1986, Phil Wlodarczyk, Andre Pam, and I bought a photocopier. After later buying Andrew out, Phil and I formed a partnership and made many copies over the next 20 years. I still have the copier, complete with glow-in-the-dark spider stickers, in the garage. Sadly broken and unable to be repaired, the New Wave Altar still exists. I have done other fanzines, including a handwritten *Kalien* and the two copies (right and left) of *Shoezine*, which was mainly painted and written on the sole of the shoe with Texta pens. I would like to try out a spirit-based hectograph — perhaps one day, when I am playing with gelatine or Agar Agar (the vegetarian option).





So photocopying was my thing, and the results could be neat and tidy, or chaotic, as mine often were. I did do one zine I e-mailed, which was incredibly easy. Maybe I should do more, as I write with a computer (a laptop, in this case, complete with small keyboard and 10-inch screen), so everything is a computer file before I print it out. I also spellcheck and grammar-check everything these days, something not possible when typing on a typewriter (especially in the dark — we did some pretty rough stuff for ANZAPA when Singular Productions was a member. I do miss the IBM Selectric Golfball typewriter (see photo above), which had a correction ribbon: a cool machine with a nice keyboard feel.

So I helped create many A4 and A5 fanzines, usually centrefolded with staples. (Never get angry and throw your jammed long-arm stapler on



the desk. It may never work as well again as it will bend and twist out of alignment. A word from the wise.)

## The variety of fanzines

The first fanzines I saw were newszines such as *The Dragon's Hoard* or club newsletters such as *Australian Playbeing*. I had been reading these for





awhile when in August 1984 I thought, 'I can do this too.' So down the rabbit hole I went. I still don't know how deep it is.

The first *Kalien* came out in August–September 1984, and I think it can give Bruce's first *SF Commentary* a run for its money as the worst fanzine cover ever. Luckily several people saw it and helped me. I am forever grateful to Frank



Collins from Adelaide, who designed for Number 2 the *Kalien* masthead that I have used ever since. I also got a lot of help and some lovely illustrations from Phil Wlodarczyk and Gunny (Ian Gunn). Many people have helped with my fanzines over the years, but Phil was for a long time such a great collaborator.

Aussiecon 2, 1985, was my second convention. There I found an incredible variety of mostly Australian fanzines. The fan lounge was a great place to stop and peruse these fanzines.

Science fiction fans invented fanzines. This may not be widely known these days, but we follow a great tradition. I have been a bit put out by public libraries that operate on the assumption that fanzines are something teenagers do. Teenage fanzine editors do still create often interesting genzines where they write about their lives, but dammit I do know about fanzines! I have been producing them on and off for nearly 35 years.

A trip into Melbourne's Sticky Institute in the Degraeves Street underground entrance to Flinders Street station, Melbourne, is worthwhile. It is a small shop devoted to non-science-fiction fanzines. It has all sorts of interesting stuff, including lots of manual typers so you can create something that is not online and available to the world through the internet. I find it slightly amusing that the efforts being made by secret government agencies to capture everything on the internet has led some people to return to fanzine editing using the good old paper-and-staples production method. And you know who you are sending it to. Skynet won't be able to target you because years ago you wrote something in your fanzine that is now forbidden or even just mis-





understood. (Years ago the New Zealand fanzine ironically titled *Killer Kung Fu Nuns on Crack* was stopped by NZ customs, because they were concerned by the title. I have restrained myself from publishing a zine called *Coburg Liberation Army Times: A Call to Jihad*, and probably will do so in the future.

## Inspiration

Punk music in the early 1980s gave us the do-it-yourself idea, which took hold in my little bit of fandom. I know someone who started a band after hearing Motorhead's *No Sleep Till Hammersmith* live album. He thought, 'I can do that', and he did — although not as loud as what was said to be the loudest band on Earth. I read *The Dragon's Hoard* and *Australian Playbeing* and decided to start my own fanzine, with an article about *Star Wars* and another about Aussie SF in the first issue. I was off and exploring. I have been exploring fandom ever since.

Sure I still use 'Bash it down now and we can tart it up later' as my production credo, but it has been quite a ride. *Fanzines are fun*. They are meant to be enjoyed. There is a joyous and worthwhile moment when you have finished a new issue and you have the only copy in your hand. I never get that feeling from a Facebook posting or even posting a blog. Maybe a Podcast would do it, but I love fanzines, even as rising costs and alternative technologies make them less relevant.

My 33 years at the Melbourne Science Fiction Club have helped me with fanzine creation. I owe a debt of thanks to many members for their work and for all the ideas that circulate round the Club. Its membership ebbs and flows over time, like an

ocean, but it is still a good place to hand out copies of a new issue of a fanzine. Conventions are my other great place to distribute and receive fanzines. I received a fanzine at the latest Continuu, No 12, June 2016, even though I was really only there for the opening night and the last day, with a session in the bar on Saturday night where I caught up with friends. The Hotel Jasper has a pretty good bar, and I enjoyed their strong gin and tonic.

## An amateur career with rewards

Bruce writes about being given fannish awards: 'I rather felt that I was expected to fade away after winning them.' I understand that. I was delighted to be made a Life Member of the Melbourne SF Club in 2009, but I did feel I should disengage a bit. Of course circumstances didn't let me. I am still Librarian, worrying about the books in the MSFC Library although they are currently in storage.

I do have a feeling of quiet satisfaction that the archive of our fanzines is with the Monash University Library Rare Books Collection. Fanzines are rare things indeed. They document some of our history; the memories of outsiders who love something the average Australian doesn't know or care about.

Similarly it takes a bit to cope with the honour of being given in 2016 the A. Bertram Chandler Award for Outstanding Contribution to Australian Science Fiction. I know this is an incredibly big deal, but I am still a bit of an unreconstructed punk who gets odd inspirations from the Surrealists and the Dadaists. I think Marcel Duchamp is the most important artist of the twentieth century, which partly explains some of my more outrageous ideas. Someday I must visit the Philadelphia Museum of Art to see all the work on display there.

So I sit here with my almost toy laptop. It is good for e-mail and web surfing, not so good at presentations and video, with a processor chip like my phone. I have managed a much shorter article than Bruce's, but that is my modus operandi. Fandom is important to me, and writing and reading fanzines is a big part of that. The Chandler Award sits to my right, and it still gets a 'wow!' from me. As Danny Oz said: I don't have anywhere to put it, yet.

I would like to thank Bruce for writing his article about fanzines. It was very inspiring, and provided a useful template. I also enjoyed being on the Fanzines panel with Bruce at the April MSFC meeting. It was fun to talk about zines and try to inspire some more.

Finally a shout out to Phil: the next *Kalien* will be out Real Soon Now.

— Cheerio, **Jocko**.



**John Litchen** was a member of Melbourne fandom until he and his family moved to Queensland. An avid reader of SF above all else from 1952 to the present, over more than half a century, John has in particular loved stories about Mars. Finally, he has taken the opportunity to write something about this.

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# John Litchen

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## Fascinating Mars: 120 years of fiction about Mars Part 1

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The Red Planet has always fascinated me.

There has always been an intense interest in Mars. In the clear skies of ancient times its blood-red colour was visible to the Greeks. The Romans, who associated the colour with blood, and blood with warfare, designated the Red Planet as the abode of the God of War, giving that God's Roman name to the planet.

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries many writers been fascinated by Mars. Over the last six or seven decades Mars has continued to feature prominently in fiction and non-fiction.

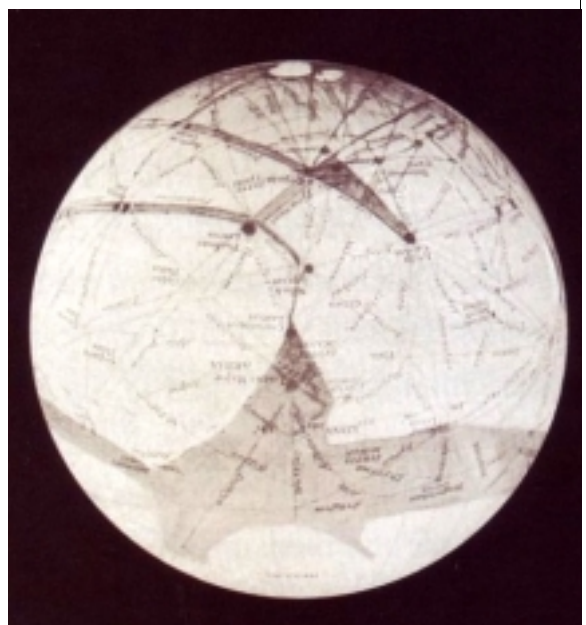
### *Canali* or canals?

**Galileo** was the first to observe Mars through the newly invented telescope. He saw an indistinct shape with little detail. As telescopes improved, in 1666 another astronomer,

**Giovanni Cassini**, saw ice caps on the planet. In 1877 the astronomer **Asaph Hall** discovered the two moons, Phobos and Deimos, orbiting the planet. This was a century and a half after the author **Jonathon Swift** had written in 1726 in his book *Gulliver's Travels* that Laputian astronomers had discovered that Mars had two moons and more or less accurately described their orbits and periodicity. How did he know? Was it just a lucky guess based on observations? No one will ever know.

The most important 'fact' relating to Mars was announced by the Italian astronomer **Giovanni Schiaparelli**. He observed Mars over a period of time from September 1877 and carefully drew maps showing darker areas linked together with faint lines. He announced that he had observed *canali* on Mars. In Italian this means channels, but the English world translated *canali* as canals. It was assumed that Mars was or had been inhabited. Why else would there be canals on Mars? Yet no other observers saw these lines in

**Left: 1888: Giovanni Schiaparelli shows Syrtis Major on Mars, plus a network of fine linear features he called *canali*.**  
**Right: 1890s: Percival Lowell saw Mars as laced with straight-line canals, to which he added labels.**



1877, although Mars was at its closest point to Earth. Once two other astronomers, **Joseph Perrotin** and **Louis Thollon**, had claimed to see the canals in 1886, everyone who looked at Mars began to see the canals.

The astronomer **Percival Lowell** could hardly wait until Mars made its next closest approach to Earth (October 1894) so that he too could observe the canals. Sure enough, he saw them — in greater detail than ever before. He published a book about his findings in 1896 (*Mars*), and two more books in 1906 and 1908 (*Mars and Its Canals*; *Mars as the Abode of Life*). He saw what he claimed were networks of canals carrying water from the poles to the more arid and inhospitable equatorial regions of the planet. He truly believed these canals crisscrossed the planet and intersected at nodes he deemed to be oases. He saw what he saw because he believed that was what he was going to see. The human mind will play tricks and subconsciously join disconnected spots together to make continuous lines, especially when viewing conditions are difficult.

Other astronomers were also convinced that Mars was covered by a network of canals. *Some even saw canals on Venus and Mercury!*

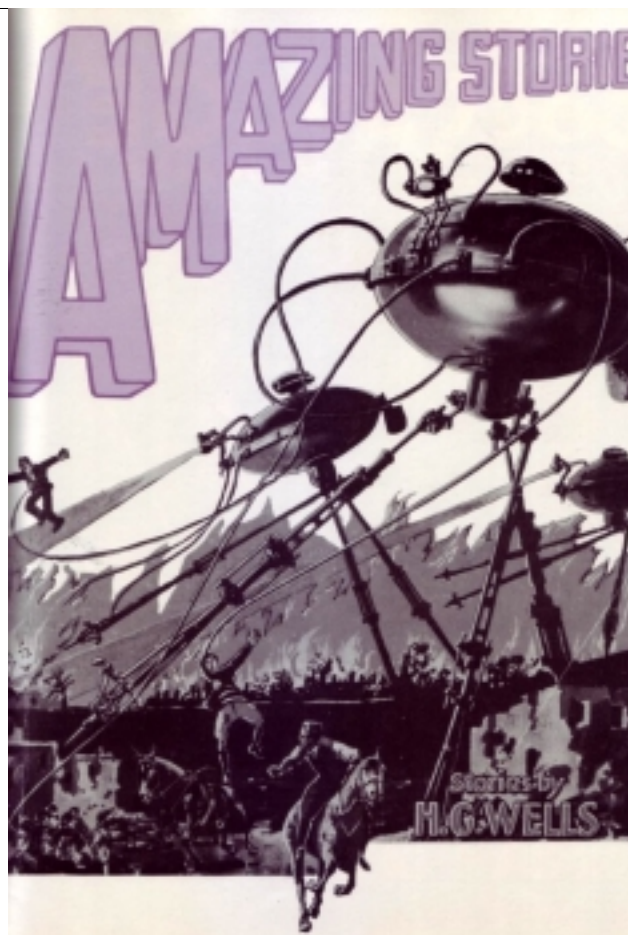
Others, of course, didn't believe in Mars's canals for one second. They asserted that they had not seen anything like canals when they managed to get clear views. **Alfred Russell Wallace**, a contemporary of Charles Darwin who came up independently with a similar theory of evolution based on his field studies in Indonesia (which forced Darwin to publish his *On the Origin of Species* before he was ready to do so), stated that 'not only is Mars not inhabited by intelligent beings, but it is uninhabitable'. He accepted that Lowell had seen lines across the surface, although Howell and his fellow believers were unable to capture photographic images to prove this. What Wallace thought was that these were natural, a result of volcanic activity and 'planetary shrinkage'. He also suggested that because Mars was further from the Sun than the Earth, it would be much colder and could not have the pleasant earth-like climate everyone expected. He suggested the daytime summer temperatures would still be well below the freezing point of water.

Many members of the general public were convinced that Mars had canals, and that for such canals to be seen from the Earth through telescopes they must have been at least 30 to 50 kilometres wide. They were also convinced that the planet harboured ancient civilisations with skilled engineers as well as extinct civilisations and old cities that were collapsing in disrepair. They believed the planet had once been far more advanced than Earth now was, but was in its last desperate stages of dying.

## H. G. Wells

Several novels had been written about Mars in the late nineteenth century. **Percy Greg's** *Across the Zodiac*, published in 1880 and set wholly on Mars, was one of them. **H. G. Wells** was the first to use the idea of an ancient civilisation, struggling to survive on a dying planet, that decides to invade the lush and beautiful planet Earth.

*The War of The Worlds* stunned and terrified readers in 1898. Wells was apparently ignorant of Lowell's ideas and his book about Mars published a couple of years earlier, but he must surely have known about Schiaparelli's observations and drawn his own conclusions as to who or what could have constructed canals sufficiently wide that they could be seen



from Earth. He had written an article discussing possible life on Mars and the Martian climate for the London *Saturday Review* in 1896, in which he referred to an article published in *Nature* in 1894 about luminous flashes of light seen near Mars's poles when Mars was at its closest approach to Earth.

Wells also wrote a short story called '**The Crystal Egg**' (1897), wherein a London antique dealer comes across a mysterious polished crystal egg that seems to display images of another world, a verdant world with ethereal creatures which, we discover by the end of the story, are inhabitants of Mars. Before anything more could be discovered the mysterious crystal egg disappears, and that is the end of the story.

A year later, in *The War of The Worlds*, Wells imbues his Martians with sinister and superior intellects that are far in advanced of humans'. The Martians decide to take over our world because theirs can no longer able sustain them. There was nothing we can do to stop them. After laying waste to vast areas of the English countryside and preparing to destroy London, the Martian machines grind to a halt. The Martians, hideous and unstoppable (the first truly alien beings ever described in fiction), had succumbed to the humble bacteria that caused the common cold, to which humans had become immune. The Martians had never encountered this particular bacterium before. With no immunity, they all die. After *The War of the Worlds*, Wells did not return to Mars.

However, he did use the same plot device to resolve his later story *First Men in the Moon*. Again, the Selenites all succumb to the common cold carried by the inventor of the spaceship that takes his characters to the Moon.

Wells had been aware of this phenomenon in Africa, Australia, and the islands of the Pacific, where contact with Europeans brought death and devastation to native popula-

tions through such common diseases as measles, mumps, smallpox, and syphilis.

*The War of the Worlds* started a new wave of stories about Earth being invaded by increasingly sinister aliens, a theme that is still used today (more so in movies than in books, since filmmakers generally prefer horrible and grotesque subject matter rather than realistic invaders).

## Taking a slight step sideways ...

1966 was the centenary of the birth of H. G. Wells. As a tribute to Wells, Brian Aldiss wrote a delightful novella 'The Saliva Tree'. Other authors have written stories in which H. G. Wells appears as a secondary character or as a main character. (Perhaps Brian Aldiss started this trend.) Two examples are Michael Moorcock's *The Hollow Lands*, in which Wells gives some advice about time machines to Jherik Carnellian, a mysterious innocent from the ends of time (*Dancers at the End of Time* series) — one of the funniest books Moorcock ever wrote — and Christopher Priest's *The Space Machine*. Much later, Kevin J. Anderson added to this selection of books with two novellas that formed the basis of a later book, *The Martian War*, which purports to be *the true account of the war of the worlds*. It features H. G. Wells as well as many of the characters Wells created.

Brian Aldiss's '**The Saliva Tree**' opens with two English gentlemen, walking along a country road, who see a huge meteor passing slowly overhead. It disappears over a hilltop where they assume it has crashed. They rush to the site, finding that whatever it is has landed in a farmer's pond and cannot be seen. The farmer is known to the young gentleman who has amorous intentions towards the farmer's daughter, so he has no problems in gaining access to the farm.

Not long after, a mysterious mist envelopes the farm, where it lingers until the sun is strong enough to dissipate it. This mysterious event prompts our young man to write to his esteemed friend H. G. Wells, whom he knows loves a good mystery. Odd things begin to occur on the farm. There is the feeling that something strange is wandering about. It leaves footprints but cannot be seen. People feel that they are being watched. Again the young gentleman writes to his friend, invites him to look at what is happening.

Spring arrives, and for some reason everything on the farm grows to enormous size. Pigs and cows give birth to many more offspring than expected, and the farmer is happy. He considers what is happening as good luck. Other farms are struggling and produce little. While the farmer loads a wagon with piglets to take to market the young man sees a series of footprints approaching. Suddenly the wagon sags as if something heavy has jumped on it. The piglets go crazy. One manages to jump off, breaking a leg in the process. The piglets one by one seem to dis-inflate, as if everything has been sucked out of them leaving nothing but the skin behind. The young man is horrified. The farmer is dumbfounded and insists that the pigs are suffering from some mysterious disease. The farmer takes the injured piglet into his pregnant wife. She cooks it for dinner, but no one can eat it because it tastes horrible, as if it had been poisoned.

The young man does some research, and finds some snakes inject a poison that digests the victim from inside, so all the snake has to do is suck the liquefied inside out. He believes that something comes up out of the lake and does the same to the farm animals. Things turn from bad to worse.



In terrible agony the farmer's wife gives birth to nine babies. The young man realises that whatever is in the meteor in the lake has somehow fertilised the farm and is harvesting its creatures for food. The farmer's wife goes crazy and strangles the babies because she believes she can see a weird creature eating the animals for food and suspects the babies could be next.

The young man now believes the alien creature in the lake treats everything, people included, as a source of food. They set up a trap to capture it by spreading flour so he can see the footprints appearing when it comes towards them. When this happens they throw bags of flour over it to reveal its shape. It is monstrous: almost two metres tall with writhing tentacles, each with a mouth and teeth so it looks a bit like an octopus combined with a man-o'-war jellyfish, combined with crablike legs and finned feet. He and the farmer manage to stick the pitchfork into it. One of the farmer's assistants tries to strangle it but is thrown aside. It retreats and heads back into the pond. Later, in the barn it comes for the cows, which are enormously bloated. The young man is trying to get the farmer's daughter to a safe place, but they are caught in the barn. Trapped in there, they manage to see the hideous creature covered by the dust raised by the panicking cows. The young man shoots it with the farmer's rifle stored in the barn and the monster retreats back to the pond.

Not long after there is a terrible noise. Huge amounts of steam rise from the pond, and slowly the meteorite rises up out of the pond and shoots up into the sky. The horrible visitor has gone. Did it come here for a holiday? Did it come to exploit the animal life for food? Will more of the creatures arrive on Earth?

These are unanswered questions as the young man heads back into town with his fiancée. Back at the hotel he finds his friend H. G. Wells has checked in. He rushes up to his friend's room to tell him all of the events that occurred. And that is the end of the story. Presumably H. G. Wells will relate this story, in a much expanded form, as *The War of The Worlds*.



This is a beautifully crafted piece that captures the Victorian age perfectly. It is both amusing and horrifying. A magnificent tribute from Brian Aldiss!

In **Christopher Priest's** *The Space Machine*, the 'space machine' is really a time machine that enables our young hero and his lady love to be transported accidentally into the future. They also find themselves on Mars, where they undertake some strange and wonderful adventures culminating in their starting a revolution. They help downtrodden slaves fight against their monstrous overlords, and when they find that these horrible creatures intend to invade Earth, they contrive to stow away in the first capsule to be catapulted towards Earth. They arrive as the spearhead of the Martian invasion. No one believes them when they try to warn people, but the population soon finds out that all of Earth's (meaning England's) armies are no match for the Martian invasion.

Our two weary travellers decide to head back to where the inventor of the time machine lives: he is, of course, our heroine's guardian. On their way home they encounter a dishevelled gentleman, none other than H. G. Wells. They join forces to work their way down river, avoiding Martians and their destructive machines. When they finally reach their destination, they find it abandoned.

H. G. Wells tells his new acquaintances that the inventor of the time machine was a friend of his, whose adventures he has recently chronicled. H. G. and our hero proceed to build themselves a space time machine, which they use to attack and destroy the Martian war machines, which by this time are stomping all over the countryside. The effort seems too much for them. Just as they are about to give up hope,

the Martians mysteriously begin to die. At the end of the book, H. G. parts company with our young hero and his lady love. Each decides to write down an account of what happened. Of course H. G. Wells will write *The War of the Worlds*, and our hero already told his story — *The Space Machine*.

The book is a delight ... the story, the Victorian style of writing, in short everything about it is a joy to read.

*The Martian War* by **Kevin J. Anderson** was written many years after the books by Aldiss and Priest. Two novellas, 'A Scientific Romance' (1998), and 'The Canals of Mars' (1995) form the basis of the larger work, which Anderson has subtitled: *A Thrilling Eyewitness Account of the Recent Alien Invasion as Reported by H. G. Wells*.

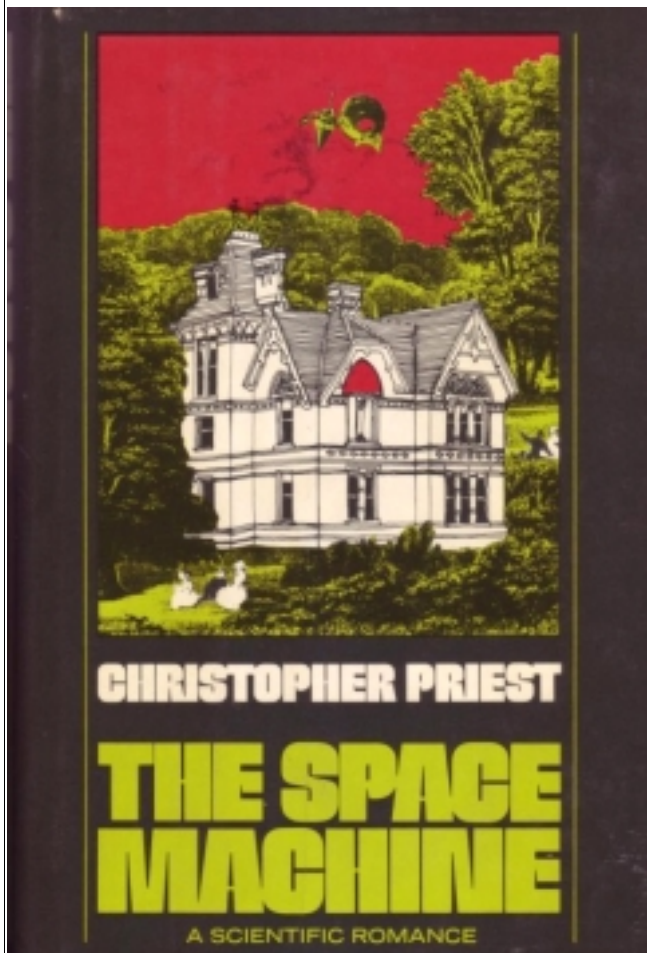
In his story Anderson uses real people: H. G. Wells himself along with his fiancé Jane, T. H. Huxley, and Percival Lowell (the man who gave us the canals and dying civilisations on Mars) as well as the fictional Dr Moreau, Hawley Griffin (the invisible man), and Professor Cavor (the inventor of cavorite and the sphere that goes to the moon), delightfully mixed together in such a way that we can believe that that was how H. G. Wells came to write his famous stories: *First Men in the Moon*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Crystal Egg*, *The Shape of Things to Come*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and, of course, *The War of the Worlds*.

Anderson gives us two interlinked parallel stories. The first tells of H. G. Wells and his romance with Jane, as well as an invitation to participate in a forum where many different scientists are working on secret weapons to thwart a possible Prussian invasion of England. Among the scientists is Dr Cavor, who is trying to invent an impenetrable shield against Prussian artillery, but in the process comes up with anti-gravity; Hawley Griffin ('almost a madman'), who is experimenting with drugs to make things invisible; and many others, all presided over by Professor T. H. Huxley, the eminent biologist/botanist and general man of the sciences. The initial meeting is interrupted by Dr Moreau, who has been banned from attending these conferences in England because of his animal experiments (on a mysterious tropical island). He tells them he has a remarkable tale regarding an invasion from Mars and actually has a specimen to show them. It's all documented in his notebooks, which he gives to Huxley.

The meeting breaks up in an uproar when the Martian specimen is revealed.

H. G. and his fiancé, along with T. H. Huxley, find themselves in the laboratory where Dr Cavor has built his sphere when the mad Hawley Griffin comes in (he is a saboteur) and sets off an explosion. Wells anticipates what Hawley is about to do, and thrusts Jane and Huxley into the sphere, closing the hatch as he follows them in. The explosion set off by Hawley kills Cavor and blows the sphere through the roof of the science lab, up through the atmosphere, and out into space. They learn how to control the sphere as it rushes towards the Moon.

Moreau's notebooks are revealed to H. G., who begins to peruse them, thus initiating the parallel story. Lowell has enlisted Moreau's help in building an enormous triangular canal 10 miles long on each side in the desert of North Africa. They fill this with gasoline and bitumen and set it alight in order to send a signal to Mars, which is rapidly approaching its closest distance to Earth. Sure enough, a mysterious cylinder flies past overhead leaving a fiery trail. It crashes in the desert not too far away and Lowell and Moreau rush to the site to find the crashed space ship cooling down. They open it and a hideous Martian appears. They knock it back down inside and climb in after it, to find





the ship full of desiccated insect-like creatures and one other dead Martian. They capture the Martian, who is trying to do something with a crystal egg and they bring it back to their camp.

Landing on the Moon, H. G. opens the hatch and discovers it has an atmosphere that appears when the sun comes out, and presumably disappears when the two-week night commences. He and Huxley argue about who should step out first. H. G. wants it to be Huxley but Huxley insists H. G. should step out saying ... "It is but a small step." Wells stood firm. "No Professor. When history looks back on this it will be seen as a giant leap for mankind." (page 147).

*The Martian War* includes many moments such as this, as well as references to H. G. Wells' novels and stories.

While our explorers discover the Selenites and their history, we also discover what Lowell and Moreau are up to. They have taken their Martian to America, where Lowell is building a huge telescope in Arizona at a place he calls Mars Hill. The Martian runs amok, but not before we discover its true nature: it feeds by sucking the life fluids out of a living being, and it is a scout for an invasion force preparing to attack Earth. Moreau eventually kills the Martian, and takes this specimen to England to show to his colleagues.

Meanwhile H. G., Jane, and Huxley set off for Mars. When they arrive, they are captured and the sphere is locked away in a huge warehouse. H. G. and Jane are made into slaves and put to work alongside the Selenites, who had previously been captured and taken to Mars to work at building the invasion fleet. The Martians can't do much on their own, needing mechanical assistance to move around. These are the tripod walking machines among other things.

Jane, who has been given a crystal from the Selenite Mastermind, the mother of all the Selenites, induces the slaves to revolt. They obey her because they recognise the crystal and because she is female. H. G. and Jane escape, and rescue Huxley. An enthralling chase across the Martian surface follows, with the Martians trying to stop the escapees. Our heroes finally destroy or escape their pursuers and reach the polar ice cap, where they first landed. They release vials of cholera into the water system so that all Martians will be affected by this disease, thus wiping them out. The Selenites remain untouched, since they are insectivorous and not at all like the Martians.

Huxley decides to stay on Mars while H. G. and Jane return to Earth, landing in the courtyard of the same science foundation from which they were blown out into space.

The story ends here. We all know that H. G. will go on and write his famous books, both to entertain as well as to warn people of possible dire futures.

This is a most enjoyable story, full of nostalgia and references to historical events to which we can all relate. And if you haven't read any of H. G. Wells' books, you should do so immediately.

## Edgar Rice Burroughs

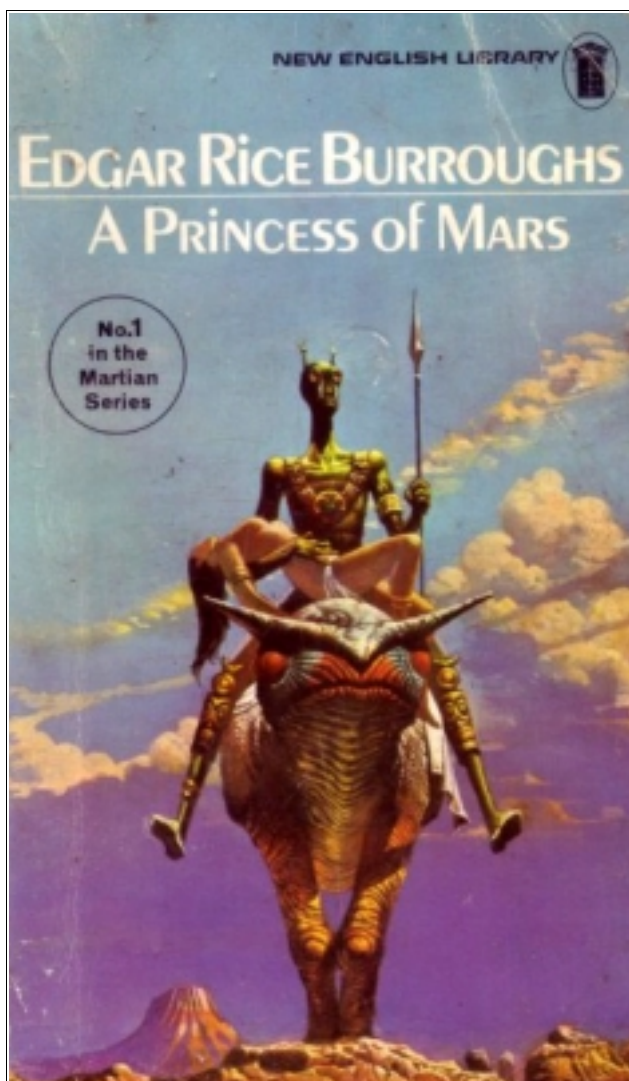
**Edgar Rice Burroughs** was one of the most exciting and imaginative of these writers. He wasn't a great writer of prose, but he could tell fabulous stories that included all the excitement of great romances and adventures, thrilling battles between weird creatures, and humanlike people. Inhabiting his Mars are six-legged animals and six-limbed intelligent beings that coexist with others who might as well have been human. Burroughs used magic and mysticism interspersed with clunky Victorian science, to make his 'Mars' books unputdownable for young readers like me who discovered them in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Burroughs, the epitome of the entertaining writer, was also the creator of Tarzan, a fabulous character who appeared in many books, and became a cinematic hero for generations. *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914) was the first Tarzan book published. When I read it in about 1952 I was hooked forever. I read all the Tarzan books, saw all the Tarzan movies, and devoured the Tarzan serials at my local movie theatre. When Burroughs was writing about Tarzan he had already finished his earlier Mars books, whose main character is John Carter.

Burroughs also challenged Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* with his own creation of Pellucidar, a world inside the Earth inhabited by dinosaurs and monsters from the Age of Reptiles that coexisted with tribal humans: Burroughs' version of the 'noble savage'. One of his last books even linked Tarzan (a modern version of the noble savage) with this new and primitive world in a book called *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* (1930).

The very first book set on Mars that I read was *Thuvia, Maid of Mars* by **Edgar Rice Burroughs**. It was the fourth or fifth in his 'Mars' series, whose hero is John Carter, and I was 14 at the time. I had already devoured several Tarzan books, and this and subsequent Mars books, which I snatched up as soon as I saw them at my local newsagent/general store, were absolutely amazing as far as I was concerned. I thought the events described were real. I was convinced because Burroughs explained how he came to have the manuscript given to him by his uncle John Carter himself, putting





himself into the story as well as the readers.

When these books were written, the colonial era of Europeans in Africa was about to end (although I knew nothing about that) and writers searched for a wider range of unknown and exotic places in which to set their adventures. What place could be more exotic and exciting than Mars? It was still thought that there were canals there, and dying civilisations. Burroughs imagined this *Mars* in all its glory, and convincingly set grand adventures there, using his uncle as chief protagonist. Well, I believed it was his uncle. I couldn't put whichever book I was reading down until the last word was read.

If nothing else had hooked me into science fiction, these books by Edgar Rice Burroughs would surely have done it. I dreamed about Mars, of being up there doing fantastic stuff. Eventually I outgrew these books and found other equally as exciting stories set in space, on other worlds, or in our own world's future history.

Quite recently I was tempted to see if I could buy copies of Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars books to read again. After thinking about it, I decided to forego that dubious pleasure and remember the essence of them and how they affected me as a young reader in 1954 rather than be disappointed. Since the memory of the details in these books is more than 60 years old and lost in the mists of time, all that remains is the vague fuzzy feeling of excitement reading them generated, and that is something I would like to keep.

with *A Princess of Mars* (originally serialised in a pulp

magazine as 'Under the Moons of Mars'), were published between 1912 and 1917, long before I was born. (Burroughs was already dead when I discovered his books. He died in 1950.) He also wrote about Venus, depicting it as a world of massive seas and jungle-covered land, much like the Amazon but hotter and wetter, and filled with extremely dangerous creatures resembling those of Earth's Mesozoic Era.

It was common to think of Venus as being hotter (because closer to the Sun) and wetter (being perpetually covered in clouds) than the Earth. Mars, further away from the Sun, was considered to be more of a desert and colder than Earth, a Gobi desert stretching over a whole planet.

Most other writers assumed the atmosphere of Mars was thin, much like that found at the top of a mountain range such as the Andes, and left it at that. The Martians had adapted to it over millennia, whereas humans would have to use some kind of mask to assist with breathing until they could accustom themselves to the thinner atmosphere. No one suggested it could be cold, since naked or semi-naked women and scantily clad warriors seemed to inhabit the planet.

It was only Burroughs, however, who suggested that the inhabitants might use some kind of air-producing machine to replenish the extremely thin atmosphere. This first suggestion of 'terraforming' brought his books into the realm of science fiction, although basically they were exotic fantasies overlaid with Victorian Age scientific speculation.

## Ray Bradbury

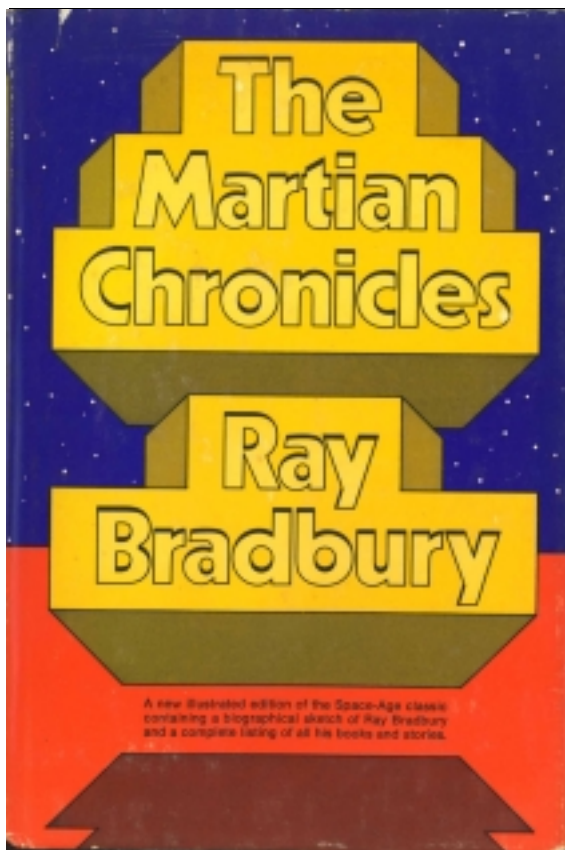
After discovering Burroughs I came across an English paperback with a beautiful cover depicting thousands of silvery space ships rising up into a deep blue sky. It was *The Silver Locusts* by Ray Bradbury. The real name of the book, which was a collection of stories Bradbury had been publishing through the late 1940s, was *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) (see my review in *SF Commentary* 86.) Although this is not a novel, it can be read as if it were, with each story a chapter in the ongoing establishment of humankind on Mars. It bowled me over because it was so different from what Burroughs had created. Yet it was as unrealistic as any other earlier fantasy.

Bradbury's ideas of what Mars was like could have been engendered by what he read as a boy: Edgar Rice Burroughs' series of books set on Mars, the idea that Mars harboured a dying civilisation, and the notion that the lines seen in telescopes were canals built to bring water from the Poles to the arid equatorial areas. H. G. Wells' Mars harboured an ancient civilisation, and his Martians were sinister and malevolent. Ray Bradbury's were wise, benign, and sometimes even funny (see the story titled 'The Summer Night') and certainly very human.

Bradbury wasn't concerned with the reality of Mars but with the myth of a lost civilisation that had endured aeons of a dying planet, combined with the myth of rural America that he remembered from his childhood. His recollections of small-town America were more fantasy than reality. He projected his childlike fantasy onto his present time (1940–1950), then extrapolated it to what he imagined the near future would be. This nonexistent past America projected into the near future permeates the stories, giving them a sense of wonder tinged with nostalgia. It is this same feeling that after more than half a century keeps these stories alive, fresh, and enjoyable.

*The Martian Chronicles* has endured because its poetic use





of language is combined with a mythic nostalgia. It is continually being reprinted, whereas many other more realistic stories and novels about Mars have disappeared, and are rarely ever seen again.

## Mars: fanciful, factual, transformative

For at least another half-century, no one knew the reality of Mars, but that didn't stop imaginative writers from speculating. In the first 25 to 30 years of the twentieth century thousands of stories were written about Mars. Fortunately, very few have survived in the memory of today's readers. We do remember the longer works, the novels, and these were usually more carefully written. They are undoubtedly better than the quickly produced short stories which filled many magazines during the golden age of SF.

To refer to all the novels where Mars is prominent would be an impossible task, so I have limited myself to those I remember reading but no longer have, and to the ones still in my collection of books.

Stories about Mars usually fall into three categories: fanciful, factual, and transformative.

In the first category are stories that assume Mars has been inhabited and that remnants of ancient civilisations struggle to survive, or deal with situations that include the arrival of humans and their discovery of these ancient remnants, or straight-out fantasies in which exotic creatures live strange lives in kingdoms and autocracies based vaguely on human models but set in an alien environment. For instance, **Michael Moorcock**, writing under the pseudonym of **Edwin P. Bradbury**, began his career with fantasies about Mars. **Leigh Brackett** also wrote novels set on Mars, which supposedly had a breathable atmosphere. Underlying these fantasies is the belief that once there must have been life of some

sort on Mars when it had water and a thick atmosphere.

The second category includes stories involving the trip to Mars and the difficulties this entails; stories about setting up and colonising the planet and dealing with its harsh realities of Mars. This includes a subcategory: disaster happens and a small number of people have to struggle to survive until they can be rescued or must make an epic journey across the surface to a place where they can be safe or wait until rescued. These are basically adventure stories. Often an important aspect of these adventure stories is the discovery is primitive life still surviving in the harsh Martian terrain. We want to find life there, so we can finally say we are not alone in the universe. The heroes of such stories find bacteria deep underground, or primitive plant life partially protected in the valleys of massive chasms.

Also included in this second category is a smaller group of speculative stories that are basically non-fiction but slightly dramatised: how will we reach Mars and what will we do there? The technical details can be made more interesting for the non-technical reader. **Arthur C. Clarke's** book *The Snows of Olympus: A Garden on Mars* (1994) falls into this category.

The third category is fiction that depicts a major transformation of Mars. These include stories in which humans are modified so they can exist unprotected on the surface of Mars (or any other planet), or modifications to Mars to create some resemblance to Earth; in other words, terraforming Mars to make it more habitable for humans.

There are also many crossovers within those categories, which often makes it hard to know where a story fits. Most of these are crossovers between categories two and three. If the protagonists do find on Mars some kind of animal or alien being (presumably underground) it falls into the category of fantasy or fanciful imagination regardless of how the author tries to justify it. If there is some scientific basis for the speculation, no matter how tenuous, it remains acceptable until humans actually explore Mars and can prove otherwise.

Another crossover is where some phenomenon (such as Martian bacteria or radiation) inimical to humans affects them on Mars or is carried inadvertently onto their ship and, as they return, either infects them or remains dormant until they arrive back on Earth. This is a variation of the alien invasion concept originating with H. G. Wells, and is more popular in movies than it is in books.

Whatever the category or sub-category, I believe it is best to enjoy each story for what it is, taking into consideration the time or the decade when it was written and what would have been known about Mars at that time.

## Grand plans

As far back as 1950, there have been grand plans for humans to travel to Mars as the next step after reaching the Moon. No one had reached the Moon at that time other than in the imagination of science fiction writers. The Russians still hadn't sent *Sputnik* into orbit when **Wernher von Braun** (the father of the V2 rocket) suggested in 1952 (in German and later in 1953 in English) in a book called *The Mars Project* (which he revised in 1962 to take into account the improved rocket engineering and fuels that had become available) building a fleet of 10 giant ships in space to send 70 people to Mars. Without the capability of sending enough materials into low Earth orbit to build the ships, and without a space

station to work from, the whole concept was nothing more than a dream. But the idea of von Braun's book was to show that it was possible even with the technology and the fuels available in the early 1950s.

**Walt Disney** produced an animated documentary for his television program in 1957, elaborating on Wernher von Braun's ideas. It started off realistically, showing Von Braun's concept of orbiting spaceships departing for Mars, but soon became a ridiculous cartoon presentation of the weird creatures that were supposed to exist on Mars and on other planets. Aimed at the children who watched the *Mickey Mouse Club*, the film was good for its time and but hopelessly outdated within a few years.

Celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the *Apollo 11* Moon landing, President Bush said in a speech on the steps of the Air and Space Museum in Washington DC that NASA would go 'back to the Moon, back to the future, and this time back to stay — and then a journey into tomorrow, a journey to another planet, a manned mission to Mars'. No doubt he tried to emulate Kennedy, who told Americans that they would put a man on the Moon within a decade — and they did, but stopped after the Space Race had been won. The Moon was abandoned, and any chance of establishing a foothold beyond Earth was also abandoned for the foreseeable future. It was such a waste, but that's politics. A statement had been made and national superiority demonstrated, after which it was time to move on.

President Bush's statement was a bold, probably off-the-cuff statement that at first seemed easy to implement, but in reality the idea was fraught with difficulties. President Bush's grand plan never made it through Congress, as both sides rejected the spending of the huge sums of money that would be needed. Attempts to keep humans in space on a permanent basis failed. The only plan that got the go-ahead was the International Space Station, but this was because Europe and Japan and Russia were all part of the project, although USA supplied most of the money and expertise, and the use of its space shuttle fleet. Then the space shuttles were abandoned, being considered obsolete. The US government was terrified another disaster might occur with the ageing shuttles — they had already lost two — and budget constraints stopped the development of an alternative system to replace the shuttle. Once the shuttles were abandoned, the US had no means of getting into space, let alone going to Mars. It now depends on the Russians, who still use old, almost obsolete technology to transport people and supplies to the International Space Station.

The chance of going to Mars was being pushed further and further into the future. Even going back to the Moon doesn't seem likely if the project relies on government financing.

However, private enterprise has come to the rescue, with the development of rockets capable of delivering payloads into orbit and opening the possibility of near-space tourism with short-duration flights to the edge of space.

It will be private enterprise that will take us back to the Moon, to Mars and beyond. Most likely within the next 30 years we may all see such expeditions and colonising attempts take place.

## The greatest mystery

As late as 1962 many still believed that the greatest mystery in the solar system yet to be solved was the riddle of the canals on Mars. Others who accepted that the canals did not exist

still held in their minds the idea that some form of plant life would be found on Mars.

But all fanciful speculations about Mars came to a sudden stop when, after seven months of journeying, NASA's *Mariner 4* arrived there in July 1965. Passing by at a distance of 10,000 kilometres, over four days it took 21 grainy photographs that killed forever the idea of canals and ancient civilisations. It showed us a surface pockmarked with countless impact craters and recorded a temperature of minus 100 degrees Celsius. Other images from subsequent *Mariner* missions confirmed the findings from *Mariner 4*. (*Mariner 5* went to Venus, dispelling any hope that Venus was a tropical water world.)

The shocking reality is there are no canals on Mars, no water, virtually no atmosphere — and what little there is, is mostly carbon dioxide — but there are vast deserts dotted with impact craters, massive chasms, and dead volcanoes, planetwide dust storms, and frozen carbon dioxide, not water ice, at one of the Poles. With summer temperatures at its equator resembling those in Antarctica, Mars is much colder than expected. Mars is not the benign place once envisaged. It would be a very difficult place for any kind of life familiar to us to exist. And it would be very difficult for us to live there as well, although, with the right equipment, not impossible.

Even worse were our discoveries about Venus. It is a runaway hothouse, with surface temperatures too hot to sustain any form of life we know of. Totally covered by clouds of acid and with a volcanically active surface, the surface of Venus can only be seen thanks to radar from satellites circling the planet. So Venus is out of the fanciful category for ever, along with the surface of some of the moons of the larger planets, such as Jupiter and Saturn, which are inimical to human life. On these moons we might find something that is alive in seas beneath frozen surfaces. We will find this out in the not-too-distant future.

But the hope remains that perhaps once Mars, the planet most accessible to us with our present technology, did support life of some kind, and that one day we will discover fossilised remnants of such life, or even surviving bacteria deep beneath the surface.

Many probes, orbiters, and robotic landers have been sent to Mars since *Mariner 4*. Many have been successful, but some have been lost or destroyed as they attempted to orbit or land on the planet. Through telemetry and photos sent back to Earth from these robotic probes, a new and often astonishing picture of our nearest neighbour has emerged.

## Mars One

There is a competition to find people willing to go to Mars on a one-way trip to set up a colony (the **Mars One expedition**), to start a new life on another planet with no possibility of returning. Should there be any surprise that there are more than 200,000 who want to go?

This number will have to be whittled down to fewer than a hundred, and eventually to only four who will make that first trip to Mars. Their job will be to establish and build a self-sufficient base for themselves and for the next group of four to follow, until a decade later at least 20 people could be living on Mars. Their preparations and eventual journey will be watched on TV by the whole world. No doubt it will be the greatest 'reality show' ever, and with a bit of luck will be entirely financed through advertising or private subscriptions.

Before they get to go, however, another privately financed group intends to send a married astronaut couple on a flyby mission to Mars and back, with the craft passing as close as 160 kilometres above the surface.

NASA, as well as ESA and other government organisations, has re-entered the fray, which is the race to get to Mars. NASA is developing a massive new rocket that will lift its Mars expedition ship into orbit and boost it on the journey to Mars. It plans on orbiting, setting up a possible base on Phobos, and eventually landing on the surface before returning to Earth.

Unfortunately, none of this is likely to take place before the end of the 2030s. I strongly suspect that private enterprise of some sort will beat any government agency in establishing a base on Mars. And at my age I may just live long enough to see the *Mars One* expedition take place. I doubt if I will ever see NASA's effort completed, but at least I can vicariously experience the excitement and the profound possibilities of exploring Mars through the many fine novels and stories being written today along with those of the near past.

## Mars rediscovered

The new reality of Mars revealed by the orbiters and landers stunned writers. Many of them abandoned Mars as a subject of their speculative stories and headed off to the asteroid belt, the outer planets, and into the far depths of the galaxy, which meant few stories about Mars were published during the 1960s. The only one I can recall is *Farewell Earth's Bliss* by **D. G. Compton** (1966). There were two I came across in the 1970s, *Man Plus* by **Frederik Pohl** (1976) and *The Martian Inca* by **Ian Watson** (1977), and only one in the 1980s, again by **Frederik Pohl**: *The Day the Martians Came* (1988).

Gradually writers again realised that Mars was unbelievably fascinating. Here was a whole new world about which they knew nothing, but was being revealed bit by bit: its stark deserts and magnificent canyons, the largest volcano in the whole solar system, ice caps of frozen carbon dioxide, of water frozen under the surface with the possibility of finding some form of life deep underground. Many of the physical features photographed in exquisite detail showed that running water had sculpted them millions of years in the past. Recent indications are that some water-sculpted areas were much more recent; perhaps only a few hundred thousand years old.

It was like an unknown planet had been discovered; a world no one had known about, and all of a sudden it was there, dropped into an orbit a little bit further out than our own. It was within reach. We had gone to the moon; surely the next step would be to go to Mars.

This idea has more recently been reiterated by President Obama, who also believes that the future of mankind must include the establishment of a human presence on the Moon and on other worlds such as Mars. People are already training for the long voyage, or studying how a base might be established by carrying out experiments in Iceland, where the terrain is similar to parts of Mars. There is another Mars camp on a remote island in Canada where the same training is taking place in preparation for the Mars trip. The Russians conducted an experiment where a group of (potential) Mars-cosmonauts lived for the duration of a voyage to Mars and back in a replica space ship, doing what such a crew may be asked to do, eating what they would have to eat and so on, to study the psychological effects of such a long voyage

of people in such a closed and tiny environment from which they could not escape until they returned to Earth. They have concluded that it can be done, and that it will be done for real, and sooner rather than later.

So suddenly the 1990s were filled with stories about Mars. I have at least 11 novels from that decade, and that is not counting non-fiction books, which have proliferated since then. The novels all take into account the latest knowledge gained from orbital surveys, images, and reports sent back from the various satellites orbiting the planet and the rovers wandering about on the surface. Mars is an exciting and thrilling place to explore and writers are doing exactly that with new stories that are for the most believable, prophetic, and dramatic, while at the same time being scientifically accurate in their descriptions of conditions future astronauts and potential explorers and colonists will encounter. It is this scientific accuracy that adds verisimilitude and a sense of wonder to these more recent stories.

The four earliest Mars novels that remain in my collection, and which I have recently read again, were all published between 1951 and 1973. These I would place in my second category, since they were meant to be realistic. All were based on knowledge thought to be true at the time they were written. I read them when they were published, half a century or more ago. I needed another look at them to see how they compared with similar work more recently published. To say the least, I was surprised at how good two of them were.

The four books are: *The Sands of Mars* by **Arthur C. Clarke** (1951), *Alien Dust* by **E. C. Tubb** (1955), *Farewell Earth's Bliss* by **D. G. Compton** (1966), and *The Earth Is Near* by **Ludek Pesek** (1973 English translation).

## The realism of Mars

Slowly our knowledge of the Red Planet is increasing as Rovers and Orbiters continue to send back information to be processed. Each new generation of writers draws on the greater knowledge available, so the stories they write become more and more credible. Exactly how realistic they are remains to be seen, and we won't know this until people actually colonise Mars then begin to write about it. Of course most of us today will not live long enough to see this.

Perhaps the first 'down-to-earth' depiction of Mars was **Arthur C. Clarke's** novel *The Sands of Mars*. It was his first novel, published in 1951. Clarke, being a scientist who helped with the development of radar during the Second World War to assist the British see German fighter planes attacking England, and who is famous for having invented the idea of geosynchronous satellites in orbit to facilitate radio communications around the world, was a member of the British Interplanetary Society. He was also an amateur astronomer, and didn't believe there were canals on Mars. He wanted to depict Mars as realistically as possible. While others were still writing about dying civilisations and evaporating canals he wrote about Mars being a cold desert planet.

As part of an introduction to a reprint of this book in 2001 (by Gollancz: *The Space Trilogy*, including *Islands in the Sky*, *The Sands of Mars*, and *Earthlight*) he confessed to having a certain fondness for *The Sands of Mars*, since it was his first full-length novel. He said: 'When I wrote it we knew practically nothing about Mars — and what we did know was completely wrong ... It was still generally believed that Mars



had a thin but useful atmosphere and that some vegetation flourished in the tropical regions where the temperature often rose above freezing point.' And of course by extension we assumed that 'there would also be some more interesting forms of life'.

My original copy of this book has disappeared from the collection, but I do remember it had illustrations of the kind found in the pulp magazines. One of these showed a young man looking through a porthole from a habitat to see a vista of endless sand dunes disappearing over the horizon. Clarke later recalled that the story contains one sentence italicised for emphasis — *there are no mountains on Mars* — which later caused him considerable embarrassment when the *Viking* and *Mariner* photos started coming back. He apologised in subsequent reprints to his readers, but much later qualified this original statement by claiming there 'were no mountains as we understand them, like the Alps, the Andes or the Himalayas. Even Olympus Mons was more a blister in the crust rather than a mountain because it is too large — three times the height of Everest with a crater 600 kilometres in diameter. There are cliffs and canyons of immense length but no real mountains' (see *The Snows of Olympus: A Garden on Mars*, by Arthur C. Clarke, Victor Gollancz, 1994).

Was Clarke right? Perhaps it is a matter of perspective. If you are on the surface, the cliffs he talks about are as good as being mountains, but if they weren't caused by the same processes that create mountains on Earth, then perhaps they aren't mountains and are nothing more than cliffs of harder stone left after winds have blown away the softer sandy material from around them

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In the 1950s little was known about Mars, but one assumption was that the atmosphere was breathable, although it was as thin as that found at the top of Mt Everest. It was also believed that, with proper conditioning, humans could manage to breathe it with only a little assistance from a breathing mask when stressful exercise made a large intake of oxygen necessary.

It was assumed (rightly) that Mars was cold — it was further away from the sun than the Earth, and received considerably less solar radiation.

Another assumption was that the polar ice caps of Mars were of water ice. This assumption did not take into account that the atmosphere was less than one per cent of Earth's, and consisted mostly of carbon dioxide. Even if there was enough pressure on the surface, the atmosphere would be unbreathable. Also it was not known that the ice caps at the Poles were of frozen carbon dioxide (dry ice) and not water.

No one realised how cold Mars really is: at night temperatures plummet to below 100 degrees Celsius and daytime temperatures in the tropical regions barely reach Antarctic

temperatures.

It was known that Mars is a dead or dying world; shrunk and cracked with canyons and giant chasms that Schiaparelli had called *canali*, a world of cold deserts and planetwide sandstorms.

Of the four novels and authors mentioned above, only Pešek had access to the information sent back to Earth by the *Viking* and *Mariner* satellite flybys (starting in 1965). These mind-blowing photos showed a crater-pocked surface, giant dead volcanoes, and a huge chasm that almost split the surface of the planet in half. With this knowledge Pešek created a much more realistic story than did the other three authors.

The four books all recognise Mars as a cold desert planet and make much of the problems caused by dust, sand, and the inevitable dust and/or sand storms.

Two of them, *The Sands of Mars* and *Farewell Earth's Bliss*, tell of colonies already established on Mars, and make use of indigenous plant life as an integral part of the story. To a modern reader is jarring, to say the least.

All four of them involve a trip to Mars in the early part of the story, and all of them show the problem of weightlessness inside the ships on the way. Compton and Pešek use drugs to prevent sickness and bone density loss during the trip. Clarke shows the problem, but is not concerned about people living in freefall, while Tubb doesn't even mention the problem, although he has a centrifuge built on Mars so people planning on going back to Earth can exercise their bodies at earth-normal gravity induced by centrifugal force. Not one of them considered revolving the space ships to create a semblance of artificial gravity.

Two of them, *The Sands of Mars* and *The Earth is Near*, have the Mars spaceship built in orbit before going to Mars, then have it remain on one of the Martian moons while smaller shuttles go down to the surface.

The other two show space ships landing on Mars itself.

*Farewell Earth's Bliss* uses old moon shuttles as the ships that take people to Mars, so a background assumption is that a thriving outpost with regular traffic from Earth has been established on the Moon for some time.

## Arthur C. Clarke's *The Sands of Mars*

Arthur C. Clarke's *The Sands of Mars* is always being reprinted. Published in 1951, it pre-dates the other books. What makes this one different? To begin with, it is optimistic. Apart from one glaring misconception (finding plant and animal life on Mars, which are necessary for the story and which could make it fanciful rather than realistic), the novel is full of brilliant speculation and big ideas that create a sense of wonder even today. With Clarke you can believe these things are possible.

His viewpoint character is a science fiction author turned journalist who is asked by Earth's government to travel on the maiden voyage of a new spaceship liner that later will take tourists to Mars. This ship had been built in orbit.

*The Sands of Mars* is as modern as any book written today on the same subject, with only one or two slightly jarring anomalies to disturb the modern reader. If you can overlook these, the story that unfolds is timeless. If you read the story taking into consideration what was known about Mars at the time it was written and published (1951), it is an outstanding piece of literature that embodies all of Clarke's ideas of what constitutes science fiction, with believably extrapolated technology, and how it affects the lives of the people using it. The

novel is about people, not about the technology, and about how they change as a result of events that challenge them.

Clarke doesn't give a future date for his story. This could destroy verisimilitude as we pass by such a date and must face the predictions that may have been made about that year. There is a reference to a Gibson, an ex-SF writer of space opera novels and a book about Mars, called *Martian Dust*, published in 1973 or 1974, a quarter of a century ahead of the time Clarke wrote this book). We can assume that the voyage described in *The Sands of Mars* takes place well into the middle of the century we now live in.

Mars has a well-established colony, with a small 'city' called Port Lowell, where most of the population live in inflated domes large enough to contain several dozen two- and three-storey buildings. A smaller group lives in another settlement, half way around Mars, called Skia or Port Schiaparelli. At Port Lowell, the colonists are building another, even larger dome in anticipation of an increase in migration from Earth.

No mention of colonies on the Moon, a huge space station in orbit around the Earth from where the Mars journey begins, atomic rocket ships (operating only in space at least 1000 kilometres away from Earth), and much material that is almost skipped over because for those living in this future it is all very ordinary and hardly noticeable. There are no protracted explanations of how things work. Every character takes for granted procedures on Mars and gets on with life. There are regular voyages between Earth and Mars and Venus as well, although this fact is mentioned only in passing. Earth supplies Mars with much of its needs, and Mars sends back minerals and other products Earth needs. At the moment the story opens, Mars is trying to encourage people to come and live there. As part of this attempt, the authorities on Earth have commissioned the ex-SF writer who is now writing more realistic material to travel to Mars on the maiden voyage of the new passenger liner *Ares* so he can report on life in space and on Mars. Gibson (the writer) is the only passenger on a ship with a crew of six. The spaces for the passenger cabins are filled with cargo for this maiden voyage.

There are some anachronisms that show us that the story was written a long time ago. For instance, Gibson carries a portable typewriter, with stacks of paper and carbon paper. When he finishes an article or story he takes it to the 'radio room' and the operator feeds it into a fax machine that converts his text to radio signals beamed back to Earth. This is not too bad a prediction for its time, but it now seems oldfashioned. In 1951 there were no desktop computers, laptops, smartphones or tablets; they could not possibly have been imagined, not even by Arthur C. Clarke. Also, Gibson and his agent communicate via radiogram. I suspect it was Clarke's extension of the idea of telegrams.

One nice touch to show us the lack of gravity is Gibson's loss of his rice-paper-thin carbon paper when he starts working. If he leaves it lying around it floats up and is sucked up against the exhaust air vent. The crew navigate the ship by pulling themselves along cables strung along the walls of passages.

At that time no one knew that a long-term lack of gravity would cause loss of bone density and muscle mass. Clarke does mention that no one seems very hungry because, without gravity, muscles don't work very hard, so the body needs few calories. His contemporary authors often use 'drugs' to offset the nausea they believed is caused by the lack of gravity. In 1950 writers assume that everything will float around inside the spaceship. Any side-effects were all specu-

lative. Clarke chose not to show deleterious side effects because his output was always optimistic.

Clarke mentions in passing that the ship's library contains a 'quarter of a million books and thousands of orchestral works [no mention of popular music of any kind] all recorded in electronic patterns awaiting orders to bring it to life'. There is no mention of how those books might be read once they have been brought to life, but the crew members take turns selecting orchestral works they want to hear. As far as I know this is the first mention in science fiction of digital storage and e-books.

He describes the passenger ship *Ares* as being like two doughnuts connected by a long passage, looking like a giant dumbbell, a design very similar to the one he used a decade or so later in his book *2001*. However in this early story he does not have the crew's quarters rotating, as he did in the ship of 2001 (beautifully shown in the film by Stanley Kubrick in 1968). He also includes a spacewalk to the story. A crew member must go outside to realign the antennae to enable contact with a faster rocket fired up to chase them. This rocket carries a vaccine to fight Martian fever, a disease affecting the colonists. It is the result of a flu or similar virus taken by the colonists to Mars, where it has mutated and is running rampant. The rocket is off course; the ship's radio signals don't travel far enough to make the rocket notice them and adjust its course. By focusing a direct beam at it with the antennae they will be able to correct the course and effect a rendezvous. This gives Clarke the opportunity to have Gibson go outside, from where can look back at the ship and describe it.

Clarke becomes elegiac in describing what Gibson sees and feels: 'a pale band of light welding the two hemispheres of the sky together, the whole rim of the Milky Way was visible. Gibson could see quite clearly the rents and tears along its edge, where entire continents of stars seemed to break away and go voyaging alone into the abyss. The black chasm of the Coal Sack gaped like a tunnel drilled through the stars into another universe.'

He turns towards Andromeda: 'a ghostly lens of light. He could cover it with his thumbnail, yet it was a whole galaxy as vast as the sky spanning ring of stars in whose heart he was floating now. That misty spectre was million times further away than the stars — and they were a million times more distant than the planets. How pitiful were all of men's voyaging and adventures when seen against this background!'

Gibson spots something floating in space. Is it something gigantic but far away? Or is it something very close and therefore large? It turns out to be a piece of quarto writing paper, probably a draft of one of his articles floating just beyond his reach. The crewman accompanying him explains they threw out some garbage. Pieces of garbage orbit the ship like tiny satellites or floats beside the spaceship. Gibson wonders what is written on the paper, but his tether prevents him from reaching it. He consoles himself that, long after he is dead and gone, the tiny piece of paper will still be carrying its message to the stars.

Clarke is on record as saying that in the 1940s and early 1950s 'we knew a lot about Mars and most of it was wrong'.

Clarke was incorrect in his belief that Mars has some kind of plant life on Mars that grows and dies off with the seasons. It was the only way to explain the changes in colour in some areas observed over many centuries. Clarke falls prey to this belief, and hangs the whole second half of his novel on the idea of using those plants in a unique way. Clarke's plants are a lot more complex and larger than the primitive fungus

and lichen used in Compton's 1966 novel *Farewell Earth's Bliss*. Both writers, however, also introduce animal life. (*Where there are plants there must be animals such as herbivores, right?*) There has to be life on Mars; there used to be water, and where there is water there is always life. We don't want to be alone in the universe; that is a terrifying thought, so even today some writers offer remnants of life on Mars.

The colour changes, first seen by Schiaparelli and noted in his maps of Mars in 1877, especially in the area of Syrtis Major, are caused by weathering of basalt rock by the huge temperature range between night and day. It causes the rock to flake off. These flaky pieces, so small they are nothing but dust, turn a lighter colour as they weather, but when the season changes and strong winds blow, they lift this fine dusty covering and blow it away to expose the darker basalt underneath. That is what causes the colour change, not plant growth. But that was not known in 1950.

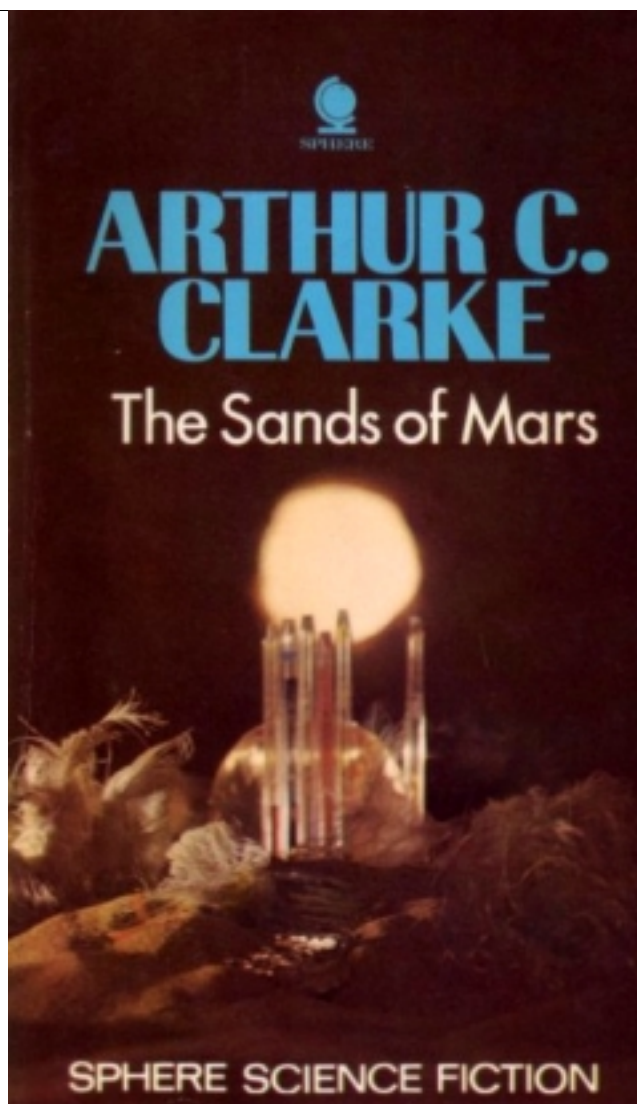
All of the early writers about Mars got the sky wrong. Clarke's is deep blue, like the high-altitude atmosphere of Earth. Compton's is green. Pesek's 1970 novel *The Earth is Near* has mostly a yellow or dark brown sky because of the relentlessly blowing dust. No one ever thought Mars' sky could be pink!

The plot of *The Sands of Mars* is very simple. Mars has a thriving colony. Ex-SF writer, Gibson, who wrote about Mars in earlier books, is sent on the maiden voyage of a passenger liner, *Ares*, to Mars and back to report on this momentous voyage, and during the three-month turnaround before the return voyage, to report on what life is like on a frontier planet. The voyage is more exciting than Gibson expects, and once he lands on Mars he makes a momentous discovery that changes his life. He decides he wants to stay on Mars because it offers a much more exciting life than the one he left behind on Earth. He slowly becomes Martian in outlook. The focus of the story is on the changes within Gibson, not on the technology, and this is what makes Clarke's story enduring while other Mars books from the same era have disappeared.

There is also a subplot, which tells of the young teenage cadet Jimmy, whom Gibson later suspects is his son from a liaison he had while at university in Cambridge. Jimmy also falls in love with the Chief Executive's daughter, the only other teenager on Mars. All the other colonists are adults. No babies have yet been born, and only the Chief Executive had been able to bring his family with him when he came to Mars. The inevitability of the only two teenagers on the planet falling in love is a nice touch, but is just part of the story's background.

Once you accept the idea of plant life on Mars, the rest of the story makes very good sense. The colony is independent. It obtains unlimited oxygen by breaking down minerals to extract the oxygen trapped in them, as well as gaining export product (refined minerals) to send back to Earth. There isn't much said about food, but presumably this is manufactured hydroponically. Much is revealed as the Chief Executive takes Gibson on tours around the colony to show him how the colony operates. At first he is somewhat cold towards Gibson, but as Gibson writes highly supportive reports and sends them back to Earth he slowly becomes friendlier.

The plants Clarke describes are very different from plants as we know them. The ones near the colony domes open during the day and follow the sun across the sky. At night they close up or fold up to conserve energy. Gibson also finds a plant that reminds me of giant kelp. It has small balloon-like pods that fill with oxygen extracted from the soil, in



much the same way that giant kelp has bulbs filled with air to help keep it floating.

On a trip to Port Schiaparelli the jet plane he is travelling in crashes because dust from a storm fills the motors. It crash lands in a long canyon. The crew cannot bounce a radio signal off the atmosphere as they could on Earth because Mars' atmosphere is too thin. They need a direct line of sight, but they are too far away from base. Gibson and Jimmy try to find a high spot to broadcast an SOS to Phobos to be rebroadcast back to Port Lowell.

Making their way through a dense patch of the kelp-like plants Gibson spots a small group of animals grazing on the plants. No one had discovered animal life on Mars before. The supposition is that these animals need the oxygen, so they eat the plants that produce it in the bulbs that are the equivalent of fruit. One of these younger animals attaches itself to Gibson and follows him, while the others ignore the humans and continue grazing.

They succeed in sending a message to base and are promptly rescued. Gibson becomes a celebrity on both Earth and Mars, and his photos of the little 'kangaroo-like marsupial creature' are a sensation. (Did Clarke consider Australian marsupials to be sufficiently stranger than other mammals so they could be identified as alien?)

It is at this point that Gibson subconsciously decides he wants to stay on Mars. He puts forward a plan to cultivate the oxygen-producing plants to help increase the oxygen in the



atmosphere, so he is taken to a secret facility where the scientists are attempting to do this. They had known about these plants before Gibson discovered them. But they hold a further secret, something they do not want Earth to find out about. Most of the local population also don't know about their scheme, but suddenly it becomes clear why Gibson's ship was asked to dock on Deimos instead of Phobos. The scientists of Mars have decided to turn Phobos into a miniature sun. They want to warm the planet and promote rapid growth of the oxygen-bearing plants so they can increase the oxygen content of Mars' atmosphere to make it possible for the colonists to move about unencumbered.

When I reread the book recently I had completely forgotten about this element of the plot. It came as a huge surprise to discover that in 1950 Clarke was describing how to terraform Mars to make it habitable for humans. Was he the first to do this? If he wasn't the first, at least came up with a logical way of terraforming, based on the premise that these plants actually exist. And what a grand plan it was: create another sun, a smaller sun that would orbit Mars and supply all the warmth and energy the far-distant sun could not provide. No wonder the colonists want to keep that secret from Earth.

(Clarke later used the same idea of converting a moon into a star, or a long-lived thermonuclear reaction that might as well have been a star. In his second *Odyssey* book, his enigmatic aliens turn Jupiter into a second sun to warm one of its moons that contains life in an ocean under a frozen crust.)

The increased warmth from an ignited Phobos would produce on Mars a thousand years of rapid plant growth, with a subsequent rapid production of oxygen vented into the atmosphere. It would melt the ice caps, provide water, and make the climate more benign. He suggests that in a mere 50 years humans might walk unencumbered on the Martian surface.

Arthur C. Clarke always believed that nothing was impossible if you developed the technology to do it. This book is filled with grand ideas and an optimistic outlook for the future, which generates a sense of wonder. It is what made his stories so readable for me as a teenager and as a young man. Now an old man (I finally have to admit to that), when I re-read his early books I still find them as exciting and full of wonder as I did more than half a century ago.

## E. C. Tubb's *Alien Dust*

*Alien Dust* (the most dated story) uses the old idea of huge rockets taking off from Earth to travel to Mars (as well as Venus), then has them land vertically, using the rocket engines to slow them down until they touch the surface. Then, of course, they take off and return to Earth (where they extrude wings and glide in to land at sea because Earth's air is too thick to land vertically). How large must these (V2-type) rocket ships have been? How much fuel would they have had to carry to lift off with a dozen passengers and supplies for the trip out and additional supplies for the colonists, and still have reserve fuel for lift off from Mars to return? It would be an impossible task, but no one thought that at the time. Nor did they think of multistage rockets, as Wernher Von Braun later advocated. They simply made the rockets bigger, as if that would solve anything. E. C. Tubb skims over this problem with a brief mention of how exact weight requirements are needed for the trip, and that when an idealistic youth (the nephew of the ship's captain) stows

away he has to be ejected into space so they won't waste any more of their precious fuel which is needed for Mars landing and take-off.

*Alien Dust*, although it is read as a novel, is a collection of short stories of varying length, with a five- or ten-year gap between each one, showing the establishment of a colony on Mars, 100 miles south of the North Polar ice cap. It begins in 1995, and the final story chapter is dated 2030. Characters overlap from one story to the next, so there is a feeling of continuity. The colony is established in a wide chasm because the air pressure is just enough at the bottom of this chasm to allow the colonists to breathe.

(I really don't think this would be the case, but it is an idea that often pops up in stories and even in films as recent as the Spanish SF movie, *Stranded*, made in 2001, which has three survivors finding enough air to breathe at the very bottom of the *Valles Marineris* canyon. It seems logical, because on Earth, the deeper you go the higher the atmospheric pressure. This system of canyons is as deep as 8000 metres.)

The dramatic opening of *Alien Dust* has one of three ships crash landing and exploding on arrival. This ship carries most of the food supplies for the colony, so from the outset the colonists are in real trouble. One of the ships has to return to Earth to retrieve more supplies, while the other one is cannibalised for its atomic power plant, which is needed to power the colony. They manage to grow yeast in vats after building a pipeline to the polar ice cap, from where they obtain water to pump to the colony. They all have trouble breathing the thin air, and eventually all suffer from a form of lung disease rather like silicosis. None of them can ever return to Earth because the heavier gravity would kill them after five years on Mars.

Nothing grows in the alien dust of Mars, which they discover is mildly radioactive. When several shiploads of women arrive, the subsequent children born show no signs of abnormality, but no woman is able to have a second child because she is either sterile (from the radiation) or she dies in childbirth giving birth to a mutated or deformed foetus. Eventually the women and children are evacuated, and the colony is about to be abandoned. Earth prefers to send ships to Venus, which (in 1955) was still thought of as a tropical world with abundant possibilities for colonisation.

Somewhat melodramatically, the Martian colonists use the threat of loading a spaceship with radioactive dust to crash land it on Earth, with the implied threat that this will cause cancer or sterility in the women of Earth, as a means of ensuring the colony survives. Why they would want to survive there is beyond comprehension, since all they can eat is yeast hydroponically grown while they all slowly die of lung cancer induced by the radioactive dust that permeates everything. However, although all the women returned to Earth from Mars die of cancer, the children evacuated with them are immune to the cancers produced by the radioactive dust and, now grown up, they want to return to Mars, which for them is home. The book finishes on a positive note after being relentlessly pessimistic until the last few pages.

Once you ignore the assumptions the overall story is based on, the novel does have its engrossing moments. However, of the four books, this one from 1955 is the least readable and the most dated. E. C. Tubb was a good writer, but he was also a pulp writer who churned out hundreds of books under many different names across a long career, and *Alien Dust* is one of his very early books. Although I was impressed by *Alien Dust* when I read it in 1956 or 1957, it is not one I would search for today, unless one is curious or has a need to read all the *Mars* books still extant.

## Philip K. Dick's *Martian Time-Slip*

Why do authors set their futures so close to their present time? Philip K. Dick wrote *Martian Time-Slip* in 1962, but it was not published until 1964, and his projected future (1994) is only 30 years ahead of his own time. In the sixties there was no way a colony could be established on Mars in 30 years. Not even today, with technology advancing at breakneck speed, will 30 years be enough time to send a few people there for a first visit, let alone encourage migration and the establishment of various colonies on a large scale, as depicted by Dick.

Dick has, unlike all writers before 1965 and the *Mariner 4* flyby of Mars who assumed that Mars has a thin but breathable atmosphere, has simply ignored any knowledge of what Mars could possibly have been like, other than a brief mention that a vast canal system would have been speculative until the settlers arrived.

He assumes that day-time temperatures will be hot enough to turn milk sour if it is left unrefrigerated. He has one of his main characters refer to the local Martian natives derogatively as 'Niggers' rather than native inhabitants, and uses the name 'Bleekmen' to further describe them. Was Dick prejudiced against African Americans? Perhaps Dick was not immune to the prevailing feelings toward African Americans.

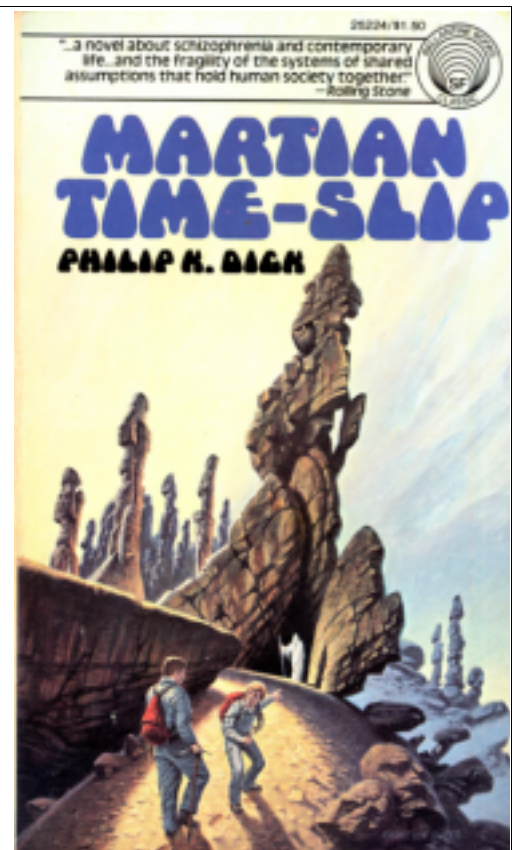
This novel — which was written in the same year as *The Man in the High Castle*, which exhibits German hatred of Jews and Japanese superiority over the Anglo Americans, and also mentions the extermination by the Germans of the Africans in Africa — indicates an underlying prejudice. This prejudice is strongly demonstrated by Arnie Kott, the thug-gish Plumbers' Union leader who hates the Bleekmen, yet has one working for him as a slave.

That name itself conjures up images of sad-looking mysterious beings eternally unhappy at the way their homeland has degenerated both on a physical and a psychological level after they had been pushed aside by the invading colonists. This seems to be a comment on what happened in America several hundred years earlier as invading immigrants pushed the Native Americans further and further out into the wilderness. Or maybe Dick was indirectly criticising all the European powers that pushed aside natives in other parts of the world so they could establish their empires.

My first impression of the colony is of a group of home-steaders transplanted from the Depression's rural America to Mars, where they struggle to exist in a hostile and barren land. They appear to be absolutely ordinary people, and the only reason we know they are on Mars is because it is mentioned several times.

It is not a novel about Mars or even about people adapting to the Martian environment, or how that environment could possibly affect them. It is about working-class (blue-collar) people struggling to survive harsh conditions, and reflects America during the Depression or post-war years, with door-to-door salesmen peddling black market goods, and a repairman, Jack Bohlen, who fixes anything broken because replacement items are unobtainable.

But primarily the novel is about schizophrenia and autism and the ideas people had about those afflictions in the 1960s. Unfortunately this theme dates the novel, which was originally a mainstream novel set in rural America. Having had it rejected along with all his other mainstream novels, Dick added the SF elements. The Mars landscape becomes an Earth-like desert. People can travel there in a couple of days, so there is trading between Mars and Earth.



He has everyone using private helicopters instead of motor vehicles, or else they walk or use bikes because it is easy to pedal in the lower Martian gravity.

Jack Bohlen the repairman, the main character in the novel, was once a schizophrenic who thought he had been cured. However, he is forced to deal with a young boy, suffering from autism, who has visions of a future Mars and a massive apartment building which houses thousands of poor immigrants. Jack begins to re-experience bouts of schizophrenia himself. Arnie Kott, the union boss, thinks he can make money by obtaining the land the apartments are to be built on. Many of his machinations involve forcing Jack to communicate with the autistic boy. Arnie Kott gets what he deserves after undertaking a pilgrimage with the autistic boy to a sacred mountain cave which the Bleekmen believe holds secrets of both the past and the future times, which the boy can see. Arnie experiences a backwards time vision which doesn't go the way he planned.

Philip K. Dick himself suffered episodes of schizophrenia, and was able to convey how this feels as reality slips away from him. I suspect, however, few researchers knew much about autism in the late fifties, so this aspect of the story isn't convincing.

Of the few novels set on or about Mars in the 1950s and '60s, this is the one that least resembles Mars. Dick used none of the then current knowledge of Mars. I think it could have been a much better and more profound story if he really had made some effort to fit his vision of Mars to the then-known facts about the planet.

This story was serialised as *All We Marsmen* in *Worlds of Tomorrow* magazine, before it eventually came out as a novel in 1964 published by Ballantine Books. Many consider this to be one of his best novels. Perhaps it is if one considers it is a novel about about manipulative working-class people and schizophrenia. It could have been a great novel rather than just a good novel.

## D. G. Compton's *Farewell Earth's Bliss*

*Farewell Earth's Bliss* was published in 1966, 11 years later, but would have been written before news of the first Mars flyby arrived, so Compton worked with whatever knowledge was available.

Being a British writer, he came up with the idea of asking what England might do with its unwanted criminals. In the 1700s and 1800s, the British sent them to Australia. In Compton's undated future, the Earth people send their unwanted citizens to Mars. Once a year they use old Moon shuttles for the 12-week trip. The passengers are kept drugged and semi-comatose throughout the journey. The ship functions automatically. These ships are not expected to return. Mars is no use for Earth except as a dumping ground for unwanted people.

The whole idea is preposterous, but Compton is a good enough writer to convince you that it might be possible.

When his spaceship lands not far from where the previous 11 ships had landed, the passengers alight to find a group of the surviving forced colonists waiting for them. Compton has everyone wearing spacesuits on the surface of Mars, which at least reflects reality. These colonists board the ship and confiscate everything on board. They leave the new arrivals there, and tell them they will be back the next day to help shift them over to the colony base camp. However an enormous dust storm envelopes the ship and the colonists are stuck there. Two of them attempt to go outside and are lost in the storm, killed, frozen and desiccated by the extreme cold at night. The storm lasts almost 40 days, by which time half the ship's people have died of starvation while the rest are emaciated and dehydrated. Finally the storm abates, and the survivors are taken to the main camp, where they discover the previous 11 shuttles are used for accommodation and related activities.

Each survivor is billeted with a colonist, and begins his or her lessons on how to survive on Mars. Compton assumes there is some form of fungal-type plant life used for food, apart from the supplies confiscated from the new arrivals. Everything is patched endlessly. Nothing is wasted. Spacesuits are always fixed and reused. When someone doesn't obey the rules of the colony, he or she is forced to stay outdoors at night and freeze to death. Later the offender's clothes and spacesuit are recovered for use by the rest of the colony. As the new arrivals slowly learn, life on Mars is tough, and there is no going back to Earth or the Moon. Everyone works hard; they have no choice. Eventually some small creatures that live underground are discovered eating the ubiquitous fungus, and these are caught and killed for food as well as for their furry skins. They call these creatures rabbits; thus Compton completes his analogy of convicts being sent to Australia. There is no mention of any other ecology which would have been necessary if there are plants and at least one animal.

We follow the life's story of one person in particular; a person who is of African descent. The prejudice he faces from the other characters dates this book firmly in the 1960s. Sometimes Compton forgets that his characters have to wear spacesuits at all times outside a habitat. He has one person piss on the desiccated bodies of the two lost in the initial dust storm after the retrieval of their spacesuits and clothes.

The colony itself has been established near the ice cap because that is their water source. Compton assumes the Martian ice caps will be made of water-ice.



The story is unrelentingly depressing and overly melodramatic.

The final scene takes place a year later. Another shuttle arrives, and the colonists head out, not to welcome the newly arrived inhabitants but to steal from them whatever they can and then to artificially create a dust storm that will last long enough to kill at least half of them. This is the only way they can survive. Mars is too harsh an environment to support more than a few people. On board the new arrival is one coloured girl. Our viewpoint character quietly tells her to hang on, no matter what, before he goes outside to help the others create the dust storm that will envelope the shuttle for 40 or so days.

To Compton's credit his story is about the people, and not about Mars itself. He concerns himself with the social and puritanical structure of the colony as well as the pragmatism of survival. On that basis it works, but there are too many jarring assumptions about Mars for today's readers. Probably it would not be reprinted today.

## Ludek Pesek's *The Earth Is Near*

*The Earth Is Near* by Ludek Pesek was published in 1973 in English.

Originally published in 1970 as *Die Erde ist nah – die Mars Expedition*, it won the prestigious German Children's Book Prize in 1971. It was translated into English and published by Longman Young Books in 1973.

Ludek Pesek was born in Czechoslovakia and educated in Prague. He is both a writer and an astronomical artist, with many of his paintings used to illustrate books such as *Journey to the Planets* (1972), *Planet Earth* (1972), *The Ocean World*



(1973), *UFOs and Other Worlds* (1975), and *The Solar System* (1978), as well as covers and illustrations for books and magazines.

*The Earth is Near* is a seminal book in the history of books about travelling to Mars. It examines the psychological and physical problems that could realistically be expected to occur during such a long voyage, as well as the difficulties in establishing a foothold on the Red Planet itself. Because it was a translation from German into English, it has long been overlooked by many English language readers.

Of the three authors discussed already, Pesek had the advantage of knowledge about Mars that they could not have had. As far as I can tell this, this is the first novel written about such a voyage after the *Viking* and *Mariner* probes had sent back their photographs of the surface of Mars, shattering forever the legends about canals and dying civilisations.

The illustration on the cover of the English hardcover is a painting by Pesek showing the surface pockmarked with craters. This was one of the most unexpected finds from the first series of images sent back from the orbiting satellites. Another discovery was an enormous dust storm that obscured observation of the surface for a long time, so dust and sand storms feature prominently in Pesek's story.

The tone of the book is initially flat, and is told in the first person from the point of view of one of two doctors on board, the psychologist (the other is a medical doctor). We are offered much detail regarding the mental state of the expedition members, the effects of the long confinement in the ships, and the deterioration of their physical abilities as a result of prolonged time in freefall. Pesek's solution to the latter problem is to give everyone a drug that somehow counters the effects of prolonged freefall, but has other side-effects, which become apparent as the voyage progresses.

Twenty crew members occupy a huge mother ship that is part of a convoy of linked ships making the long voyage to Mars. Set at an undetermined time in the future after we have returned and established colonies on the Moon, this expedition is to take a year to get there, spend 400 days on the surface of Mars, before spending another year returning to Earth.

There is nothing overly dramatic in the story apart from a 'swarm' of meteorites that almost collide with the ship as they approach the insertion point for orbit around Mars. It is suggested that these meteorites are also making long orbits around Mars (implying that, as they fall, they create the cratered surface). The crew members cannot change their trajectory (as they might in a film like *Star Wars*) for fear of failing to achieve Mars orbit. Fortunately the meteorites miss the convoy by about 30 kilometres, and orbital insertion is achieved.

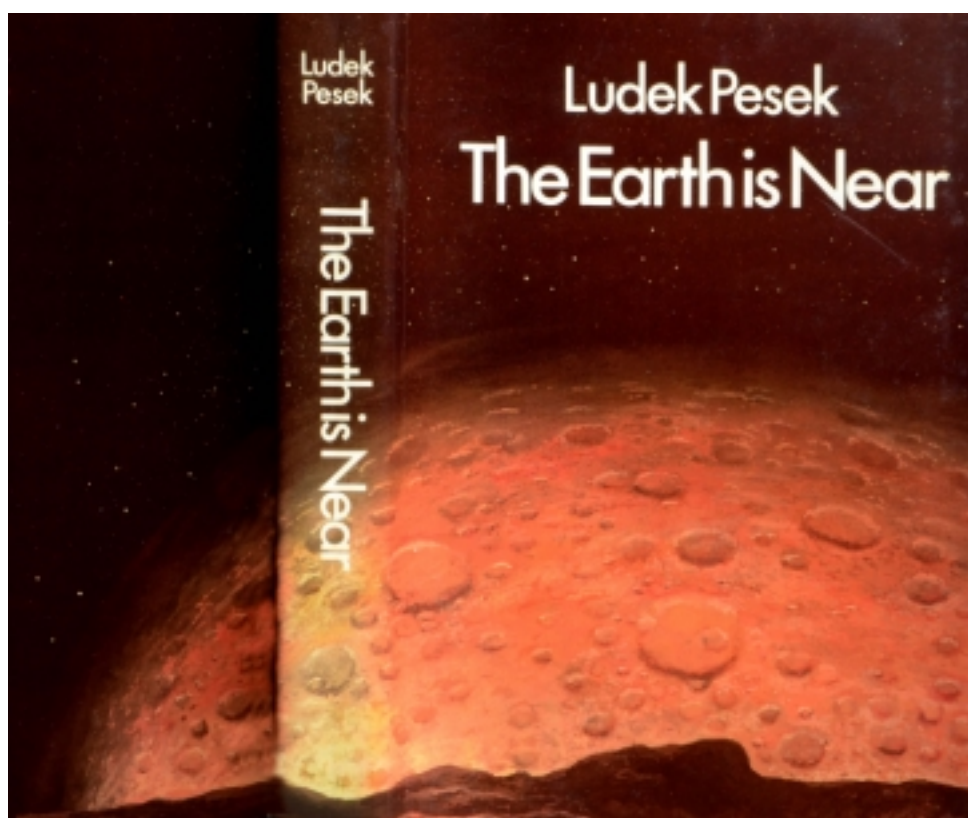
The convoy slowly manoeuvres into a parallel orbit with Phobos, approaches, and lands on the surface. The mother ship and some of the others are separated and fixed to the surface of Phobos as a space station-like base, from which they can use a landing module and some of the smaller cargo freighters carrying equipment to travel down to the surface, where they will establish a base to stay for 400 days.

(Arthur C. Clarke had already used Mars's moons as a staging base for trips down to Mars and back up again; it was a common idea, and obviously more practical than trying to land a huge ship or convoy of ships on the planet's surface. This approach is now being considered for future Mars expeditions.)

This first third of the book is titled 'The Long Voyage'.

The second third is titled 'The First Man on Mars'. The narration becomes more lively as we experience through the narrator's eyes the initial attempts at exploration. The main characters have a problem with the landing: a huge dust storm obscures the area where they are intending to land, which, because of its colouration, may harbour some form of primitive life, but they cannot land as they cannot see the terrain beneath them. Instead they travel beyond the storm and land in an area of flat desert 600 kilometres off target. They are stuck here and have to make the best of it. The landing party consists of several smaller cargo ships, and one larger ship that is the main base. The mother ship stays on Phobos.

There had been some conflict with the original captain while the crew went into training. He is replaced two days before the voyage begins with a military-minded man. The original captain is demoted to second in command. Once the expedition reaches the surface of Mars, animosity develops between these two men, and the crew members divide their support equally between them. What are the expedition's objectives? Some crew members want to follow the original plan and travel to the designated landing area. Others want to explore the local surroundings.



While establishing a perimeter, they almost lose one of their small tractor vehicles when it disappears into superfine soft sand. This dust-like sand fills craters, making them invisible and presenting a constant danger whenever the explorers move about on the surface. The fine sand also gets into everything, so the crew members are always having problems getting equipment to work. Utterly exhausted because they experience the effects of gravity after a year in freefall, they become prone to accidents. One of the landing craft is damaged and they have to salvage what they can.

They spend a lot of time probing the surrounding area to determine what is solid and what is not. Before they could do much of anything they are enveloped in a sand storm that inserts fine grit into their equipment, and prevents them from exploring further out from their base.

Travelling anywhere becomes so difficult they soon realise they will not be able to drive to the original landing location. However, that has become the obsession of the second in command. An expedition is dispatched. It takes weeks for the expedition members to gain a few hundred kilometres. They become stuck on a ridge surrounded by hidden craters. To make any headway they must walk out in front of their tractors and probe the sand for solid ground underneath, a difficult job while wearing spacesuits. Also, they must make many detours. Often a whole day is spent probing and slowly crawling forward, only to gain a kilometre or less in the right direction after having travelled 40 kilometres or so zigzagging around hidden dust-filled craters.

The descriptions of dust storms and the prelude to such storms are beautiful and evocative. The feelings of the team members as they struggle to reach even simple goals under harsh conditions are believable. At this point the book is hard to put down.

One of the crew members is injured. Because the others cannot remove the space suit to treat him he slowly becomes infected with gangrene. Finally, after many delays, a small helicopter is sent from the base to rescue the injured man. The helicopter's gyroscopic instrument doesn't work, making navigation very difficult. The crew use signal rockets fired up into the atmosphere so that the pilot can find his destination. Unfortunately the injured man later dies back at the base. He is buried near the landing module and covered by a cairn of rocks. He becomes the first man buried on Mars.

The last third of the book, called 'The Long March', is about the continuing attempt to reach the original proposed landing site. However, the terrain becomes more and more difficult to traverse, too many detours around impassable terrain are made, equipment is lost, so the captain finally allows the helicopter to make an exploratory trip towards the planned landing site. The pilot reports seeing something green before losing communication. It lands first where the group is stranded, refuels, and heads off towards the place where the ship should have landed. The helicopter doesn't return, so another person is lost, along with valuable equipment. Still the second in command wants to continue on foot while the others want to return to base. The team splits into two groups. One heads off with the second in command while the other group prepares to head back to the ships. Their tractor overturns and its contents, which includes oxygen supplies, tumbles down into a deep crater, so they send a radio message to the team heading off in the direction of the lost helicopter to come back and rescue them. This team thinks it a ruse to make them return and ignores them.

Their scheduled time on Mars is coming to an end, and

they must return to Phobos if they wish to take the mother ship back to Earth. The date of departure is fixed. Finally the other half, dissatisfied with the second in command and his obsession, return to find those they left weren't joking. They really did need rescuing. Finally they all return to base for the departure to Phobos, then on to Earth.

Mars has beaten them.

As they are about to leave, the second in command goes out through the airlock and heads off into the desert. He has decided he is not going back. Finally the others have no choice but to take off and leave him. The final scene shows the ship taking off as seen from the viewpoint of the second in command standing alone on Mars in his dusty spacesuit. We know he only has 90 days of food and oxygen left in the base, and after that he will be dead.

Pesek has crafted an original story that shows humans who will never give up on their dreams no matter the cost. It is at times pessimistic, but at the same time it is optimistic. I believe he sets a high standard with this story about the first voyage to Mars, a standard that many other writers might well emulate. He covers it all, technically, psychologically, emotionally, and from the point of view of the grand adventure. Anyone coming after him could only apply variations to this basic storyline.

It is a great pity that this book was never well known, as many later stories and novels merely that cover the same ground.

## The new space race

In December 1968 American astronauts went to the Moon. For the first time we gained a glimpse of the dark side, which no one had ever seen before. The Russians had already sent a probe to the Moon on 14 September 1968. It was a desperate attempt to outdo the Americans, who had been testing the command module for Moon missions in near-Earth orbit.

Panicked, the Americans hastily readied their crew for *Apollo 8*. This was only the second manned Apollo mission. The mission was to go around the Moon and the astronauts were to test trans-lunar injection with the systems on board. They were not able to land because the landing module wasn't ready. NASA believed that if it didn't do something spectacular the Russians would beat them to the Moon. Departing on 21 December 1968, three days later they circled the Moon and were the first humans to witness Earthrise on the Moon. They took the iconic photo of the half-full Earth sitting just above the horizon of the Moon. It is no doubt the most famous picture ever taken of our home world.

*Apollo 9* tested docking procedures in Earth orbit, *Apollo 10* again went to the Moon to test the landing module, but without actually landing. It approached to a distance of 15 kilometres and the crew took some spectacular photos of the cratered surface beneath. It wasn't until 16 July 1969 that *Apollo 11* went to the Moon, and for the first time humans stepped onto the surface of another world. The astronauts spent 21 hours 31 minutes and 40 seconds on the surface.

A near-fatal mishap with *Apollo 13* put a dent in the American enthusiasm for space adventures, and they became more cautious after that. On subsequent Moon missions, astronauts with moon buggies drove around on the surface collecting samples and generally having a great time. *Apollo 17* in December 1972 was the last time humans went to the Moon. Having won the space race with the Russians

with *Apollo 11*, when Armstrong stepped tentatively onto the moon's surface, the Americans didn't want to spend any more money on moon missions. They abandoned the Moon, much to the disappointment of SF fans all around the world.

But a new race had begun. The Russians had sent probes to Venus and to Mars, as had the Americans, but now they resumed this activity with greater intensity.

## Ian Watson's *The Martian Inca*

The only two *Mars* novels I came across in the 1970s were very different from each other, but both had the underlying theme of a contest between Russia and America; a time of Mutually Assured Destruction with both nations on the brink of a nuclear catastrophe. There was tension and conflict between two radically different ideological approaches to life, which is manifested in a race between them to be the first to go to Mars.

These two books, *Man Plus* by **Frederik Pohl**, published in 1976, and *The Martian Inca*, by **Ian Watson**, published in 1977, are radically different from each other, although both are concerned with a major transformation. *The Martian Inca* is more mainstream SF, while *Man Plus* is traditional SF with mainstream elements. Pohl evolved from the pulp tradition of SF in America, while Watson came from the more literary British tradition established by such people as H. G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon.

Both authors delved deep into the characters of their protagonists, something not often done in science fiction novels, and this puts them head and shoulders above other books of the time (mid 1970s).

At the beginning of *The Martian Inca* a Russian robotic probe, which has returned from Mars carrying a sample of Martian soil, has a mishap. Instead of landing safely in Kazakhstan it crash-lands on the Altiplano of Bolivia, high in the Andes Mountains. It crashes just behind a village that is having a fiesta. People rush to the site to see what has happened, and to grab whatever they can for salvage. Anyone who handled the parachute cloth used to slow the descent, or who ran their hands through the spilled Martian soil or who breathed in the dust of it, almost immediately is struck down with a terrible affliction. Doctors are brought in from La Paz to try to cure the villagers. Police and Army are brought in to control the villagers so none will leave. No matter what the doctors do, all those afflicted die horribly, except for two who manage to avoid any treatment. One, Julio, runs off and hides in a cave while the other, Angelina, is kept hidden by the tribe's healer, so the foreign doctors from La Paz won't touch her. He knew she would survive if left alone. They become paralysed, go into a coma, and appear to be dead before they come back to life a few weeks later.

Meanwhile three American astronauts are on their way to Mars. NASA tries to warn them about the danger of the Martian soil and to tell them not to land as planned.

The survivor Julio comes out of his cave with an enhanced perception of the world around him. He decides he wants to recreate the ancient Inca Empire. He sets out, alongside his girlfriend Angelina, who has also been transformed, with some followers from the village to start a revolution. Government soldiers take the remains of the Russian probe back to La Paz. The Russians want it back. The Americans want to examine the two survivors of the Martian infection. They

need to know what happened in case it could happen to their astronauts who are going to Mars. The Bolivians don't want anything to do with the Russians or the Americans, and keep their borders closed to both.

The American astronauts planned to land and examine Mars's surface, then, after various tests, return to the command module and put into position a huge unfolded mirror over one of the polar ice caps to reflect sunlight down to melt it to increase the carbon dioxide content of the air and thus warm the planet. But they change the plan. Ignoring the advice from NASA, they decide that two of them will descend to the surface while the third will remain on orbit in the command module.

This is the first Mars story that mentions the sky being pink, so Watson was paying attention when the first photos came back from the Mars *Rovers* in July and September 1976.

One of the astronauts has a minor accident while setting up an external habitat in which to examine the soil in detail. His space suit is pierced near his foot. The other one treats his partner's damaged foot, wiping away some blood and some dust that entered through the damaged suit. Within hours the astronaut is afflicted with the same disease that wiped out the Bolivian villagers. NASA advises leaving him alone without treatment.

The Russians have been sending probes to Venus, planning to terraform the planet by seeding the atmosphere with bacteria and algae that will break it down by consuming carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen, a process that will take many decades. They have decided to leave Mars to the Americans.

The Americans are still trying to work out what to do about their own astronauts. The sick astronaut has been transformed — he has visions of how life on Mars actually works. He wants to continue with his experiments to verify his visions, but the astronaut who remains in the command module wants both the others to return. NASA advises not to let them return but to leave them there longer. Meanwhile a dust storm is developing as a result of the mirror the lone astronaut in orbit has placed over the pole. The night before they are due to return to orbit the recovered astronaut cuts his partner on the leg with a scalpel and rubs in some Martian soil, knowing it contains the micro-organisms which will infect and transform him.

There is no way NASA will allow them to return to Earth, so the astronaut in orbit is ordered to return to Earth.

On Mars the developing storm damages the lander beyond repair. All that survives is the small geodesic dome established for the soil experiments. The astronauts now have nothing to eat, so it is assumed that in the long term they will not survive. The implication is also that Mars will remain a very dangerous place for humans.

*The Martian Inca* contains much speculation about evolution of consciousness. The author suggests that this kind of transformation has taken place randomly over millennia, giving rise to ancient Egyptian civilisation, the establishment of the Inca Empire, which almost overnight grew out of a few obscure hillside tribes and became a dominant culture until the Spanish destroyed it, and the evolution of life in general throughout the universe.

Much of the narrative concentrates not on survival but on the back story: the lives of the astronauts within the fragmented paranoid society of the period that Watson extrapolates from the world of the 1970s.

This book could be included in a subcategory of books about invasion from space. Such invasion stories are not always about Mars. The following book is.





## Frederik Pohl's *Man Plus*

*Man Plus* by Frederik Pohl (1976) is an unusual Mars story, because very little of it takes place on Mars.

In chapter 3 (pp. 18-19), Pohl sums up a history of what we know about Mars, starting from Schiaparelli's canali in 1877, to Lowell Thomas's canals and ancient cities, to improvements in telescopic viewing and the eventual realisation that Mars is too cold, has too little air, and retains no surface water, to the first Mariner flybys that convince the world that the planet has no Martian Race. He briefly explains how an unprotected human could be killed on Mars from freezing, lack of air, thirst, exposure to unshielded solar radiation, and so on. Nothing grows, so there is nothing there humans could eat. An unprotected human would be lucky to last 15 minutes on the surface.

He mentions that an unprotected human would also die in Antarctica, but we still go there and survive. We survive by bringing a kinder environment with us (p. 20).

We would do this on the Moon, since we can't survive unprotected there either. But the Moon can be supplied from Earth with essentials at any time. A supply rocket can reach the Moon in a few days.

Not so Mars; it is too far away. It can only be reached when it most closely approaches Earth. Earth orbits the sun twice while Mars only makes one orbit. There are two months or a bit less when both are on the same side of the sun and in line. Any trip to Mars must take place so the ship can arrive when the planets are at their closest. The return journey cannot take place immediately after arriving because it returns to Earth it won't be there; it will be further around its orbit of the sun. The ship must wait almost an earth year before commencing the return journey to guarantee it will arrive at the same place in the orbit at the correct time. The Mars colony must be self-sustaining. Changing Mars to make

it suitable for human occupation would take centuries, but in this story the characters are trying to prevent a cataclysm of our own making on Earth. The only solution is to alter humans so they can live on Mars. This is the premise of Pohl's story.

Mars Plus is not about going to Mars. It is about making a human into something that can live on Mars: changing a human to fit the Martian climate, and not trying to make Mars suitable for humans.

Take away the lungs and replace them with a miniaturised oxygen-regenerating and circulatory system, remove the skin and replace it with something that can withstand solar radiation, augment the major muscles with mechanical ones and the need for food is almost eliminated, replace the eyes with special cameras that can see infrared wavelengths as well as ultraviolet and beyond, and for energy add solar wings to absorb energy from the sun or radiation beamed down from a Mars-orbiting satellite. What do you have? A cyborg.

Is a cyborg still human, or is it something else? This is the question that Pohl poses in this novel.

The first attempt fails. The subject's brain ceases functioning from too much unprocessable input, and he dies. The next experimental cyborg suffers a broken leg, so the third in line, Roger Torraway, steps up, not quite willing to be transformed.

The escape of information about the cyborg project prompts a new space race between America, China, and Russia, who are competing for the same end result. There is much unrest in the world, with small wars going on in many different places, and the general belief that humans need to establish a colony on Mars to prevent them being wiped out like the dinosaurs as a result of our own doing, not some accidental event from outer space.

Pohl paints vivid images of a world descending into chaos: inevitable world war and planet-wide destruction unless there is a change of direction. This background is extrapolated from the reality we know existed during the 1960s and 1970s, and some of it is very much like what is happening right now. One of the events that might delay the inevitable could be a project to establish a human presence on Mars.

Pohl extrapolates that the Spacelab will continue, becoming ever bigger and grander, doing the job that is now done by the International Space Station. Pohl could not have known that USA would abandon the Spacelab, allowing it to burn up in the atmosphere as it fell back to Earth. He is more accurate in his prediction that room-sized computers would shrink to the size of a backpack, which the cyborg wears and needs for proper functioning, but the super-miniaturisation of computers seems to have been beyond imagining in 1976.

The modifications to make a human into a cyborg seem reasonable and possible, although Pohl does not offer a great deal of specific information. He suggests enough to make the project seem plausible.

Roger Torraway is an unforgettable character. He becomes a monster to look at, with glowing lenses for eyes, skin like a rhinoceros, and strange bat wings extruding from his shoulders to stretch out above his head for gathering solar radiation. Everything — eyes, ears, lungs, nose, mouth, calculating systems, perception centres, heart — is replaced or augmented, rebuilt for the sole purpose of surviving on Mars. Underneath, he is still very human. He is worried about his wife, who is having an affair with one of the people working to turn him into a cyborg, but there is nothing he

can do about it since as part of the cyborg process he has been emasculated. He has problems adjusting to heightened awareness, and for a while he believes himself to be a monster.

As these inner feelings are resolved Roger comes to accept himself for what he is.

The cyborg team accompanies him to Mars, where for the first time he is allowed to be free. This process occupies only the last couple of chapters, and the trip details are glossed over in a paragraph or two. Roger's experience of what it is like to be a creature that can live on the surface of Mars as it is, and how he sees the beauty that mere humans cannot see, is the highlight of a profound study in what it is to be human.

Some chapters begin with an odd first-person statement usually beginning with ... 'we saw', 'we did', 'we understood that Roger was' ... and so on, before dropping back into the third-person narrative from Roger's viewpoint. It is revealed in the epilogue that the whole project had been instigated by artificial intelligences, which consist of various worldwide computer networks that think they will be destroyed if humanity destroys itself. They wish to continue existing, so they subtly manipulate government programs in various countries to engineer humans to be able to live on another world. These AIs create the impetus behind the Man Plus project. By moving humanity off Earth they save some of humanity but they themselves will also be able to survive.

Man Plus is one of Pohl's best stories.

### Kevin J. Anderson's *Climbing Olympus*

As a contrast (jumping to 1994), *Climbing Olympus* by **Kevin J. Anderson** all takes place on Mars, with a couple of flash-back scenes on Earth to set up some background explanations. This novel also deals with transforming and augmenting humans so they can live on Mars unencumbered by spacesuits and habitats. There is a reference in this story to Americans working on a similar project to create a *man-plus*: a nice homage to Frederik Pohl's story. Anderson doesn't refer to his *Martians* as being cyborgs. This is because they are not cyborgs (or humans augmented with mechanical and electronic devices), but surgically modified humans with extra lungs and thicker skin and other natural enhancements. Although sterilised (with vasectomies) they were not emasculated. They retain more of their human characteristics than does Pohl's cyborg.

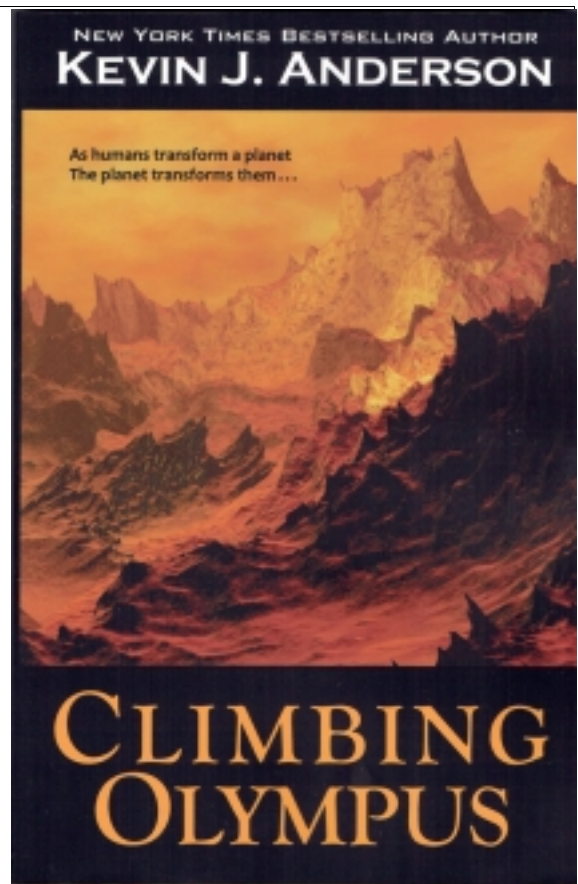
A corrupt Russian government (that wants to prevent the Americans getting ahead of them) has commissioned Dr Rachel Dycheck to augment humans so they can live on Mars. She has a choice of her society's criminals and unwanted prisoners in Siberia to experiment with. She offers them the chance to be free if they undergo the complex surgeries needed to make them able to survive in the harsh conditions on Mars, and they accept. Many die during the process, but enough survive to complete the project. Taking them to Mars over the four-month journey, the ship gradually lowers the temperature and the air pressure so that when the ship arrives they will be conditioned to what they will find on the surface: extreme cold, often as low as minus 100C, and air pressure that is barely more than one per cent that of Earth's. Some of them die on the way. Others die on Mars after a few days, leaving only the toughest of them to do their jobs. Their work on Mars is to build habitats for the humans who will be following and to begin the process of terra-forming Mars. Since the project was secret and the UNSA

knows little about it, they are most upset when Russia announces it has landed on Mars humans who can live on the surface.

When the first augmented humans realise that by terra-forming Mars they will doom themselves because they would not be able to live in such a climate, they revolt, and the toughest of them, their leader Boris, publicly executes the UNSA administrator on Mars by breaking his neck during a live broadcast to Earth. Now wanted for murder, these augmented humans known as Adins (first in Russian) race off into the rugged terrain of the land near an extinct volcano Pavonis Mons where they hide out. Eventually everyone thinks they are dead.

On Earth in Russia, Dr Dycheck had created more advanced surgically altered humans for living on Mars. These she calls Dva (second in Russian). This time she asks for volunteers, which include scientists, doctors, and other professional people from a minority group that had been exiled from their own country. Their idea is to recreate their country on Mars where they will be able to live without fear of repression and exile. There will be no return to Earth. Dr Dycheck is called in by the UN to explain her reasons for doing what she had done, illegal and secretive. Unhappy with her explanations, they send her to Mars as punishment to oversee her Dva begin the transforming of the planet. She is the Administrator.

Kevin J. Anderson has his story with Dr Dycheck on Mars awaiting replacement in a day or so and visiting the site of an avalanche that had killed half of her Dva workforce. The novel crosses back and forth between her and the activities at Port Lowell, the main base, and the five still living Adin led by Boris (15 years later) living in caves high up the slopes of Pavonis Mons. Boris is still determined to stop the transformation of Mars, and believes the whole planet belongs to him and his crew since they are the only ones able to live



there. What spurs him on is that his woman is pregnant and about to give birth. He knows the baby will be human and will not survive being born; unable to breathe the icy thin air it will die. He wants it to die so he can show the humans at Port Lowell that unaltered humans should not be on Mars. He takes one of the other Adin with him. They descend the slopes of Pavonis Mons and attack a water reclamation and pumping station run by Dva. Boris wrecks the pump and the pipes and water spills out, freezing before beginning to sublimate. His companion bursts into the habitat of the Dva and tries to kill the five in there, but only manages to kill two before they kill him. Boris retreats back up Pavonis Mons, leaving his dead companion there.

When Dr Dychek arrives she discovers the dead Adin, and is excited that some of her first augmented humans are still alive. She follows the tracks left by Boris and discovers the hideout on Pavonis Mons where she also discovers that Boris' woman Cora Marisovna is pregnant and about to give birth. She convinces the woman to come with her back to Port Lowell, where there is medical equipment to help her.

Angry that Dr Dychek has found them, Boris threatens to kill her, but Cora intervenes. He disappears outside, where he pushes the rover Dr Dychek uses over the side of a cliff. When Dychek and Cora leave they find the rover gone, and no sign of Boris.

Back at the base they are worried that Dr Dychek has not returned and cannot be contacted by radio, so the new administrator goes out to search for her in the only other rover. He has only a few hours, because a massive storm is threatening. Not knowing where Dr Dychek has gone, he heads off to the site of the avalanche where the Dva were killed, thinking she might have gone there one last time before returning to Earth.

The other surviving Adin help Dr Dychek reach the rover to find out if it is still okay. These are tough machines, and it soon rights itself. No damage has been done. She manages to get Cora inside, where suddenly her labour intensifies. The baby is about to be born. Boris is furious and rushes down to the rover to try to smash his way in. He wants to kill all the occupants. He smashed a small hole in the wind-screen which Dr Dychek manages to patch, but to be on the safe side she takes off her space suit and puts the newly born baby inside where a proper air pressure can be maintained. Cora is having trouble breathing the thicker air so she goes outside where she is immediately attacked by Boris. Dr Dychek starts the rover and it makes its way down the side of the volcano, following the gully it had been dropped into. Her last sight of Cora is of her wrestling the spear from Boris and stabbing him in the chest.

At the same time Jesus Keefer, the new administrator, has arrived at the avalanche site and has seen a Dva running away. He and his companion follow, and end up in a dead end. They discover a fake rock door, which they slide open and follow a tunnel deeper into the cliff side. They go through several doors which are actually airlocks, and finally enter a large series of partially pressurised chambers where there are many Dva workers. There is a garden and suddenly the leader of this group confronts them. These are the Dva that had been supposedly killed in the avalanche. Their plan all along was to install a separate habitat so they could give birth to human children who could survive. In this way they could claim Mars for themselves. By producing descendants they could claim the land for their children, thus recreating their lost homeland on a new world.

All the men were sterilized during the medical processes that made them Adin or Dva, but the women were not. The

vasectomies were not always carried out correctly, thus allowing Boris to become a father. The Dva have brought frozen sperm with them to impregnate their womenfolk. Their idea was to present the children, once born, to the base to show the whole world that humans will be able to survive on Mars, even before full terraforming is completed. Unfortunately they had been discovered too soon. Their women still had a few months to go before giving birth. They knew nothing of the whereabouts of Dr Dychek, and hadn't seen her since the fake avalanche.

Before the sand storm arrives with full force, the new administrator and the leader of the Dva head back to Port Lowell. Dr Dychek also finally makes it back to base and gets her newborn baby into the medical centre. News of this baby causes a sensation at Port Lowell, and news of its birth is broadcast back to Earth.

Somebody bangs on the habitat wall. As they look out through a window the crew members see a badly injured Cora lying in the dust. She had been severely beaten and dumped there by Boris, who again has disappeared. However, he soon turns up and tries to smash his way in to the medical centre. He is determined to kill the baby to prove his point that unaltered humans cannot live on Mars. Meanwhile, the new administrator has returned with the leader of the missing Dva in order to see the first human baby born on Mars.

At this point Boris smashes his way in, and there is an explosive decompression of the medical base. Dr Dychek cuts Boris with a surgical laser, forcing him back outside. She tries to patch the hole while the Dva leader rushes out to confront Boris. Boris kills his new opponent, receiving further serious injuries in the fight. Knowing he has lost his battle, he rushes off to hide in the wilderness, alone and unwanted. The last we see of him, he is climbing Mount Olympus, where he feels he will be safe from humans. Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in the whole solar system, is his final retreat.

This story deals with the people who came to change Mars, and end up being changed themselves. Kevin J. Anderson portrays the minds and feelings of all the different humans with great skill and empathy, and crafts a memorable story that reflects ideas first presented in Pohl's much earlier book. The two books complement each other, by giving both the American side (*Man Plus*) and the Russian side (*Climbing Olympus*) of a Mars settlement project, although there is almost a 20-year gap between the writing and publication of each book.

## More Mars from Pohl

In 1994, **Frederik Pohl** produced *Mars Plus*, with **Thomas T. Thomas**, a sequel to *Man Plus*.

The events take place 50 years after the conclusion of *Man Plus*. I suspect the bulk of this story, if not all, was written by Thomas T. Thomas (perhaps from a plot suggested by Pohl); it doesn't read like a novel written by Frederik Pohl, although it has his name on the cover.

Mars has a population of about 30,000 scattered over several colonies, mainly populated by humans as well as partially modified human/cyborg combinations. Also outside the colony are a number of free cyborgs, including Roger Torraway who is now the oldest cyborgs to inhabit the planet.

At the end of *Man Plus*, Frederik Pohl reveals that the computers controlling the worldwide computer net have



become sentient, and manipulate events to create the programs that enable humans to settle on Mars. This was for their own preservation as well as that of humankind, because if there was a world war, everyone, human and AI, would lose out.

On Mars the computer intelligences control everything needed for the colonists to survive, but they are secretly still manipulating events for their own purposes, one of which is to set up a group around the edges of the solar system.

The story involves a young female spy sent to Mars to find out what is going on in Valles Marineris. She represents the company that was once NASA but is now privately owned. It lays claim to this area and to the cyborg Roger Torraway (who appears briefly at the beginning, and reappears only towards the end of the story.) A New Zealand group as well as one from Korea is interested in the same area. There is much talk about terraforming Mars by smashing comets into it to increase the water and atmospheric content, but the computer intelligences oppose the plan, since it would likely damage the delicate balance that exists on the planet.

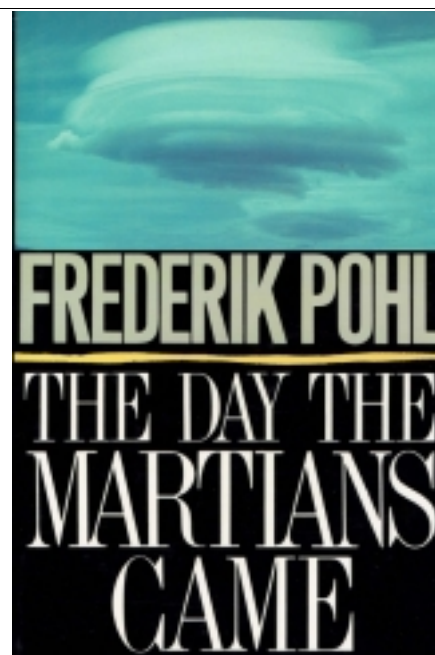
A group of dissidents realise that the computers are manipulating events, and they want to stop them. Everywhere they go is monitored, so they have found a disused part of the colony, long abandoned because the ground they bored the tunnels in was too unstable, and in here they set up a secure hiding place. They are trying to construct a computer to generate viruses to be inserted into the mainframes to disrupt all the AIs that control Mars.

The book contains a lot of talk about computers. I suspect the content about computers and computer human interfacing with implanted chips and other computer parts has been written by Thomas T. Thomas. The book provides a lot of background information about how this works and how the colony operates, which slows the main action. I'm not sure whether this book was meant to be written for younger readers or for adults; it has the feel of a juvenile novel, but there is enough weird sex between human and partial cyborg-enhanced human to make it unlikely to be marketed to juveniles.

I suspect Frederik Pohl's name is on this book so that Thomas T. Thomas could use the character Roger Torraway and the implied future of Mars suggested by Pohl in *Man Plus*. There is little in the way of character development. Mars Plus reads like a straightforward adventure set on Mars, which includes romance, intrigue, a couple of fight scenes, and an enigmatic ending regarding the Artificial Intelligences and the differences between them and human minds. I would place this book in category two, whereas *Man Plus* and *Climbing Olympus* definitely fall into category three.

In 1988 Frederik Pohl published a book called *The Day the Martians Came*. It is a fix-up rather than a novel: a collection of short stories, five of which were written and published in 1976 and 1977, one of which was written in 1972, and another comes from 1967 (about the time as he wrote *Man Plus*). This earlier story, called 'The Day After the Martians Came', is probably the genesis for the other stories. He also writes some segments to connect the individual stories, as well as three extra stories for this collection. It almost reads as a novel, but feels more like a television mini-series.

The underlying theme, expressed in the first story, is that the expedition to Mars that takes 270 people there is a



disaster. An accident with the ship carrying their supplies occurs on landing. Through mismanagement and misuse of materials, everyone on Mars is dying of radiation poisoning. The mission is abandoned, and the 38 of the 270 astronauts that survive return to Earth. A short time before they are due to leave they discover under the ground under the ice of the North Pole an ancient series of caves and a city that is occupied by seal-like creatures that are the remnants of an older Martian civilisation. They decide to bring five of these Martians back to Earth with them. That first story is straight SF, and so is the very final piece, which is from the Martians' collective viewpoint. The second last story links the other stories to complete the story arc.

The stories between the first and the second last are set on Earth (in the USA, except for one story) and deal with how people (usually opportunists and con men) are affected by the news of the discovery of Martians and of their arrival on Earth. The setting is an alternate America to that of the 1980s and 1990s. Real people appear in the short linking narratives, people such as Carl Sagan, James Randi, and Oprah Winfrey. The stories provide a delightfully sardonic and exaggerated view of the America of the 1980s decade. Several of them overlap enough to make the whole seem like a novel rather than a collection of stories.

This book falls into my first category, because it includes the discovery of an ancient underground complex and the remnants of living Martians, as well as its feeling of being in a parallel time frame. The blurb describes it as being a satirical look at a near-future America, but it is an alternate America of the same time period in which it was written. It shows the strength of Frederik Pohl writing skills, and how perceptive he was at describing the American psyche.

This is the only Mars book that I have from the 1980s. I suspect that there was little interest in Mars during that decade.

— Part 2 of this article will appear in *SF Commentary* 94 or 95.

**Colin Steele's** qualifications include MA, GradDipLib, FAHA, FLCIP, FALIA, and KtCross Spain. He is an Emeritus Fellow of the Australian National University since 2004. Before that, he was Director of Scholarly Information Strategies and University Librarian, ANU (1980–2002). He has been writing SF reviews for *The Canberra Times* for many years, and been contributing to *SF Commentary* since the 1970s. The following reviews appeared first in *The Canberra Times* 2015–2016.

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# Colin Steele

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## The field

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### Books about SF and fantasy

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#### ***The View from the Cheap Seats: Selected Non-Fiction* Neil Gaiman (Headline; \$29.99)**

When Neil Gaiman came to Canberra nearly a decade ago for an *Canberra Times*/Australian National University Meet the Author event, he stayed long after the signing session talking to fans and did not get back to the Hyatt Hotel until after midnight. Now we would be unlikely to host him to Canberra, given his subsequent rise in global popularity.

Gaiman has a busy media time ahead for the rest of 2016. A TV series of *American Gods* will be released later in the year, while four of Gaiman's Likely Stories are being adapted as a UK Sky TV series.

Gaiman has, however, always had a sceptical view of media celebrity, a sentiment confirmed after attending the 2010 Academy Awards ceremony, when *Coraline* was nominated for best animated feature film. The non-fiction collection, *The View from the Cheap Seats*, takes its name from Gaiman's essay about those Academy Awards.

The collection comprises 550 pages, with 84 chapters arranged in 10 subject sections. Gaiman has stated, 'It's not every speech, introduction or article I've written, but it's all the speeches that seemed important, all the articles I was still proud of, all the introductions that seemed to be about something bigger than just telling people about the book or author they were going to read.'

Gaiman, who lives in America, begins with a personal credo, concluding that 'in the battle between guns and ideas, ideas will eventually win'. His 2013 lecture for the UK Reading Agency champions the 'Freedom to read, freedom of ideas and freedom of communication'.

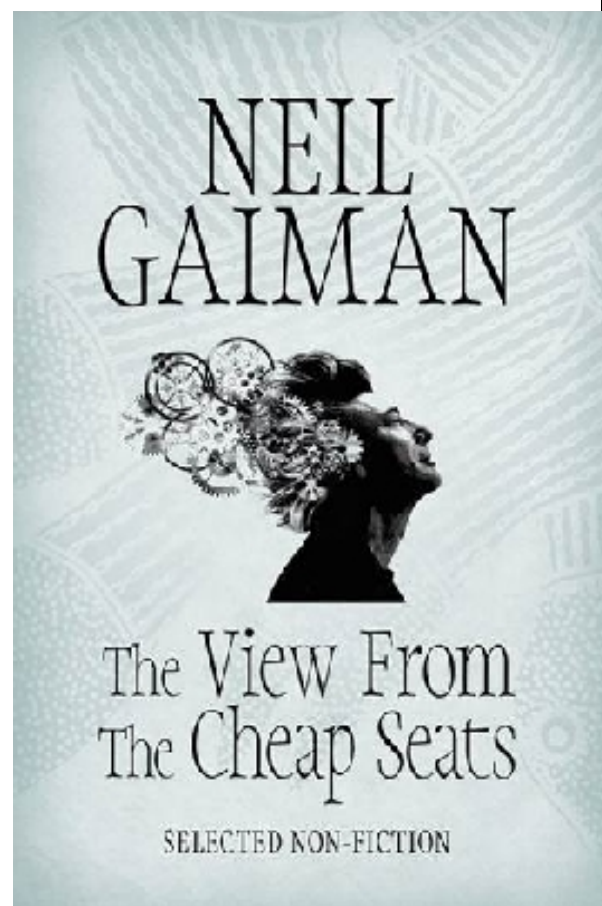
Quoting statistics that 'half of all the prisoners in the United Kingdom have a reading age of an 11-year-old', Gaiman argues strongly on behalf of education, libraries, and reading. Gaiman's compassionate views on humanity are evidenced in the essay 'So Many Ways To Die', describing his visit to a Syrian refugee camp in 2014.

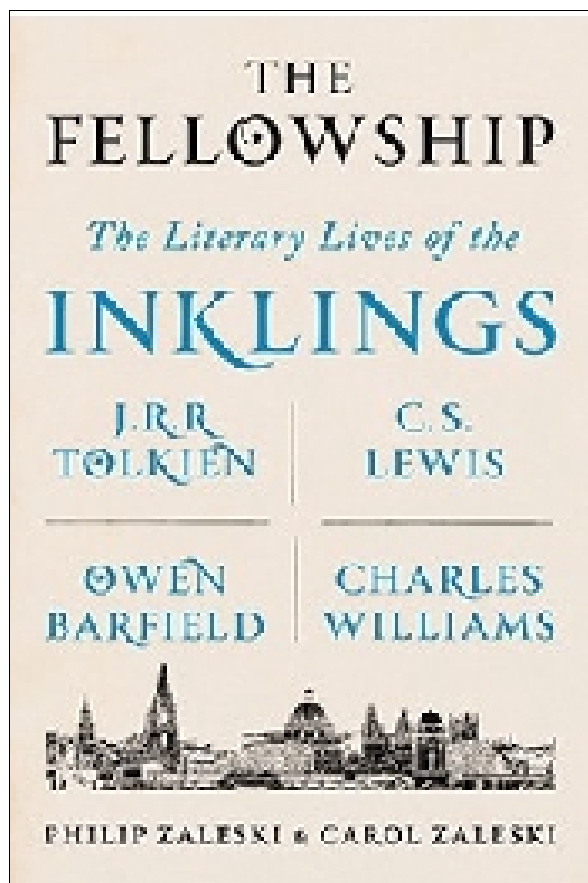
Gaiman recalls the books and comics he read, with the approval of parents, who 'didn't have any kind of rules about what I couldn't read'. He ranges over favourite authors such

as Terry Pratchett, Stephen King, Edgar Allen Poe, Ray Bradbury, and James Thurber.

The work of musicians such as Lou Reed and Gaiman's wife Amanda Palmer are covered in other chapters, especially Gaiman's attendance at Palmer's Dresden Dolls Halloween performance in 2010. His long section on comics reflects his deep personal involvement in the genre, arguing, through accounts of the various versions of the *Sandman* comic, that comic books should be taken seriously within literary circles.

*The View from the Cheap Seats* is a book to dip into, not only for the insights into Gaiman's life, especially his childhood and teenage years, but also for his accounts of books, films, art, and music that have influenced him. It will have consid-





erable appeal to readers beyond Gaiman's many fans.

### ***First Light***

**Erica Wagner (ed.) (Unbound; \$45)**

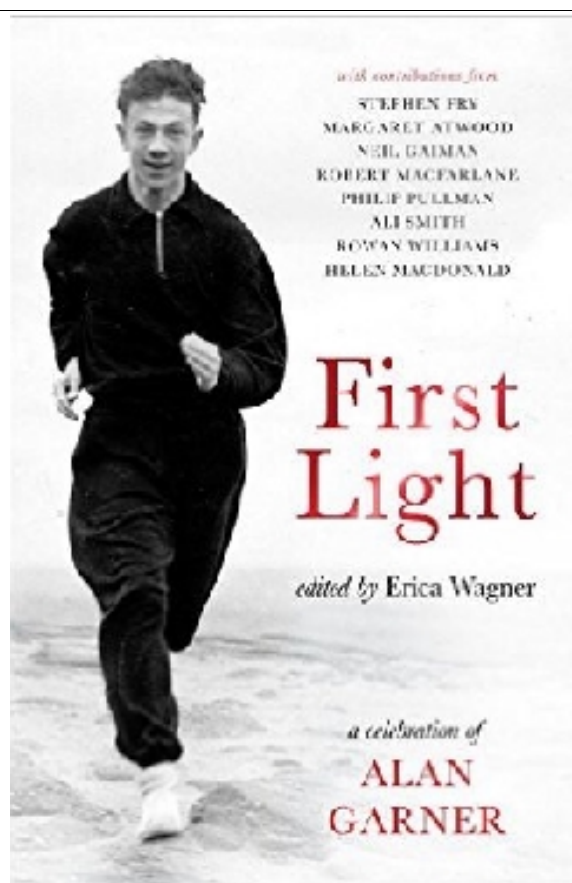
Alan Garner is a master of the fantasy pantheon, especially books such as *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, *The Owl Service*, *Red Shift*, and *The Stone Book Quartet*. Philip Pullman has called him 'the most important British writer of fantasy since Tolkien', although there are substantial differences in content and writing.

*First Light*, edited by Erica Wagner, commemorates Garner's eightieth birthday. Margaret Atwood, Susan Cooper, Stephen Fry, Neil Gaiman, and Ali Smith, are among numerous writers who contribute short essays on Garner. Fascinating details emerge, such as in Andrew Hodges' account of Garner's time in 1951 running in Cheshire lanes with the famous codebreaker Alan Turing. Garner is the runner on the front cover of *First Light*, a title he chose.

Many will remember Garner's extremely moving keynote speech at the 1983 Canberra Word Festival at University House. The then Master, Professor Ralph Elliott, had a long friendship with Garner. I was pleased to arrange, after Elliott's death, for two large manuscript boxes of their correspondence, gifted by his widow Margaret, to be deposited in the Garner Archive in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, where *First Light* was launched earlier this year.

***Utopian Literature and Science: From the Scientific Revolution to Brave New World and Beyond*  
Patrick Parrinder (Palgrave Macmillan; \$109.95)**

Emeritus Professor Patrick Parrinder is a renowned SF critic.



His academically focused, and thus priced, *Utopian Literature and Science* (Palgrave Macmillan, \$109.95), subtitled *From the Scientific Revolution to Brave New World and Beyond*, interweaves sciences, such as astronomy, genetics, and anthropology, with analyses of nineteenth- and twentieth-century utopian and dystopian writing. Parrinder poses many questions, such as whether utopias and science are compatible. Certainly many dystopias have relied on science, or 'once forbidden knowledge'. Given the depth of Parrinder's scholarship, a cheap paperback or e-book version would be appreciated by students.

***The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings*  
Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski (Farrar Straus Giroux; \$35)**

***Charles Williams: The Third Inkling*  
Grevel Lindop (Oxford University Press; \$50.95)**

The core members of the famous Oxford Inklings group, according to American scholars Philip and Carol Zaleski, were J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, and Charles Williams. Lewis once stated that the qualifications for inclusion in the Inklings was 'a tendency to write, and Christianity'. Meetings were originally held in Lewis's Magdalen College rooms, but then moved to The Eagle & Child pub, subsequently nicknamed 'The Bird and the Baby', now a core part of the Tolkien Oxford tourist route.

Owen Barfield and Charles Williams, are less well known to the general public than Tolkien and Lewis. Williams, who died in 1945, was the strangest and most controversial member of the group according to former Manchester University Professor Grevel Lindop in an authoritative and extremely readable biography. Barfield, a philosopher and philologist,



who was a great friend of Lewis and a prominent disciple of Rudolf Steiner, spent many years in the United States, where he gained a reputation as a 'prophetic' teacher. The Inklings group disbanded after Lewis's death in 1963.

Lewis was far better known publicly than Tolkien in the 1930s, and his fame increased in the 1940s after the publication of *The Screwtape Letters* and through his wartime radio broadcasts. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* was published in 1937, but *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy was not published until the 1950s, and only became a global bestseller in the 1960s, when Lewis's 'Narnia' books were also well known.

Philip and Carol Zaleski's *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings* provides the first comprehensive overview of the Inklings since Humphrey Carpenter's 1978 book on the Inklings, which predominately focused on Lewis and, to a lesser extent, Tolkien. The Zaleskis' study, given their academic and publication background, places their book within a framework of the Inklings 'revitalization of Christian intellectual and imaginative life'.

Nonetheless, discussions ranged widely. Lewis's brother Warnie said one conversation covered 'red-brick universities .??. torture, Tertullian, bores, the contractual theory of medieval kingship, and odd place-names'. Reading aloud and discussing their unfinished work was the group's primary activity. In that context, fantasy and mythology topics often dominated. The Zaleskis note that 'fantasy became their voice of faith'.

Some Inklings members, such as English don Hugo Dyson, were less enthusiastic of the fantasy focus. Dyson responded to another mumbled reading from Tolkien with the exclamation, 'Oh God, not another fucking elf!' This did not prevent Lewis warmly reviewing *The Hobbit* in the anonymity of *The Times Literary Supplement*. Lewis wrote, 'Prediction is dangerous but *The Hobbit* may well prove a classic'. Inklings members looked after each other.

*The Fellowship* is a major work of biographical analysis. The Zaleskis conclude that the Inklings 'altered, in large or small measure, the course of imaginative literature, Christian theology and philosophy and comparative mythology' as well as 'fashioning a new narrative of hope amid the ruins of war'.

Charles Williams was the first of the Inklings to be born, the first to be published and the first to die. Williams' writing, which ranged from poetry to supernatural thrillers, is largely unknown today. He has, however, become something of cult figure through his involvement with the occult. He was a member of the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, and established his 'Companions of the Co-inherence', which featured as the main plot focus in a 2015 episode of *Lewis*, the detective series set in Oxford.

Lindop, using access to newly opened archives, cites many never-before-published documents, including letters from T. S. Eliot and C. S. Lewis. He was also able to interview many people who knew Williams. The end result is a fascinating biography, combining readership and scholarship, of a decidedly complex individual.

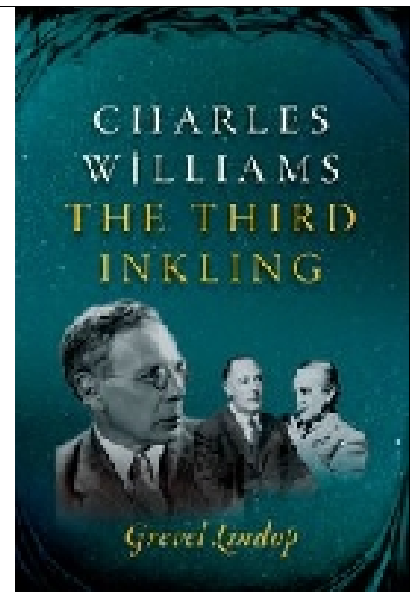
Williams rose from a childhood of poverty to become a senior editor at the Oxford University Press (OUP), as well as coordinating the World's Classics and the Oxford Standard Authors, both highly successful series. Lewis was Williams' greatest supporter, and was able to find him a relief lecturing position at the University during the Second World War. At his first lecture, flanked by Lewis and Tolkien, he expounded on the 'sage and serious doctrine of virginity' in Milton's writings.

Lindop indicates that Williams was a charismatic lecturer, which also helped in attracting young women to engage in his sado-masochistic rituals. Williams even implied in a poem he sent to a student after she left Oxford that he had once bound her to the altar of St Cross Church, Oxford. Williams's sadism and erotic fantasies were seen by him as part of a 'magical' process that stimulated his creative poetic energies.

Williams would set his female 'disciples' essays and tasks, such as 'why the female mind is incapable of punctuation'. If their responses did not meet his high expectations, which mostly they didn't, even at the OUP, they would be beaten with a ruler on the hand or more usually, after lifting their skirts, on their bottoms. OUP management was clearly extremely deficient in its duty of care.

One relationship with a 27-year-old, renamed by Williams, 'Lalage, the slave girl', led to a long erotic correspondence. When she finally complained, he gave her a copy of the book *Christian Symbolism*. William's historical reputation as a devout Christian is decidedly tarnished through Lindop's new revelations. When Williams died in May 1945, Lewis's brother Warnie wrote, 'The Inklings can never be the same again.'

Thank goodness, in one respect, would be the response.

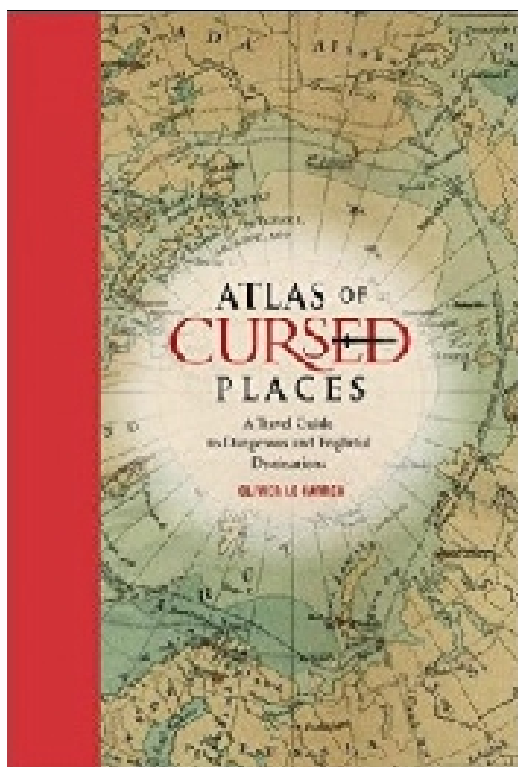


### **Fan Phenomena: The Lord of the Rings** **Lorna Piatti-Farnell (Intellect Books; \$42.95)**

The Intellect series 'Fan Phenomena' reflects the boom in university media studies in fantasy and related cultural topics. In this case, Tolkien rather than Dickens rules. Lorna Piatti-Farnell, Director of the Popular Culture Research Centre at Auckland University of Technology, has brought together ten academics to examine the fan phenomenon of *The Lord of the Rings*. They examine its impact in a variety of forms, but especially in print and in film. The essays range over such topics as fan social media, the impact of Peter Jackson's films on New Zealand tourism, intellectual property controversies and gender portrayals. Numerous colour photographs supplement an interesting, if varied, coverage.

### **The Keys of Middle-Earth: Discovering Medieval Literature through the Fiction of J. R. R. Tolkien** **Stuart Lee and Elizabeth Solopova (Palgrave; \$39.95)**

*The Keys of Middle-Earth* by Oxford academics Stuart Lee and Elizabeth Solopova is a comprehensive scholarly sourcebook to the medieval languages and texts that underpin key episodes in *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*.



***Atlas of Cursed Places: A Travel Guide to Dangerous and Frightful Destinations***

**Olivier Le Carrer and Sibylle Le Carrer  
(Black Dog; \$29.99)**

The subject matter of this book ranges from the familiar, such as fairies, ogres, witches, giants, mermaids, elves, and goblins, to the relatively unfamiliar, such as ‘knockers, boggarts, land-wights and Jack o’ Lanterns’. The last chapter, ‘The Green Man’, traces its origins well before its symbolic adoption by the green movement. Larrington effectively outlines the British boundaries between the ‘natural’ and the ‘supernatural’.

This book is a curious mixture of forty real and the unreal sites. Real-life ‘cursed’ places include Cape York, ‘the land of the killer crocodiles’, and Gaza, ‘a territory adrift’. Paranormal sites include the Strait of Messina, home of the mythical sea monsters Scylla and Charybdis, the poltergeist of Tennessee’s Bell Witch and the forbidden cemetery of Stull, Kansas. Unfortunately, impact is lessened, as Le Carrer’s short chapters often assume a background knowledge, and Sibylle Le Carrer’s historically fashioned maps lack the underpinning that photographs might have provided. This is not so much an atlas, but rather a quirky collection of the abnormal.

The extracts, including from the *Kalevala* and *Beowulf*, are presented in the original alongside English translations. *The Keys of Middle-Earth* will prove to be an extremely valuable resource for university courses.

***Harry Potter: The Character Vault*  
Jody Revenson (Titan; \$49.99)**

*Harry Potter: The Character Vault* by Jody Revenson is the third in the ‘Harry Potter Film Art Book’ series. Each of the book’s nine chapters, all superbly illustrated in colour, contains extensive profiles of the main characters, the actors who played them, and much background detail, including sets and costumes. Particularly interesting are the comments by the actors on how they interpreted and developed their roles, such as Alan Rickman on Severus Snape and Emma Thompson on Professor Sybill Trelawney, whom Thompson states is ‘mad as a bucket of snakes’. All Potter fans will relish this beautifully designed Harry Potter character overview.

***The Land of the Green Man: A Journey through the Supernatural Landscapes of the British Isles*  
Carolyn Larrington (I. B. Tauris; \$68)**

Oxford academic Carolyn Larrington explores the British cultural landscape and psyche through myths, legends, and folk stories in the impressive *The Land of the Green Man*, subtitled *A Journey through the Supernatural Landscapes of the British Isles*. Larrington mixes personal memories of landscape with deep scholarship, in a text that ranges widely over geographical locations, historical folklore, and their creative interpretations. Authors such as J. R. R. Tolkien, Alan Garner, Susan Cooper, and J. K. Rowling are used to illustrate subjects, often in unusual ways. Thus, her history of changelings concludes with Irving Welsh’s *Acid House*.

***My Fair Ladies: Female Robots, Androids and Other Artificial Eves***

**Julie Wosk (Rutgers University Press; \$39.95)**

The search for the perfect woman ranges from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and the myth of Pygmalion to *The Stepford Wives*. Julie Wosk, Professor of Art History at the State University of New York, provides a fascinating guide to *My Fair Ladies*. Wosk expertly explores depictions of ‘tokenistic living dolls’ to the enhanced female cyborg through history, literature, cultural media, art, and photography. The end result is an extremely readable analysis, supplemented by numerous black-and-white illustrations.

***Zombies: A Cultural History***

**Roger Luckhurst (Reaktion Books; \$39.99)**

London University Professor, Roger Luckhurst, provides a scholarly, yet very readable, overview of the world of zombies. His extensive research covers a wide range of zombie sources from anthropology to colonial history to pulp literature. Luckhurst begins with the early history of the zombie in the Caribbean, particularly in Haitian folklore, and follows this ‘Colonial Gothic’ through to the pulp literature of the 1920s and ’30s, notably in the writings of H. P. Lovecraft and Henry St Clair Whitehead. Luckhurst’s incisive sociocultural trail also effectively wends through cinema and television from the 1932 movie *White Zombie* through to the current *Walking Dead* TV series.

***The Wheel of Time Companion***

**Robert Jordan (Orbit; \$32.99)**

Robert Jordan’s bestselling ‘Wheel of Time’ series, which ran to 15 books, selling 44 million copies, was completed by Brandon Sanderson after Jordan’s death in 2007. *The Wheel of Time Companion*, running to over 800 pages, is an essential A–Z glossary of the series, with much new material on



characters, chronologies, and topographies. The *Companion*, compiled by his widow, Harriet McDougal, and Jordan's long-time editorial assistants Alan Romanczuk and Maria Simons, draws wherever possible on Jordan's own notes in terms of back stories and characters. This is a must purchase for devotees of the series but new readers, be warned, many of the entries include spoilers.

### ***Winter Is Coming: The Medieval World of Game Of Thrones***

**Carolyne Larrington (I.B. Tauris; \$35.95)**

Carolyne Larrington, Oxford University lecturer, puts her medieval expertise to good use in *Winter Is Coming: The Medieval World of Game of Thrones*. Larrington explores the historical and literary underpinnings of the 'two different recensions', as she terms it, of *Game of Thrones*, namely George R. R. Martin's books and the HBO mega-hit TV series. Interestingly, Larrington places ravens in the margins of relevant sections to alert new readers to spoilers.

Larrington has said in an interview, 'the skeleton of the (*GoT*) world and its different societies is based on real-world history, from the Anglo-Saxon type society in the North to the high medieval culture in King's Landing, the Mongol model for the Dothraki and so on. But George Martin adds to that figures out of the medieval imagination, the dragons, the wights, the giants, and the Children of the Forest'.

Her analysis of 'the Known World, its customs, inhabitants, power plays, religions and cultures' is supported by well-researched and accessible scholarship. Larrington, noting the series asks 'very real questions about the politics of kingship, religious faith and social organization', provides numerous helpful background historical parallels.

The Iron Bank extrapolates from the Jewish merchant banks in Venice, which later spread throughout Europe. Littlefinger's wealth is maintained by his brothels in King's Landing. Larrington here references the Bishop of Winchester, who owned the land where the best-known brothels of mediaeval London stood, with local prostitutes known as 'Winchester geese'.

The fanatical 'Faith of the Seven' has clear links to extreme Catholicism, epitomised at its most extreme by the sixteenth-century Spanish Inquisition. The notorious 'Red Wedding' massacre has source material, argues Larrington, in Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale' and the Scottish Glencoe clan massacre of 1692. 'Winter is Coming' is traced to the Norse Fimbulvetr, the Mighty Winter, a precursor of Ragnarok, the end of the world.

After her introduction, and a first chapter on the background and customs of the 'Known World', Larrington travels to the various geographical settings of the series, beginning at Winterfell. Larrington highlights the influence on Martin of the fifteenth-century English Wars of the Roses. It has been argued that Robert Baratheon was inspired by King Edward IV, Ned Stark by Richard, Duke of York, and Cersei could be Margaret of Anjou, with her son Edward of Westminster as Joffrey.

Larrington was asked in an interview what medieval punishment should be applied to Martin to ensure he speeds of the writing of the final book. Her reply, 'We could stick him in a dungeon under the Great Sept and feed him a very limited diet. No breaking on the wheel, or pulling out his guts, and burning them before his eyes. That's not going to speed things up'.

In the meantime, Larrington's epilogue foreshadows several possible conclusions to the series. Most interestingly, she muses that one ending of *Game of Thrones* might take its cue from the story of Havelok the Dane, the hero of a thirteenth century English romance, with Havelok as a proto-Targaryen.

As a companion to the show, and an introduction to medieval history and culture, Larrington's work is thoroughly recommended. At a time when humanities scholars are being encouraged to engage with the public, her book succeeds on several levels. *Winter Is Coming* is an indispensable historical guide to a twenty-first-century cultural phenomenon.

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## **British science fiction**

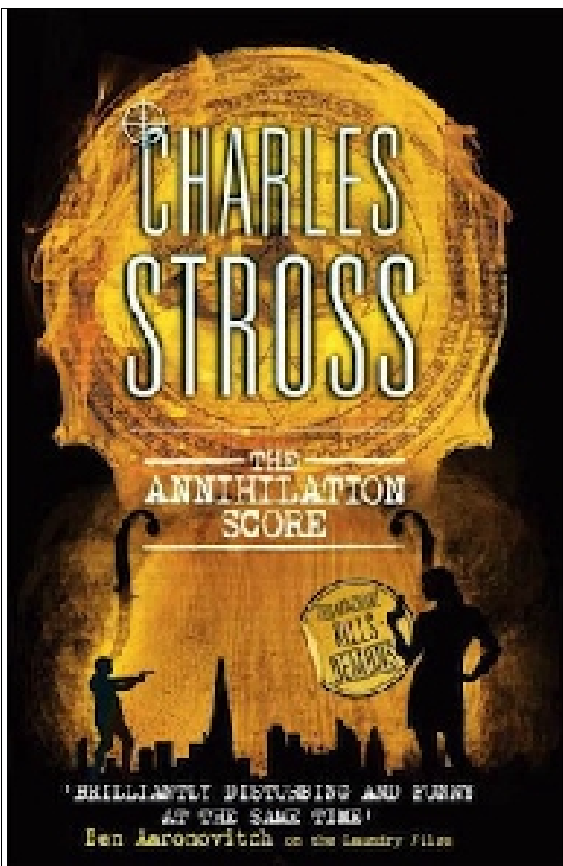
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### ***The Annihilation Score***

**Charles Stross (Orbit; \$35)**

*The Annihilation Score* is the sixth installment of Charles Stross's 'Laundry Files', a series renowned for its dark quirky humour. The main character, Mo O'Brien, has been fast-tracked into leading a clandestine superhero team, the Transhuman Policy Coordination Unit, on behalf of the British government. Their brief ranges from public riot control to fighting evil of a Lovecraftian paranormal nature. Mo's job is not made any easier when her human bone, demon killing, violin begins to play up in more ways than one. Stross ably juxtaposes his continuing satire of





bureaucracy with Mo's increasingly difficult task of keeping order in the multiverses.

### ***The Nightmare Stacks***

**Charles Stross (Orbit; \$35.50)**

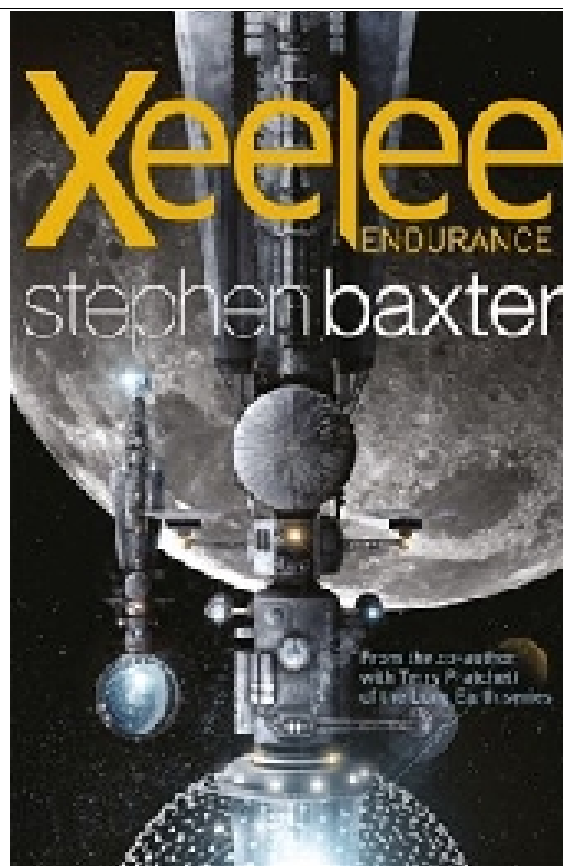
*The Nightmare Stacks*, seventh in Charles Stross's ongoing 'Laundry Files' series, is wonderfully inventive.

Alex Schwartz, works in the British paranormal secret intelligence agency Laundry Unit, where he utilises both his mathematical skills and his Phang, a.k.a. vampire syndrome, talents. Alex has been sent back to his home town Leeds to check out a site for possible Laundry relocation from London. Stross weaves satirical comments on Leeds, and student and British social mores, into an increasingly zany and engaging narrative.

Alex, hasn't had great success with girls because of his affliction and the need to avoid sunlight. Stross writes, 'Alex's experience of dating is similar to his experience of string theory: abstract, intense, and entirely theoretical due to the absence of time and opportunities for probing such high energy phenomena.' But when he meets goth Cassie, his life changes dramatically, as it does for Cassie, who is also far what she seems on the surface. She is, in fact, an Elven princess, 'Agent First of Spies and Liars', a precursor of an invasion from another planet.

Before conflict erupts in the second half of the book, Stross beautifully depicts the growing relationship of Alex and Cassie, in the process allowing Cassie to make a number of cogent and amusing comments on human society.

In one superb comic vignette, Alex is forced by his mother to take Cassie home for a Sunday dinner. When they arrive, Alex's father has already had one gin and tonic too many, and his mother is in tears as she has found out her daughter is a lesbian. When Cassie states 'I'm a princess-



assassin of the Unseelie Court! ... Not human, not even slightly human. So of course I'm weird and I make horrible social blunders when I try to pass for human! Faux pas is my middle name and I don't understand human mores at all! ... I am sorry for your discombobulation!', the main course remains frozen and the dessert falls on the kitchen floor. Mexican or Indian takeaway is the only answer.

This is one of the best of Stross's 'Laundry Files' books. *The Nightmare Stacks* comprises nearly 400 pages of inspired comic satire, with Stross ranging over topics such as bureaucracy, English food, immigration, political correctness, and love within the framework of a necromantic war of the worlds. Highly recommended, particularly for those attuned to British humour.

### ***Lost Girl***

**Adam Nevill (Pan; \$19.99)**

British author Adam Nevill juxtaposes the horror of a lost child within the horror of a future world devastated by climate change. In 2053, food crops have failed, disease is rampant and governments have collapsed through economic failure and rampant global mass migration. Nevill's main character, 'The Father', has been searching throughout southern England for over two years for his abducted four year-old daughter. Ultimately, he must descend to the violence of the criminal gangs controlling society in order to unearth the truth. Nevill's fast-paced novel, in which horror is piled upon horror, dramatically explores in Nevill's words, 'how our psychology will change through the normalisation of catastrophe and disaster'.

***Xeelee: Endurance***

**Stephen Baxter (Gollancz; \$29.99)**

British author Stephen Baxter began his now long-running 'Xeelee' series in 1987 with the short story 'Xeelee Flower'. The subsequent multiple novels and short stories now need their own detailed timeline, as documented in *Xeelee Endurance*. This collection of eleven short stories and novellas has been re-edited by Baxter to ensure chronological continuity and to enable new readers to access the stories that span eons. Baxter's universe is one where the humans are essentially bit players, living in the shadow of the advanced Xeelee civilisation. Humanity's fate ebbs and flows within the context of a larger galactic war involving dark matter entities. Impressive 'hard' SF.

***Luna. New Moon***

**Ian McDonald (Gollancz; \$29.99)**

British author Ian McDonald makes an unforgiving Moon his setting. Lunar colonists endure a harsh, almost feudal, life dominated by five family-owned 'dragon' organisations, who control the mining of Helium-3, essential for the energy needs of both the Moon and Earth. The plot focuses on the cutthroat conflict between the Brazilian Corta family and New Zealand Mackenzie family for ultimate power. *Luna*, the first of two books, starts slowly as it sets up the framework of the Mafia-style conflicts, but picks up pace as it sets the scene for the final book.

***When the Floods Came***

**Clare Morrall (Sceptre; \$29.99)**

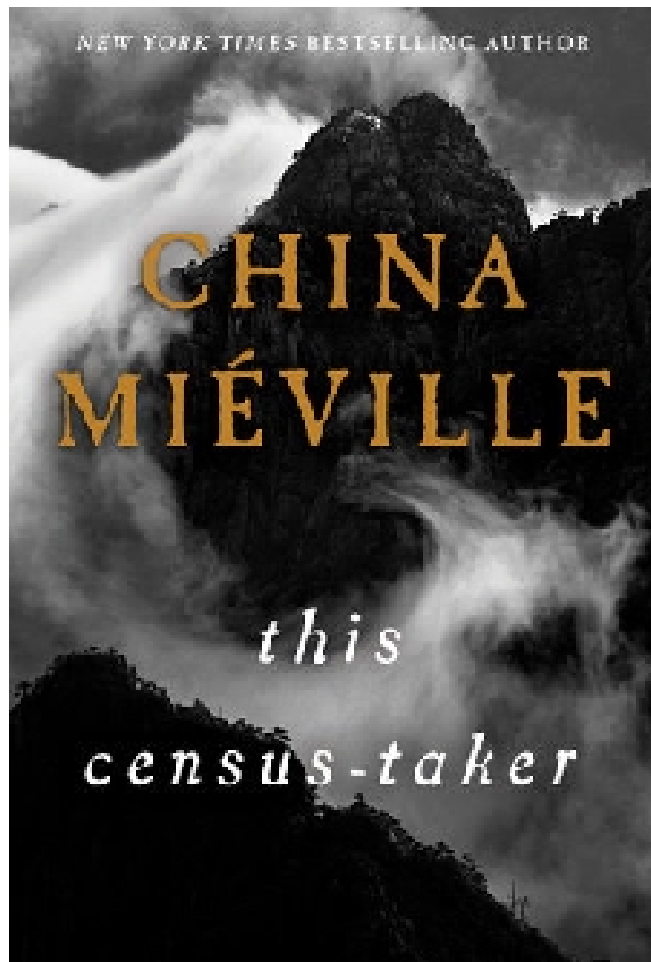
The problem with mainstream writers is that their dystopian worlds often lack credible frameworks. Such is the case with Booker-nominated author Clare Morrall's seventh novel, *When the Floods Came*. Twenty-two-year-old Roza lives with her family at the top of a tower block, seemingly alone, in a flooded devastated Birmingham. Britain is largely cut off from a China-dominated world because of the impact of a deadly virus. The British government, based in Brighton, rules through 'satellites, drones and directives'. The arrival in the tower block of the intimidating, yet charismatic, Aashay, a Pied Piper figure, forces Roza and her family into the apocalyptic wider world and a dramatic coming-of-age.

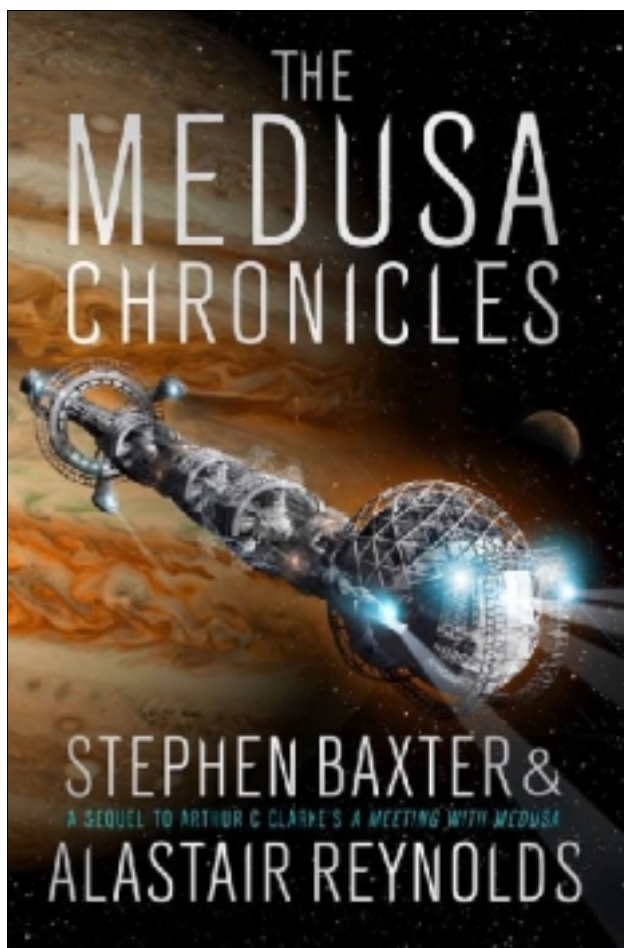
***This Census-Taker***

**China Miéville (Picador; \$32.99)**

Multiple-award-winning British author China Miéville's *This Census-Taker* is a cryptic and challenging Kafkaesque novella. It begins with a nine-year-old boy fleeing from his house, believing that his mother has killed his father. Or did his father kill his mother?

The boy, known as only 'I' or 'you', lives at the top of a steep hill with a bridge at the bottom linking it to a dilapidated rundown town, its inhabitants barely surviving after a future unspecified civil war. Feral orphan children scavenge amongst the debris of abandoned cinemas and factories and snare and eat bats from the bridge at night. Societal details are just as sketchy as the details of the protagonist's family.





The town authorities, such as they are, don't believe the boy's story. His mother has left a note allegedly explaining her disappearance, and he is forced to return to his attic in the gloomy house on the hill: 'My father's window glowed against the creeping dark. He huddled within, bent by the sill. He was the colour of the dirt on the window'. His father, a key-maker whose keys open more than just doors, kills small animals and throws them into a seemingly bottomless cave. Has he killed them, and possibly people, to gain special powers?

It eventually becomes clear that the narrative is a retrospective, as the boy, now grown up, recalls his decidedly strange and unhappy childhood. All of his attempts to escape are thwarted, including one attempted with two orphaned teenagers, Drobe and Samma, perhaps the two most rounded characters in the novella. At one level, *This Census-Taker* is about the alienation of youth from the adult world, but on the other, a reflection on domestic abuse within the apparent safe confines of the home.

It is not until the enigmatic, armed 'census-taker' arrives to document the boy's father's activities that a possible escape path emerges, although not without its own ultimate solitary framework. Who does the census-taker work for, and what use are his records put to? The references on the need to document 'foreigners' could be code for current issues with illegal immigrants.

Miéville leaves the reader to ponder many questions, as he explores the nature of memory and identity, in a book that confirms him as one of Britain's leading fiction writers.

### ***The Medusa Chronicles***

**Stephen Baxter and Alastair Reynolds**

**(Gollancz; \$32.99)**

'A Meeting with Medusa', Arthur C. Clarke's 1971 novella, was the inspiration for award-winning British SF authors Stephen Baxter and Alastair Reynolds to combine for *The Medusa Chronicles*. They take Clarke's story of Howard Falcon, an astronaut who, after an accident, becomes a human cyborg and meets the Jupiter jellyfish-like Medusans, and create a future history 800 years forward. Baxter and Reynolds explore issues such as the nature of AI, cybernetics, and robotics, with Falcon the often reluctant intermediary between 'the creatures of carbon and the creatures of metal'. The clash-of-civilisations conclusion echoes those of *Babylon 5* and Clarke's *2001*.

### ***The Sunlight Pilgrims***

**Jenni Fagan (Heinemann; \$39.99)**

*The Sunlight Pilgrims* from Jenni Fagan, one of Granta's 'Best Young British Novelists', is set in 2020 as a new ice age looms. The global economy has collapsed and society is unravelling. Fagan reflects these issues through a small group living on the 'fringes of the fringes' in a remote Scottish caravan park. Stella, a young girl, confused about her sexual identity, lives with her earthy, non-conformist mother, Constance. Their life and strange relationship with Dylan, a giant man child, is set within a freezing world on the edge of collapse. Yet, ultimately Fagan's strange trio find courage, and a form of solace, in extreme adversity.

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## **British alternative history**

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### ***The Last Days of New Paris***

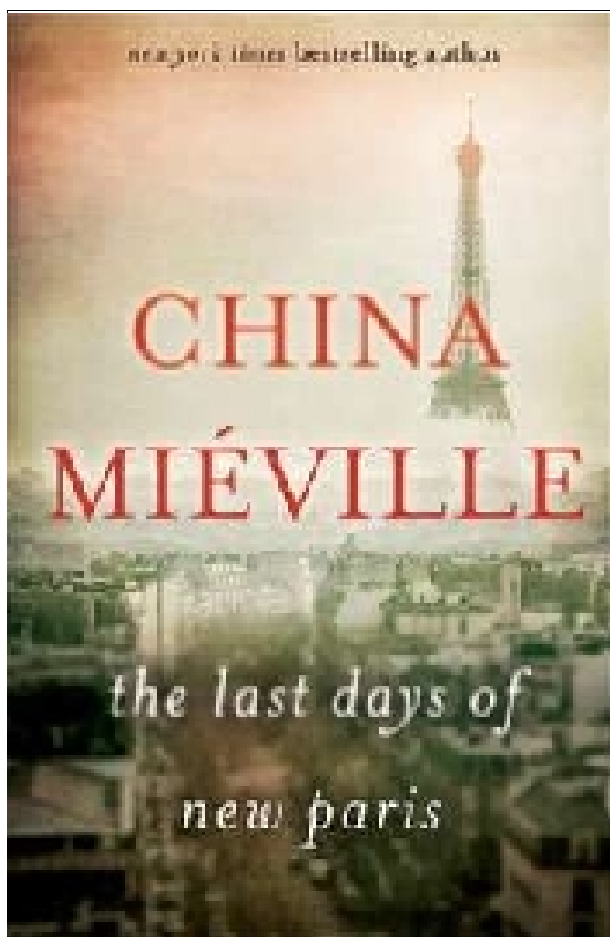
**China Miéville (Picador; \$29.99)**

China Miéville's *The Last Days of New Paris* follows strange events in France in 1941 and, more particularly Paris, in 1950. Miéville takes real-life figures, such as journalist Varian Fry, who actually ran an anti-Nazi and Jewish refugee escape route, and rocket scientist Jack Parsons, who dabbled in the occult, and links them to surrealist figures, such as Andre Bréton and Yves Tanguy.

The pivotal plot device is the detonation of a mysterious 'S-Blast' in Paris in 1941, which unleashes various surrealist art manifestations, or 'manifs'. During a battle for the soul of the city, the manifs confront Nazi supernatural power. Miéville's fictional creativity, never limited, runs wild in this novella. There are physical appearances of many artworks, including Max Ernst's *Celebes elephant*, Odilon Redon's *The Smiling Spider*, and Dorothea Tanning's winged monkey beasts.

Fast forward to 1950, when a surrealist militia member Thibaut joins forces with Sam, an American journalist/photographer intent on recording the battles between the Nazis and the resistance in hallucinogenic Paris. But is Sam really who she says she is? Together they must tackle the new Nazi secret operation named Fall Rot (Case Red) with the





help of the 'the exquisite corpse' and the cause of the S-Blast.

In the end, Miéville attempts too much in a novella packed with surrealist and Vichy France references. It might have been better for him to concentrate on a more focused war of the occult or the philosophical underpinnings of the issues that art confronts in the face of oppression and the hallucinatory nature of true artistic obsession. Nonetheless, you can never blame China Miéville for a lack of imagination.

### ***New Pompeii***

**Daniel Godfrey (Titan; \$16.99)**

Daniel Godfrey's *New Pompeii*, the first book in a series, fits, as the books blurb puts it, within the Michael Crichton mould.

The inhabitants of Pompeii have been snatched just before their neighbouring volcano erupts in AD 79. They are transported across time by the powerful energy conglomerate Novus Particles and deposited in a replica of Pompeii in a formerly Soviet central Asian republic. They believe they have been saved by divine intervention.

Postgraduate history student Nick Houghton is hired to study them, and in the process makes friends with a Roman magistrate and his daughter, Calpurnia. Godfrey's characterisation is not particular deep, reflecting the tone established by his thriller-type plot line, staccato sentences, and short chapters.

The Roman inhabitants gradually suspect that something is amiss in their world, and a clash of cultures looms. Unfortunately, this plot line is sidelined by a contemporary murder mystery and an unlikely time transfer back story. An interesting initial concept is spoilt in the execution.

### ***Smoke***

**Dan Vyleta (Weidenfeld & Nicolson; \$29.99)**

*Smoke* has echoes of Charles Dickens, Philip Pullman, and J. K. Rowling in its settings and characterisation. In an alternate Victorian England, people's 'sins' are measured by the amount of smoke that physically issues from their bodies. The rural rich pay to become 'pure' and largely smoke-free, whereas the poor and uneducated live in a profusion of smoke in the cities. Thomas and Charlie, boarding-school friends, combine with young, aristocratic Livia to uncover the truth behind their world's dark smoking mirrors. *Smoke* is an intriguing and complex novel, marred only by too many subplots.

## **British fantasy**

### ***Fly Away Home***

**Marina Warner (Salt; \$24.95)**

Marina Warner's scholarly books on gender, myths, and fairytales underpin the 'feminist fantastic' of her 20 short stories in *Fly Away Home*, which treads a delicate narrative line between the real and the unreal and the natural and the supernatural. In 'Ladybird, Ladybird', a young woman who



is unable to fall pregnant finds an unexpected solution emerges when she buys a charity shop dress. In 'After The Fox', Judith, a recent widow, takes up landscape gardening and finds her relationship with her new employer evokes the ghosts of his past loves. Warner's imaginative collection is imbued with a haunting magic, often blending ancient myth and contemporary concerns.

### ***The Story of Kullervo***

**Verlyn Flieger (ed.) (Harper Collins; \$39.99)**

It's difficult to remember that the hardback first editions of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* were remaindered in the 1950s. It was only the success of the American paperbacks on American college campuses in the 1960s that sparked the boom that still continues in Tolkien's work.

The latest book to appear from the Tolkien archival mine is *The Story of Kullervo*, edited by Professor Verlyn Flieger. Kullervo swears revenge on the magician who killed his father, but incest and despair lead him to a tragic end. Tolkien's 1912–16 re-imagining of part of the Finnish saga *Kalevala* and the tale of 'Hapless Kullervo' was never completed. It was, however, Tolkien says, 'the germ of my attempt to write legends of my own'. Kullervo ultimately segued into Túrin Turambar, the tragic hero of *The Silmarillion*. Flieger's background information is supplemented by Tolkien's drafts, notes, and lecture material.

### ***The Watchmaker of Filigree Street***

**Natasha Pulley (Bloomsbury, \$29.99)**

Natasha Pulley's debut novel *The Watchmaker of Filigree Street* is set in late nineteenth-century London, Oxford, and Japan. Thaniel, a Home Office telegraph operator, finds a gold watch in his room, which subsequently rings to save his life from a bomb that destroys Scotland Yard. Thaniel tracks down its Japanese maker, who has the power to interpret the future and may or may not be the key to the bombing. Thaniel teams up with feisty Oxford physics student Grace Carrow, as Pulley examines issues of gender, predestination, and identity in a rich and imaginative historical fantasy.

### ***Sorcerer to the Crown***

**Zen Cho (Macmillan; \$29.99)**

Zen Cho, a London-based Malaysian author, also makes an impressive debut in *Sorcerer to the Crown*. The first in a trilogy, it has echoes of Susannah Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*. Cho mixes magic and adventure in an alternate Regency England, where Zacharias Wythe, England's first African Sorcerer Royal, struggles with colour prejudice and the decline in magic, as practised by the Magicians of the Royal Society of Unnatural Philosophers. Further challenges arise when he is forced into an alliance with another strong-willed young woman, Prunella Gentleman, who may be the key to overcoming the magic drought.

### ***The Paradox***

**Charlie Fletcher (Orbit; \$29.99)**

Scottish author Charlie Fletcher follows his critically praised 'Stoneheart' trilogy with the 'Oversight' series, of which *The Paradox* is the second volume. Fletcher's blend of history and urban fantasy invites comparison with Susanna Clarke's

*Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*. The 'Oversight' constitute nineteenth century London's defence against the supernatural, but their numbers are depleted and two key members are trapped in a mirror world. Fletcher subtly explores the motivations of both sides, resisting the temptation of black-and-white portrayals of good and evil. Characterisation is also vivid. Look out for 'The Citizen' Robespierre and Issachar Templebane, who 'examined his own dead face with more disappointment than sorrow'.

### ***After Alice***

**Gregory Maguire (Harper; \$29.99)**

*After Alice*, by bestselling *Wicked* author Gregory Maguire, was written for the 150th anniversary of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Alice has disappeared once more down the rabbit hole, but, this time is followed by her best friend Ada Boyce, who spends the book seeking Alice. Maguire juxtaposes Ada's adventures underground with the real Victorian world of the 1860s, but this narrative division doesn't succeed. Most *Alice* fans will prefer Maguire's new accounts of the 'curiouser and curiouser' characters from the original novel than the above-ground angst of the Oxford families and the musings of real characters such as Charles Darwin and Walter Pater.

### ***Slade House***

**David Mitchell (Sceptre; \$27.99)**

David Mitchell's new book *Slade House*, which began as a Twitter story and has links to his other novels, comprises five linked novellas covering 1979 to 2015. Mitchell follows a predatory brother and sister, born in 1899, who every nine years must find victims and 'decant' their souls in order to retain their youth. Slade House, a mysterious London manor house, is itself a ghost, only emerging every nine years as a location for each psychical Groundhog Day. Mitchell's characters are superbly evoked. Reader empathy heightens the tension until the final surprising twist in the story.

### ***The House on Cold Hill***

**Peter James (Macmillan; \$29.99)**

Less original is Peter James' *The House on Cold Hill*. James is best known for his Roy Grace Brighton crime series, but began his career with supernatural novels. While well paced, *The House on Cold Hill* offers little new in its haunted house scenario. Web designer Ollie Harcourt, his wife Caro, and 12-year-old daughter Jade, move from Brighton to an old rundown country house with a dark past. Caro's and Jade's unhappiness at their relocation deepens when they meet apparently dead characters and the past seeps into the present, with dire consequences.

### ***The Woman in Black and Other Ghost Stories***

**Susan Hill (Profile Books; \$29.99)**

The collected ghost stories of Susan Hill, evoking memories of M. R. James, are much more subtle and sublime than Peter James'. Hill's classic *The Woman in Black*, with its powerful story of family loss, not only spawned a long-running West End play but also the recent movie with Daniel Radcliffe. Hill sets her stories in suitably atmospheric historical settings, such as a foggy Victorian London in 'Printers Devil Court',



where medical students experiment in bringing the dead back to life. 'Dolly' is set in the bleak English fens. The remote Yorkshire moors are juxtaposed with Venice in 'The Man in the Picture', in which an eighteenth-century oil painting of a Venetian carnival reaches out over the centuries, literally incorporating its victims. An excellent collection.

#### **Fellside**

**M. R. Carey (Orbit; \$29.99)**

M. R. Carey is the pen name of Mike Carey, well-known comic book writer and author of the bestselling *The Girl With All the Gifts*. *Fellside* begins with a fire in Jess Moulson's flat that kills a 10-year-old boy. Jane, herself badly burned, is convicted of murder and sent to the remote Fellside women's prison. Carey convincingly depicts the brutal prison culture and the mental and physical pressures on Jane, but then the narrative takes a supernatural twist as seemingly the dead boy's ghost appears. Jane's ventures into an astral 'Other World' sit uneasily with the prison grimness but do provide for a possible Shawshank-style redemption

#### **The Visitors Book**

**Sophie Hannah (Sort of Books; \$19.99)**

*The Visitors Book* comprises four short ghost stories. Hannah's ghosts, however, do not inhabit the usual dark rural

gothic settings, but rather appear in mundane domestic settings. 'The Last Boy to Leave' is set in an ordinary children's birthday party — but who is the boy at the end for whom no parents turn up? In 'Justified True Belief', who are the dead or dying people the main character sees, and what does this foreshadow for her? 'All the Dead Mothers of my Daughter's Friends' puts a supernatural spin on school mums. Clever plot twists reflect the expertise previously shown by Hannah in her psychological crime novels.

#### **The Angel of Highgate**

**Vaughn Entwistle (Titan; \$16.99)**

British author Vaughn Entwistle is best known for his 'Paranormal Casebooks of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle' series. *The Angel of Highgate*, set in 1859 in Victorian Britain, blends fantasy, romance, and horror. Lord Geoffrey Thraxton, a notorious womaniser, is a Flashman-type figure, although with less compassion. Thraxton's meeting with the mysterious and ethereal Aurelia changes everything, although he is unsure whether she is simply a figment of his drug addiction. Against a backdrop of London lowlife and personal conflict, Thraxton renounces all in the hope of gaining Aurelia's love, if not in this world, then the next. Entwistle is carving out an interesting paranormal fantasy slot.

### **American science fiction**

#### **Old Mars**

**edited by George R. R. Martin and Gardner Dozois (Titan; \$18.99)**

*Old Mars*, the latest anthology from George R.R. Martin and Gardner Dozois, brings together 15 new stories about Mars. Martin provides the lengthy introduction to a collection in which, one suspects, Dozois did most of the legwork. Martin calls the stories 'retro-SF', with an emphasis on the golden age of pulp writing. Allen Steele's 'Martian Blood', with a nod to H. G. Wells, follows an interaction with native Martians, while James Corey's 'A Man without Honor' is a riff on Edgar Rice Burroughs. Michael Moorcock's 'The Lost Canal', a sequel to his 'Kane of Old Mars' trilogy, has a decidedly explosive plotline. Look out for the robotic wombots!

#### **United States of Japan**

**Peter Tieryas (Angry Robot, \$19.99)**

Peter Tieryas' *United States of Japan* initially suffers from being overly publicised as the successor to Philip K. Dick's classic award-winning 1962 novel *The Man in the High Castle*. Nonetheless, the depiction of a United States controlled by the Japanese on the West Coast and the Nazis on the East, following an Axis Victory in the Second World War, is an effective alternate history novel. Tieryas places the backdrop of Japanese high-tech invention and Californian highlife against the plotline of a gritty resistance movement by the 'George Washingtons' and the violent response of the Japanese.





### ***Radiance***

**Catherynne M. Valente (Corsair; \$29.99)**

*Radiance*, by bestselling American author Catherynne M. Valente, harks back to the golden age of both pulp SF and Hollywood. Her alternative twentieth-century history is set in a solar system far removed from scientific reality. The Moon is the centre of filmmaking, although films are still silent because of the rigid patent controls of the Edison family. Filmmaker Severin Unck disappears after being sent to Venus to investigate destroyed settlements. While *Radiance* follows the search for her across the solar system, the novel's appeal is in the imaginative baroque planetary settings, which include giant space whales and Uranian pornography theatres. Valente has written, 'I'm not going to lie. This book is crazypants'. But it's highly inventive crazypants SF, and a necessary relief from the increasing number of dystopian novels spinning off current global fears.

### ***The City of Mirrors***

**Justin Cronin (Orion; \$32.99)**

Justin Cronin writes, 'Ten years ago, my eight-year-old daughter ... challenged me to write a story about "a girl who saves the world".' His global bestsellers *The Passage* (2010) and *The Twelve* (2012) were the result. Now, his epic dystopian trilogy concludes with *The City of Mirrors*. Cronin's future world is one devastated by vampire-like 'virals'. The relative calm at the end of *The Twelve* is shattered with the re-emergence of the virals leader Timothy Fanning, 'Zero', now given a long back history. His final confrontation with

Amy, 'the Girl from Nowhere', over the fate of humanity is well worth the four-year wait.

### ***The Mandibles: A Family, 2029–2047***

**Lionel Shriver (The Borough Press; \$29.95)**

The back-cover blurb to Lionel Shriver's new novel *The Mandibles* states, 'this is not science-fiction', yet it easily fits into the current outpouring of SF dystopian novels. Shriver's publishers, presumably like the publishers of P. D. James's *Children of Men*, must have felt that the SF label might scare off some of Shriver's potential mainstream readers.

One of Shriver's characters comments, on page 78, 'plots set in the future are about what people fear in the present. They're not about the future at all. The future is just the ultimate monster in the closet, the great unknown.' SF novels have always reflected contemporary angst, such as Orwell's 1948 cold-war world extrapolated into *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and nuclear war scares of the 1950s projected into apocalyptic novels as such as Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. The number of current dystopian novels is a bit of a worry in itself.

Shriver's fears reflect today's global financial and economic crises, and, in particular, America's financial debt. Shriver follows the Mandible family from 2029 to 2047, in which America endures social upheaval because of the collapse of the dollar on global markets. The dollar is replaced as a global currency in 2029 by the 'bancor', apparently an international monetary unit originally proposed by John Maynard Keynes and E. F. Schumacher.

American's Hispanic President locks America down fiscally, with all gold reserves forfeited to the government.





People are chipped so that their personal finances can be continually monitored. The Mandible family's fortune, like that of many others, is wiped out. Major events in the rest of the world are only briefly sketched. Ed Balls is British Prime Minister — no Brexit anticipated here — China annexes Japan, and, perhaps too obviously, the Mexicans build a wall to prevent Americans crossing the border. And again, not terribly inventively, teenagers in 2029 are called 'goog' and 'fifa'. Such terms may not even be relevant 12 years hence.

Shriver's descriptions of the various members of the family and their fates are overwhelmed structurally by the lengthy expositions on background economics and reflections on contemporary angsts. The various members of the Mandible family, apart from Florence and her son Willing, who is a teenager as the novel begins, never really come to life. Willing provides the impetus for escape to the 'Free State' of Nevada, where there is no medical or safety net infrastructure support. It's ironic that in the end that gold bars save the Mandible family.

A brief, forward-looking, conclusion notes that Indonesia invades Australia in 2057 — 'the President of the United States sent Canberra a special communiqué to say that he was sorry' — and that Russia annexes Alaska, but again these are just throwaway lines.

*The Mandibles* has gained global attention because of Shriver's considerable past literary achievements but, if it did not have the benefit of her established name, one wonders how much of an impact it would have had in the dystopian diaspora genre.

## ***Underground Airlines***

**Ben H. Winters (Century; \$32.99)**

Ben H. Winters sets *Underground Airlines* in a near-future United States in which the Civil War never happened and slavery still exists in the 'Hard Four' states. Winters, a Philip. K. Dick Award winner, said in an interview, 'I thought I would take a metaphorical idea — that slavery is still with us — and transform it through fiction into a literal idea'.

The rest of the world has imposed trade embargoes on the US. The European Union sees 'no distinction between the slavery-practising states and the slavery-tolerating ones'. In 1973, Henry Kissinger is forced to announce the United States' withdrawal from the United Nations.

The story is narrated by Victor, an African-American ex-slave, now turned bounty hunter, working for the *US Marshals Fugitive Slave Act*, tracking down runaway slaves, in this case one called Jackdaw. Victor, who infiltrates the African-American underground escape networks, faces personal moral dilemmas. Being cyberchipped, he also cannot escape his controller, the mysterious Mr Bridges.

Winters cleverly creates the day-to-day detail of an alternate United States, with its depersonalised capitalist slavery system. His fast-paced narrative is classic detective noir, with the specific quest to find Jackdaw and his protectors, expanding out into a stunning conclusion, underpinned by finding new, biological sources of slaves.

Winters does have his own personal connection to prejudice. 'I had ancestors who were Jews in Czechoslovakia in the 1940s, and you always needed to have your papers on you.' Winters says about America's current election cycle that it is 'is demonstrating to us vividly how close to the surface racial animosity is'.

## ***The Lost Time Accidents***

**John Wray (Canongate; \$29.99)**

*The Lost Time Accidents* by John Wray, one of Granta's Best Young American Novelists in 2007, apparently has taken him seven years to complete. Wray says that his novel is 'a blend of science fiction, theoretical physics, historical drama, and what may well be the oddest coming-of-age story'.

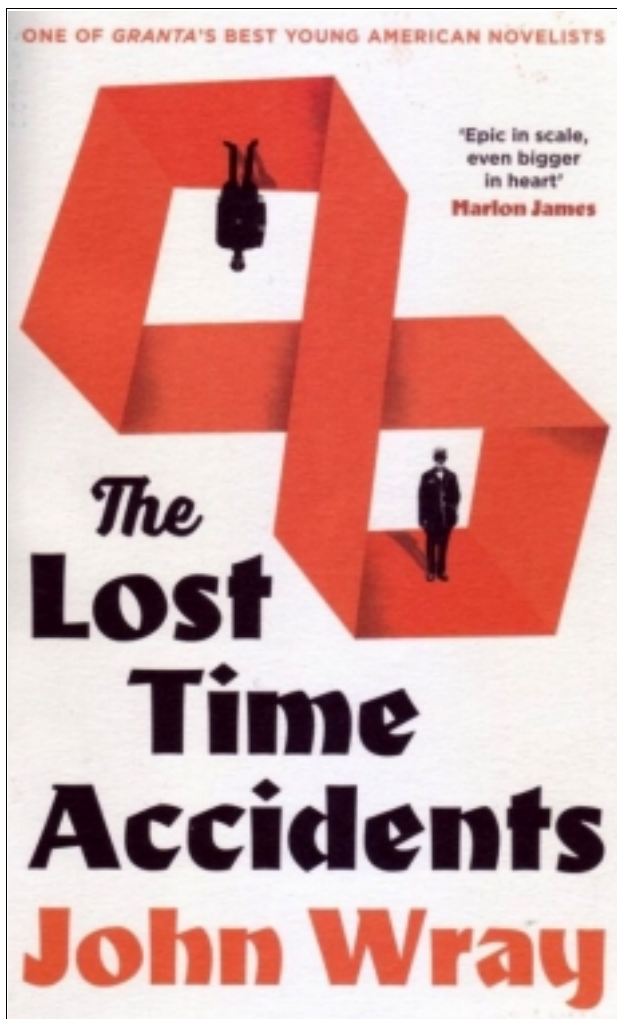
Waldy Tolliver, Wray's narrator, wakes up one morning in the library of his dead aunts' Manhattan apartment, to find that he has become 'excused from time'. 'Marooned in a desolate bubble of extra chronological space', he writes to his lover, the mysterious Mrs Haven, about his family's history. This non-linear family narrative constitutes the essence of the novel.

It begins in Vienna with Waldy's great-grandfather Ottokar's early-twentieth-century discoveries on the understanding of time. While Ottokar's work is soon forgotten in the public sphere because of the discoveries by the 'Patent Clerk', namely Albert Einstein, Ottokar's impact on time becomes 'the family curse' up to the present day.

Wray then moves on to Waldy's great-uncle, Waldemar, 'the Black Timekeeper', and his horrific concentration camp experiments into 'rotary time' during the Second World War. The pulp SF books of Waldy's father, Orson Card Tolliver, inspires a cultish religion devoted to the subjectivity of time, the United Church of Synchronology.

Interestingly, Orson's most famous book, *The Excuse*, written with a style that 'makes Arthur C. Clarke look like Arthur Miller', opens in Australia's Gibson Desert. Miller and Clarke are just two of the many real people referred to





in the text. More substantial cross-references are made to scientists and philosophers, such as J. W. Dunne, Wittgenstein, and Heisenberg, as Wray examines the nature of time through quantum physics and cosmology. The end result is a sprawling, complex, inventive, and literally timely, novel.

### ***Good Morning Midnight***

**Lily Brooks-Dalton (Hachette; \$29.99)**

*Good Morning, Midnight*, by American author Lily Brooks-Dalton, is a haunting end-of-the-world debut novel. An unexplained catastrophe has seemingly wiped out civilisation on Earth.

Augustine, a grumpy astronomer in his late 70s, has somehow survived in a remote Arctic research station along with a mysterious real, or perhaps, unreal child, Iris. They remain isolated from human contact until, late in the novel, Augustine makes contact with a returning Jupiter space mission. The six astronauts on board had been unable to contact Mission Control for months, but had thought that contact would be restored as they got closer to Earth.

Brooks-Dalton juxtaposes the stories of the two small groups as they face survival and a decidedly uncertain future. Alternate chapters feature Augustine and astronaut Sully as they reflect on their lives, their dysfunctional families, and the people they have loved and lost. The cold expanse of space and the cold of the Arctic reflect the bleakness of their situation. Augustine knows he will soon die, while the astronauts face major problems in the return from orbit to Earth.

Readers will have to accept the initial unexplained prem-

ise that all civilisation is wiped out to allow Brooks-Dalton to follow her main characters as they face their fate in the context of the end of humanity: how do we make sense of it all? In the end, perhaps we don't.

## **American fantasy**

### ***Ghostly***

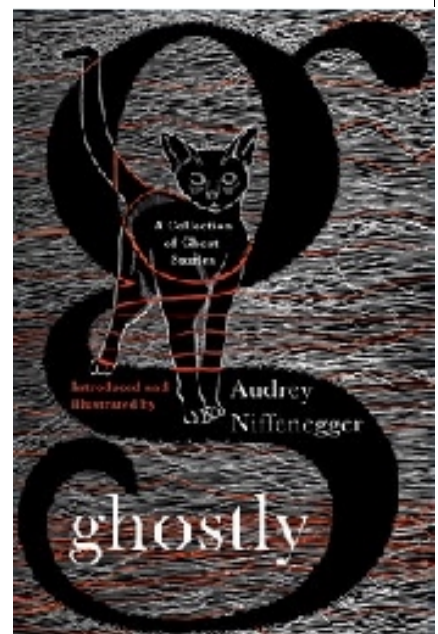
**edited by Audrey Niffenegger (Vintage; \$35)**

*Ghostly*, edited by Audrey Niffenegger, the bestselling author of *The Time Traveler's Wife*, is an excellent collection of 16 ghost stories from authors including Edgar Allan Poe, M. R. James, Edith Wharton, Kelly Link, and Neil Gaiman. Niffenegger illustrates and introduces each story, including her own 'A Secret Life With Cats'. Subject matter ranges from the Gothic to psychological hauntings. Niffenegger concludes, 'Ghost stories are speculations, little experiments in death ... literature of loneliness and longing'. Children are a staple ingredient in ghost stories, as best evidenced in *The Turn of the Screw*. The short stories from Rudyard Kipling and A. S. Byatt underpin the reality of their losses of children.

### ***Anna and the Swallow Man***

**Gavriel Savit (Corgi; \$19.99)**

*Anna and the Swallow Man*, a remarkable debut novel from American author Gavriel Savit, blends history, fable, and magic realism. Seven year-old Anna is abandoned in Krakow in November 1939, when her father is seized by the Nazis. She is saved by the strange, enigmatic 'Swallow Man', who is able to attract birds at will. They embark on a lengthy traumatic journey across war-torn Poland and Russia, but the dangers they face are greatly increased when the Swallow Man reluctantly allows a young Jewish musician to join them. Savit's narrative hauntingly explores Anna's growing up





amidst the horrors of war and the nature of her survival.

### ***Twelve Kings in Sharakhai***

**Bradley Beaulieu (Gollancz; \$29.99)**

*Twelve Kings in Sharakhai* is the first in Beaulieu's epic fantasy trilogy, 'The Song of Shattered Sands'. With fantasy trilogies pouring out of publishing houses weekly, it is pleasing to see that this one rises well above the fantasy average. It has a powerful opening — nineteen-year-old female pit fighter Çeda, known as the White Wolf, defeats a physically stronger male champion. Çeda uses being a gladiatrix as her cover to seek revenge for the death of her mother, whom she blames on the Twelve Kings of Sharakhai. Characterisation is strong, while the powerful trading metropolis of Sharakhai, set in a vast desert, evokes both *Dune* and *The Arabian Nights*.

### ***The Sorcerer's Daughter***

**Terry Brooks (Orbit; \$32.99)**

Long fantasy series have good and bad traits. Readers can immerse themselves in detail and follow characters over a long period, but many authors continue a series for commercial reasons when the original creative spark has gone. That is certainly the case with American author Terry Brooks, perhaps because he has seen a resurgence of interest as a result of the recent *Shannara Chronicles* TV series. *The Sorcerer's Daughter*, is a stand-alone young-adults-focused novel within the 'Defenders of Shannara' series. The standard battle between good and evil focuses around the daughter of a powerful evil sorcerer as she strives to keep the peace between the Federation and the Druids.

### ***The Aeronaut's Windlass***

**Jim Butcher (Orbit; \$29.99)**

American author Jim Butcher, best known for his series 'The Dresden Files' and 'The Codex Alera', now begins the 'Cinder Spires' series. *The Aeronaut's Windlass* mixes steampunk technologies, magical wars, and even intelligent cats. The populations of rival noble houses live in huge above-ground spires protected by crystal-powered airships. 'Etherealists' use crystals both to keep the peace and to foresee the future, a future now threatened by an ancient evil. Butcher's aerial world-building is itself somewhat ethereal, lacking basic underpinning detail. Nonetheless, the rapid pace of Butcher's narrative, with its simple language, will ensure its wide appeal.

### ***The Bazaar of Bad Dreams***

**Stephen King (Hachette; \$32.99)**

Stephen King's *The Bazaar of Bad Dreams*, with an AC/DC dedication, brings together 20 short stories, each with a personal introduction from King. While many stories echo real-life horror, others conjure up the supernatural. 'Bad Little Kid' is literally that, a child who never ages, whom King calls 'the evil version of Sluggo'. In 'The Dune', an elderly judge visits a remote sand dune on which names mysteriously appear, foreshadowing the named person's death. In similar vein, in 'Obits', a tabloid obituary writer finds his drafts trigger the individual's death. King questions the morality of mortality and never disappoints in his readability.

### ***The Fireman***

**Joe Hill (Gollancz; \$29.99)**

Joe Hill usually plays down the fact that he is Stephen King's son. But in *The Fireman*, his latest and perhaps best novel, he references his father's works, especially *The Stand*, as well as paying homage to Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Hill imagines 'a world overtaken by an incurable runaway pathogen (Dragonscale) that causes death by spontaneous combustion'. Nurse Harper Grayson is infected while pregnant, but her fight to save her child not only alienates her husband, but also alerts the deadly 'Cremation Crews'. Can John Rookwood, the enigmatic 'Fireman' who can control Dragonscale fire, save her? Another engrossing novel, ultimately about love and hope in a combustible world.

### ***All the Birds in the Sky***

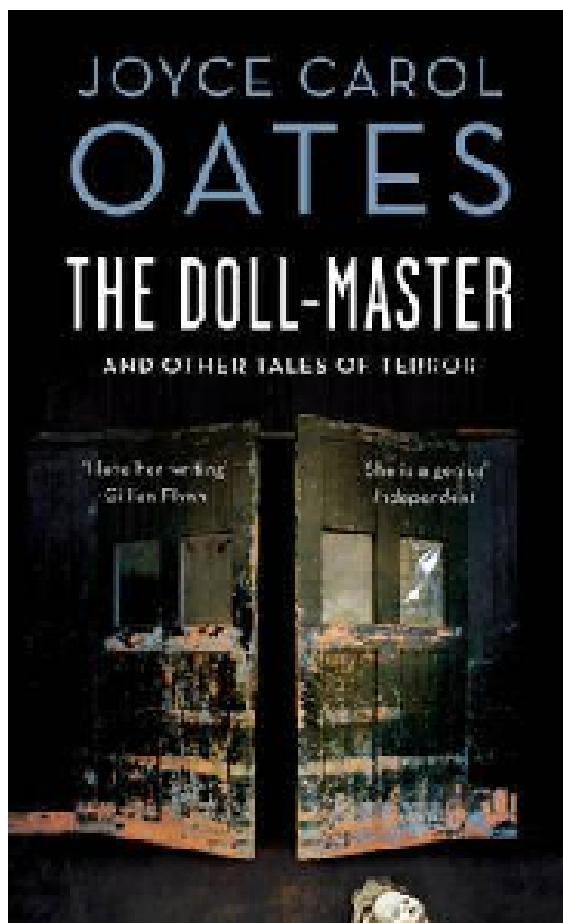
**Charlie Jane Anders (Titan, \$19.99)**

*All the Birds in the Sky* combines SF and fantasy in a near-future American setting. Patricia and Laurence attend the same school where Patricia develops her magical skills, while Laurence is a geek who has invented a machine that can take him forward in time, but only two seconds. Reuniting as adults, they need to combine their skills to avert a global catastrophe. Anders blends science and magic an intriguing plotline that bends genres.

### ***The Doll-Master and Other Tales of Terror***

**Joyce Carol Oates (Head of Zeus; \$29.99)**

Joyce Carol Oates has written over 70 books. She continues



her prolific output in *The Doll-Master and Other Tales of Terror*, which brings together six stories that evoke, in varying degrees, the 'fascination of the abomination'.

The titular opening story follows the narrator, a young boy Robbie, who has a passion for 'found dolls', a passion which doesn't disappear as he grows older. The reader slowly learns that his fascination with female dolls has morphed into a more macabre human form of control and obsession.

Another strong horror ending comes in 'Big Momma'. Thirteen-year-old Violet, alienated from her single working mother, is 'adopted' by a classmate's family, but for an unsuspected purpose, particularly after she becomes acquainted with their house pet 'Big Momma', a large reticulated python.

In 'Equatorial', 'the wife' suspects that her cruise holiday with her husband to the Galapagos Islands is merely a location for her husband to clear the marital decks.

The most political story is 'Soldier', a first-person account by an alleged 'racist murderer' of a young black boy, which dramatically highlights the current American schisms on guns and race.

'Mystery Inc', the last story, will appeal to all crime fiction bibliophiles. The owner of a mystery bookshop, who expands his bookshop empire by nefarious means, finds that he has met his bibliophilic and criminal match when he tries to take over a top-of-the-range antiquarian crime rare book shop in New Hampshire.

This is an excellent example of Oates' ability to highlight the macabre and the gothic in contemporary American society.

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## Australian science fiction

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### *Special*

**Georgia Blain (Random House, \$19.99)**

Australian author Georgia Blain's *Special*, aimed at a young adult readership, is, as Blain puts it, 'concerned with the fundamental question of the self ... what is it that makes me, me?' *Special* is set in a near-future world in which multinational corporations rule and genetic manipulation can be obtained one of the high price. This price can be overcome by poor parents if they win the BioPerfect genetic lottery package for their children. *Special* follows five genetically designed 'Lotto Girls', notably Fern Marlow, who begins the novel with her identity datawiped and in hiding as a refuse sorter. Fern, once a student at the exclusive Halston genetic school, now wonders if she has been rescued or kidnapped by the 'subversives' fighting the corporations. Blaine effectively personalises today's concerns on corporate data retention and genetic design.

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## Australian fantasy

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### *The Floating City*

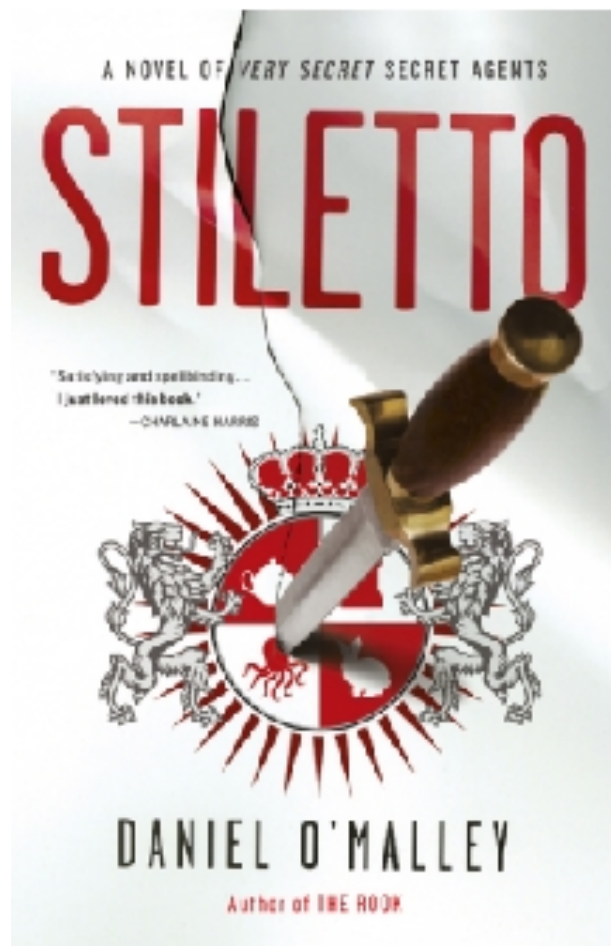
**Craig Cormick (Angry Robot, \$16.99)**

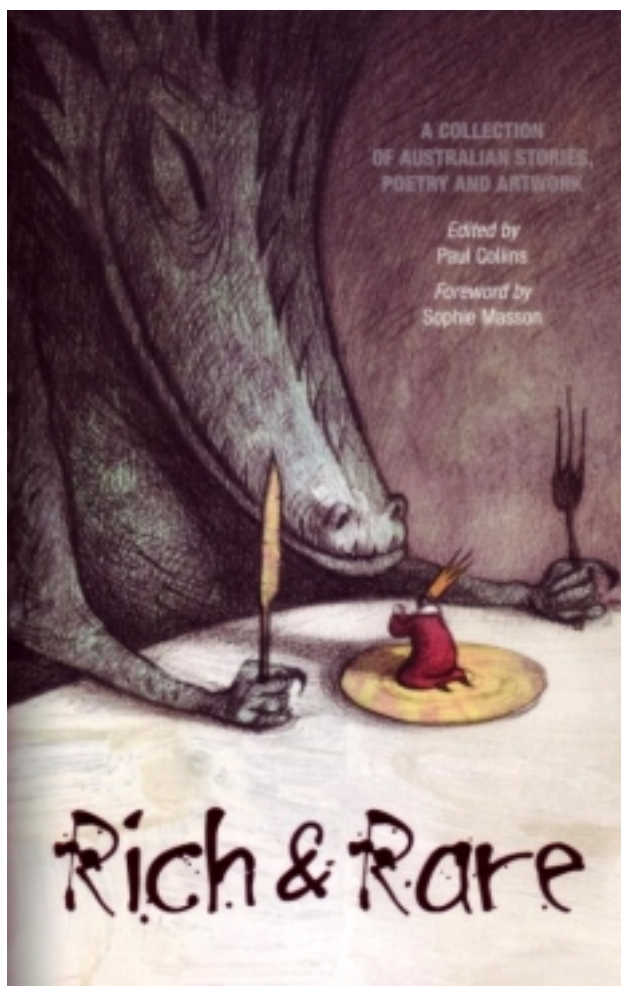
Canberra author Craig Cormick conjures up a fast-paced historical fantasy in *The Floating City*, the second in his 'Shadow Master' series, although it can be easily read as a stand-alone book. Cormick says his novel is 'set in a world very much like Renaissance Italy, and this city is very much like Venice, but where magic and demons abound'. The magic seers who protect the city are being murdered and new power blocks are emerging. Cormick's narrative is bolstered by the impact of three strong female characters linked to Shakespeare's Juliet, Desdemona, and Isabella.

### *Stiletto*

**Daniel O'Malley (Little Brown; \$29.99)**

Canberra author Daniel O'Malley's 2012 debut novel *The Rook* gained wide international acclaim. That year it was one of *Time* magazine's Books of the Year and took out the Best SF Novel at the Australian Aurealis Awards. In 2015, it was the eighth most borrowed adult-fiction title in Australian libraries. It is currently being turned into a TV series by Twilight author Stephenie Meyer, Lionsgate, and Hulu.





A huge publishing success, therefore, for this former Canberra Grammar School student, who went on to gain a Master's Degree in medieval history from Ohio State University. He currently works for the Australian Transport Safety Bureau in Canberra.

Now, four years later, comes O'Malley's *Stiletto*, the second book in 'The Checquy Files' series, which again features, although in not so prominent a role, his character Myfanwy Thomas. Myfanwy is a Rook in the British Checquy secret agency, which has a hierarchy termed by chess pieces. The Checquy agents have a variety of enhanced powers to fight supernatural threats. One reviewer, termed *The Rook* 'X-Men meets The X-Files', because of O'Malley's mixture of characters with superpowers and bureaucratic paranoia.

In *Stiletto*, Myfanwy has to forge an alliance between the Checquy and their centuries-old European enemies, the Grafters, who are able to 'twist and warp living flesh to suit their purposes'. Myfanwy's task is difficult enough without a Grafters splinter group, 'the Antagonists', derailing the process with some literally monstrous attacks on the Checquy.

Pawn Felicity, Myfanwy's protégé, is far from happy after being ordered to protect Odette, a descendant of Grafters royalty, through the negotiations. Their relationship, however, slowly changes into mutual respect, partly through having to survive a number of attacks that require all their combined supernatural healing powers.

Myfanwy also has to face her share of supernatural attacks from the Antagonists, including one at Royal Ascot. O'Malley's action sequences work extremely well, although the narrative pace is weakened at times by historical and information backfill. O'Malley's nearly 600 pages could perhaps have been edited down, given that some of the back-

ground detail has already been outlined in *The Rook*.

O'Malley's streetwise dialogue blends well with his dry humour. The Antagonists choose a London location because it's next to an Indian takeaway; a flesh-eating ghoul has a spice account at Fortnum and Mason; a supernatural monster tries to lure the Checquy Pawns into a trap by playing Bruckner's 8th Symphony, and Checquy elite troops, the Barghests, a combination of 'SWAT, knights, ninjas and Swiss Army knives' celebrate victory with songs in Latin.

We are clearly in Jasper Fforde, Douglas Adams, and Tom Holt territory, but O'Malley is decidedly his own voice. *Stiletto* is a worthy sequel to *The Rook*, and will be eagerly devoured by O'Malley's increasing number of global fans.

### ***The Last Quarrel***

**Duncan Lay (Momentum; \$29.99)**

*The Last Quarrel*, the first book in a trilogy by Australian author Duncan Lay, was originally published in e-book episodes. Lay's Gaelland, with distinctive Irish historical roots, is a troubled country. People, especially children, are disappearing all along the coast. The King seeks to resolve matters by burning selkies, but to no avail. When the Duke's ship enters harbour, in *Marie Celeste* deserted fashion, Fallon, a local middle-aged sergeant, decides to investigate. He wants to finally prove his worth, but his depressed wife just wants a quiet family life. Fallon and his wife are well portrayed, but the rest of Lay's characterisation is fantasy predictable.

### ***Rich and Rare***

**Paul Collins (ed.)**

**(Ford Street Publishing, \$24.95)**

*Rich and Rare*, an excellent Australian young adult collection edited by Paul Collins, comes with a stunning cover by Shaun Tan, who also contributes a short story: 'The Greatest Cat Ever Lived'. While aimed at YA audience, the short stories will also appeal to many adults. Many distinguished Australian authors, such as Kerry Greenwood, Libby Hathorn, Lucy Sussex, and Gary Crew, contribute short stories across genres, such as crime, history, SF, and fantasy. Local Canberra authors Tania McCartney and Tracey Hawkins also feature. The Ford Street website has interesting reading notes and questions, spinning off the stories, for classroom discussion on issues such as school bullying and the impact of social media. An exemplary collection on several levels.

### ***Vigil***

**Angela Slatter (Jo Fletcher; \$32.99)**

Australian author Angela Slatter has won numerous Australian and international awards for her short stories. *Vigil*, her debut novel, the first of the 'Verity Fassbinder' trilogy, is located in an alternate Brisbane. Verity is half human and half Weyrd. Her dead father was a 'kinderfresser', a man who killed children for bizarre reasons. Private Investigator Verity atones for her father's crimes by maintaining the balance between humanity and the Weyrd. But when more children go missing, the acerbic Verity has to tackle many issues, including dark angels, a golem, and an evil Weyrd. *Vigil* is a rich paranormal dark fantasy.





### ***The Summon Stone***

**Ian Irvine (Orbit; \$32.99)**

Ian Irvine has had a long Australian SF and fantasy career. His composite 'Three Worlds Cycle' has now sold over one million copies. Within that framework, he now starts 'The Gates of Good and Evil' trilogy with *The Summon Stone*. Irvine has indicated, in an online interview, that *The Summon Stone* is set ten years after the 'View from the Mirror' quartet, with characters who 'exemplify the Aussie spirit e.g. defiance of authority, self-deprecation [and] dislike of Tall Poppies'. Irvine's marine science background is put to good use in the background framework of magical pollution, with Sulien, a nine-year-old girl, the key to saving their world.

## **Australian young adult fiction**

### ***The Red Queen***

**Isabelle Carmody (Penguin; \$32.99)**

Many Australian schoolchildren have grown up with Isabelle Carmody's post-apocalyptic 'Obernewtyn Chronicles', which began publication in 1987 and now conclude with *The Red Queen*, the seventh volume. This final book, running to over 1100 pages, sees 'misfit' Elspeth Gordie, the 'Seeker',

although affected by her previous struggles to save the world, retaining her great moral strength in order to face the final threat of the 'Destroyer'. Carmody mixes all the classic fantasy tropes with social and ethical questions, although new readers must start at the beginning — a fictional equivalent of Christmas DVD box set bingeing?

### ***Alyzon Whitestarr***

**Isabelle Carmody (Ford Street; \$24.95)**

Isabelle Carmody, a guest at the Canberra Writers' Festival in late August 2016, presents this re-edited version of her 2005 award-winning young adult novel, *Alyzon Whitestarr*. Teenager Alyzon finds, after emerging from a coma, that her senses have become greatly increased, particularly her sense of smell. This gift, or is it a curse, allows her to smell evil, especially evil that has an impact on her sister and ultimately her family. *Alyzon Whitestarr* will certainly attract new readers in a book that reaffirms the importance of family and friendship.

## **French fantasy**

### ***The House of Shattered Wings***

**Aliette de Bodard (Gollancz; \$29.99)**

*The House of Shattered Wings* by French-Vietnamese author Aliette de Bodard tells of a magical war between ruling houses, run by fallen angels, in a devastated Paris. Bodard begins strongly, as the 'pure' powers of a recent fallen angel become the focus of new conflict. The narrative, however, falters as the action becomes too internally focused and byzantine within one ruling house. An ambitious fantasy that would have benefited from firm editing to allow the filling out of characters and the apocalyptic back story.

## **Norwegian science fiction**

### ***The World According to Anna***

**Jostein Gaarder  
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, \$24.99)**

Norwegian author Jostein Gaarder is best known for his bestselling *Sophie's World*, which has been translated into 60 languages and has sold over 40 million copies. His young adult novel *The World According to Anna* follows 15-year-old Anna through her dreams in 2012 to a climate-change-ravaged world of 2082. Here, Anna meets her great-granddaughter, Nova, who castigates Anna for her devastated bleak world and demands Anna change history. Unfortunately, Gaarder's narrative polemic for action on climate change dramatically affects the novel's overall balance and reduces its otherwise intriguing blending of Arabian magic



and twenty-first-century history.

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## German fantasy

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### *Oneiros*

**Markus Heitz (Jo Fletcher; \$19.99)**

*Oneiros* by bestselling German author Markus Heitz has death as its centrepiece. It opens powerfully, as the pilots and passengers on a flight from New York to Paris become unconscious and the plane crashes into Charles de Gaulle airport. One person mysteriously survives, but his fate is soon part of a wider conspiracy. Konstatin, the main character, is a 'Death Sleeper', who, when he sleeps, brings death to those around him. Konstatin and other Death Sleepers are in danger from those who want to use their sleeping affliction as a weapon. Unfortunately, at over 600 pages, *Oneiros* is itself somewhat sleep-inducing and needs a more ruthless editor.

### *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales*

**Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm ed. Jack Zipes (Princeton University; \$82.00)**

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published *Children's and Household Tales* in 1812 and 1815, not realising that many of their fairy stories would become world famous. The stories, how-

ever, were much more realistic and brutal than those revised and published in later editions. Professor Jack Zipes has now translated the 156 original stories for the first time in a sumptuous edition, supplemented by new black-and-white illustrations from award-winning artist Andrea Dezsö. Zipes' introduction provides the historical context to the stories, as well as reprinting the Grimms' original prefaces and notes. The unsanitised stories, represented, for example, by a much more gruesome 'Cinderella', constitute a definitive edition that certainly undumbs the Grimms.

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## Chinese science fiction

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### *The Dark Forest*

**Cixin Liu (Head of Zeus; \$29.99)**

Cixin Liu, in his award-winning trilogy, of which *The Dark Forest* is the second volume, reflects the dramas of twentieth-century Chinese politics. Liu has a dark interpretation of Fermi's law on alien contact. *The Three Body Problem*, the first volume, foreshadowed the clash of civilisations, 400 years hence, between Earth and the Trisolarians. A Chinese scientist uncovers that the Trisolarians have left their doomed system and are en route to take over Earth. *The Dark Forest* takes the reader 200 years forward, with the fate of the Earth largely in the hands of four key individuals. Liu's characterisation is not his strongest element, but he has constructed an intriguing plotline with intriguing contemporary Chinese undertones.

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## Jamaican fantasy

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### *John Crow's Devil*

**Marlon James (Oneworld; \$21.99)**

*John Crow's Devil*, the 2005 debut novel from 2015 Booker Award winner Marlon James, has now been reissued. Set in 1957, in the small Jamaican town of Gibbeah, it follows the conflict between the 'Rum Preacher' and the 'Apostle York' for the souls of the town's inhabitants. While ostensibly it's a battle between good and evil, there is little to choose in morality between the incumbent drunken priest and the apostolic interloper. Black vultures, 'John Crows', foreshadow obeah spells which unleash the spirit world. Gibbeah increasingly resembles Sodom and Gomorrah with perverse sexuality rampant. *John Crow's Devil* is a powerful, almost Old Testament, Jamaican vernacular narrative.

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## Irish fantasy

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### *The Maker of Swans*

**Paraic O'Donnell (Weidenfeld & Nicolson; \$29.99)**

*The Maker of Swans*, the debut novel of Irish writer Paraic O'Donnell, alternates between magical-realist fantasy and gothic mystery. The timeframe is deliberately left vague and the narrative viewpoints are often elliptical. The wealthy but dissolute Mr Crowe lives in a faded country house with his manservant Eustace and a young mute girl Clara. Crowe belongs to a mysterious secret order, but breaks their code through a crime of passion. Clara is kidnapped, and Eustace, who becomes the main character, sets out to rescue her and redeem himself. Clara also discovers her own powers in captivity, but remains something of a cipher. O'Donnell cleverly combines literary references and Dickensian intrigue.

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## Dutch fantasy

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### *Hex*

**Thomas Olde Heuvelt  
(Hodder & Stoughton; \$32.99)**

Bestselling Dutch author Thomas Olde Heuvelt originally set *Hex* in his native Netherlands. For the English translation, however, the location has been changed to the Hudson Valley town of Black Spring. *Hex* begins with the tragic story of Katherine van Wyler, sentenced to death for witchcraft in 1664. Her ghostly presence has quarantined the small town's residents ever since from the outside world. But, when teenagers post videos of Katherine on the internet, ancient supernatural evil is unleashed, as well as the town's internal conflict. *Hex* is an unrelenting, yet compelling, supernatural horror story.

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## Media tie-in books

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### *The Autobiography of James T. Kirk*

**David A. Goodman (ed.) (Titan; \$29.99)**

*The Autobiography of James T. Kirk* is the fictional autobiography of *Star Trek* Captain James T. Kirk (2233–2293). This must book for *Star Trek* fans follows Kirk from his youth

on Tarsus IV, through his education at the Starfleet Academy, then ultimately to the captaincy of the USS *Enterprise*. Goodman provides a framework of biographical verisimilitude, with a preface from Kirk's mentor, Leonard 'Bones' McCoy, extracts from personal correspondence, and captain's logs. Goodman expands on the frameworks from the *Star Trek* TV series and films 'to make a character that people already love have human depth'. Goodman concludes with Kirk's death in 2293 — but is he really dead?

### *Leonard: My 50 Years Friendship*

**William Shatner and David Fisher  
(Sidgwick & Jackson; \$32.99)**

*Star Trek* is a cultural phenomenon. William Shatner remembers his co-star Leonard Nimoy, who died in February 2015, in *Leonard*, co-written with David Fisher. Shatner reveals almost as much about himself as he does about Nimoy. Despite the book's subtitle, *My 50 Years Friendship*, theirs was often a turbulent relationship. Shatner writes, 'From the start Spock received the most fan mail. I hadn't expected that and I was not thrilled about it. I had the most lines, I was fronting most of the publicity, my character carried the storyline.' Shatner, nonetheless, despite his textual tantrums, effectively lifts Nimoy's neutral Vulcan mask to reveal the actor, the poet, the philosopher and, at times, the alcoholic.

### *Otherworldly Politics: The International Relations of Star Trek, Game of Thrones and Battlestar Galactica*

**Stephen Benedict Dyson (Johns Hopkins University Press; \$44.95)**

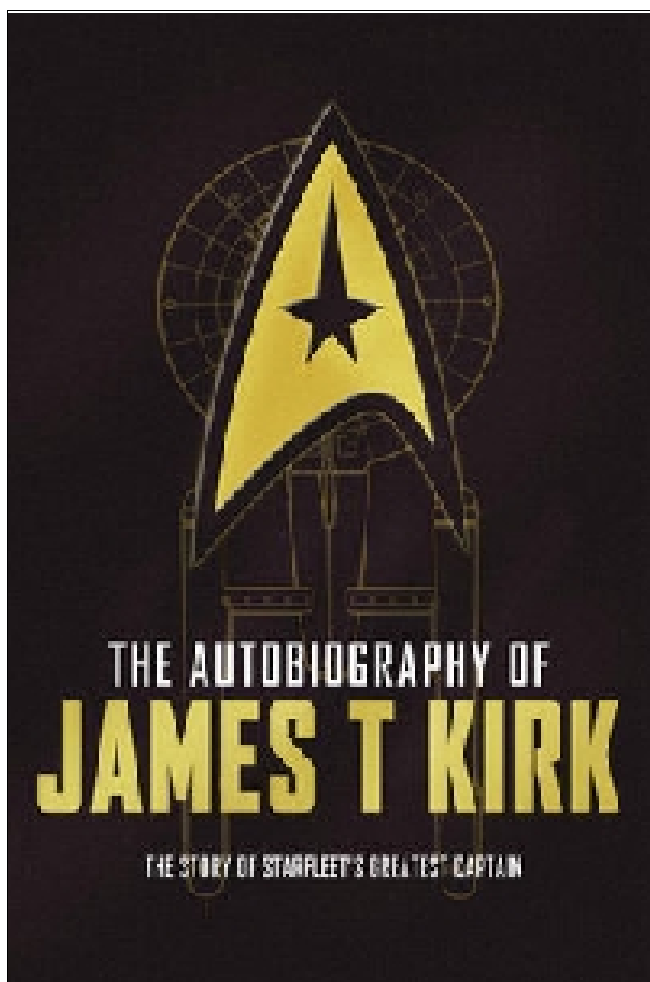
Connecticut University's Professor Stephen Benedict Dyson analyses *Star Trek* and two other famous TV series in *Otherworldly Politics: The International Relations of Star Trek, Game of Thrones and Battlestar Galactica*. Dyson provides links to relevant political commentators, such as Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama, in order to explore plotlines and cross-references them to actual political events. Thus *Star Trek* reflected the Cold War politics of the 1960s, *Battlestar Galactica* extrapolates from the impact of 9/11, and *Game of Thrones* provides a base for analysing dynastic and regional conflict. *Otherworldly Politics* will have wide appeal, and not just for relevant university courses.

### *The Art of Star Wars: The Force Awakens*

**Phil Szostak (Abrams; \$50)**

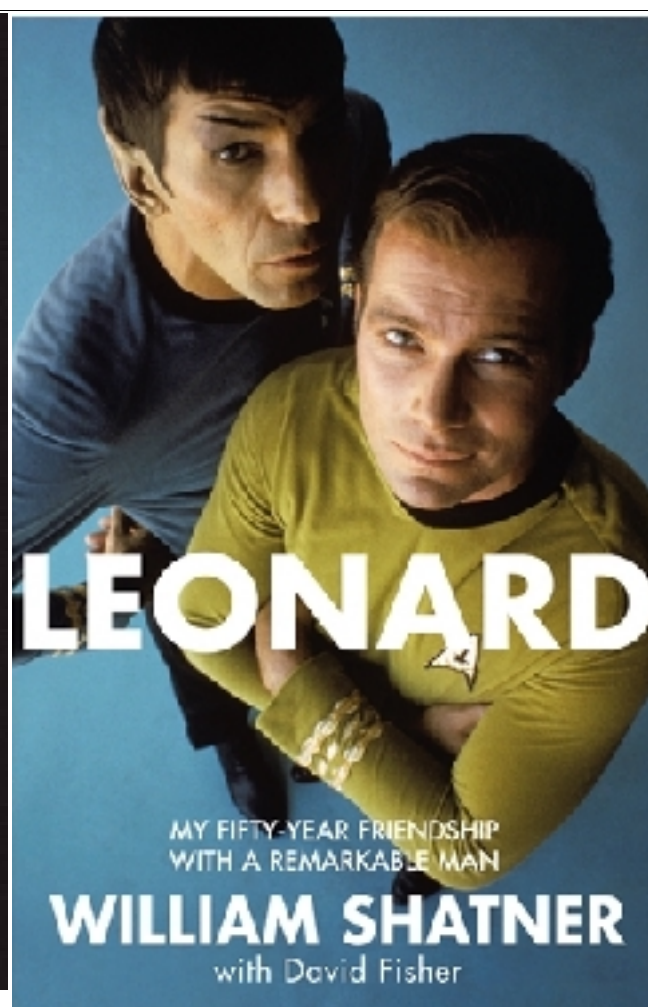
*The Art of Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, a sumptuous coffee table book, is the definitive expression of how the latest film in the *Star Wars* saga was artistically created. Phil Szostak, a conceptual researcher and archivist, who was 'embedded' in *The Force Awakens* art department from December 2012, documents the art and design chronology from the earliest preproduction to postproduction. The *Star Wars* new 'Visualists', taking inspiration from the original *Star Wars* concept artists, Ralph McQuarrie and Joe Johnston, provide new takes on the iconic characters and planetary settings. Szostak delivers an authoritative visual smorgasbord with hundreds of colour illustrations.





***Set Phasers to Stun: 50 Years of Star Trek*  
 Marcus Berkmann (Little Brown; \$19.95)**

Marcus Berkmann, a British television critic and columnist, overviews 50 years of *Star Trek* in *Set Phasers to Stun*. Although several other authors have boldly gone where Berkman now goes, his boundless enthusiasm and critical appreciation make this an essential book for cultural historians and *Star Trek* fans. Apart from the historical comparisons, especially between the original 1960s TV series and the current reboot movies, Berkmann provides wonderful trivia information, such as, why did Captain James Kirk's shirt always get torn in a fight? And what is the worst insult in Klingon? ('Your mother has a smooth forehead.') Original creator Gene Roddenberry's foibles also come under close and amusing review.




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**Graphic novels**

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***Amazing. Fantastic. Incredible*  
 Stan Lee, with Peter David and Colleen Doran  
 (Touchstone; \$45)**

Graphic novels now rival many fantasy books in terms of sales. One that covers a legendary figure in comic books is bound to appeal. Stan Lee, now 92, is the creative force behind many Marvel comics, including *The Incredible Hulk*, *Spider-Man*, and *The X-Men*. In *Amazing. Fantastic. Incredible*, Lee has combined with Peter David and artist Colleen Doran to capture the major events in Lee's life in a hardcover, full colour, albeit at times hagiographic, memoir.

— Colin Steele, 2015–16 September 2016

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John Litchen

THE FIELD  
Colin Steele

MY LIFE, SCIENCE FICTION, AND FANZINES  
Bruce Gillespie James 'Jocko' Allen

