

SF COMMENTARY 94

June 2017

64 pages

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GILLESPIE

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Cover: Steve Stiles: 'Mages'.

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End of an era

Gillespie fanzines go all-electronic

Ever since postage prices, especially overseas postage, began rising steeply ten years ago, I've had increasing difficulty in supporting the print publication of *SF Commentary*, *Treasure*, and my other magazines, such as *Steam Engine Time*. However, I have received regular freelance indexing work during the last five years, so have been able to print a small number of copies for major contributors, subscribers, and fanzine publishers who sent me paper magazines or books.

Suddenly at the end of February this flow of regular work stopped, for reasons I may never discover, so I find myself with no spare income to print and post any fanzines other than a few copies of my ANZAPAZine **brg**. This is embarrassing, because some people have sent me \$100 subscriptions in the expectation of receiving print copies. If I receive any unexpected income over the next year or so, I will meet those expectations. Your names are in my card index. The trouble with miracles, however (as Tom Disch once said) is that, although they happen, they cannot be relied upon.

Please do not send me further subscriptions. I can't meet your expectations.

The same goes for those people who have no way of downloading *SF Commentary* from Bill Burns' eFanzines.com. I also know their names, and will print copies for these few people if a miracle turns up. (Miracles have been in short supply during 2017.)

Those people who send me print fanzines and do not themselves post to eFanzines.com will have to decide whether they still want to keep me on their files. I certainly don't want to miss out on such eminent fanzines as *Banana Wings* and *Trap Door*.

'Always look on the bright side of life,' sang the Monty Pythons in similar circumstances. I am forcibly retired at last. If most people on the mailing list are willing to download and read *SFC* and *Treasure* from eFanzines.com, this gives me much greater freedom to produce smaller issues more frequently. It's only the oddities of the postage system that have forced me to limit the size of issues to between 64 and 72 pages. My ideal would be a fanzine produced fortnightly or monthly containing all the great stuff that I've received, whether it amounts to 10 pages or 100 pages.

If I have to say goodbye to valued old friends, I will grieve. But many such friends have disappeared over the years, and new friends are always getting in touch. So long — and thanks for all the fish to come.

Bruce Gillespie, May 2017



Randy Byers:
'Cannon Beach'

Colin Steele

The field

End of an era at The Canberra Times: The diminished Australian scene

As I review *Dreaming in the Dark* in February 2017 (see below), I would not have been particularly aware of its publication if I had been a reader of the mainstream Australian newspapers and literary magazines. According to Bruce Gillespie, I was the last regular science fiction and fantasy review for a major national newspaper outlet. My 30-year stint as a reviewer for *The Canberra Times* ceased in late 2016 when *The Canberra Times*, which had been running down its local reviews for some time, informed its local reviewers that all copy would be coming from Fairfax Literary Central in Melbourne.

The merging of the three separate book review pages in *The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and *The Canberra Times* has had a dramatic impact on the number of national book reviews. The reviews were also circulated on the web by Fairfax on their online regional book pages across Australia, and this source of over 100 outlets has also been lost.

This has had a particular impact on genre, notably crime, SF, and fantasy, being publicly noticed as well as regional Australian authors. *The Australian* only very occasionally publishes SF reviews by James Bradley and George Williams, while the *Australian Book Review* seems to take a literary highbrow approach to genres, as do some of the literary websites.

Dreaming in the Dark

edited by Jack Dann (PS Australia; \$39)

The good news is that Pete and Nicky Crowther, founders and publishers of PS Publishing, the British specialist genre imprint, have begun an Australian publishing operation PS Australia. Well-known author and anthologist Jack Dann is PS Australia's managing director.

The first book to appear, *Dreaming in the Dark*, edited by Jack Dann, brings together a number of Australia's leading science fiction, fantasy and horror authors. It's a very nicely produced hardback with cover and artwork designed by Greg Bridges.

Jack Dann reflects that *Dreaming in the Dark* 'will be the third part of the Australian anthology triptych begun by Janeen Webb and myself with the 1998 World Fantasy Award-winning *Dreaming Down-Under* and the second an-

thology *Dreaming Again*.'

It is interesting to note the authors from that first anthology who have made it through to this one, such as Sean Williams, Paul Brandon, Rosaleen Love, Terry Dowling, and Sean McMullen. It would have been nice to see some of the still active authors in that 1998 volume, such as Lucy Sussex, appearing in *Dreaming in the Dark*, with the addition of some Australian authors, such as Kaaron Warren, with her dark magic realism stories. Editors, however, can never win when balancing story availability and textual space.

Dann, in the original anthology *Dreaming Down-Under*, reflected on the impressive 1998 Powerhouse Museum SF event with Harlan Ellison that I attended. That sort of impact and attendance now tends to go to ComicCons in Sydney and Melbourne.

Dann writes, with reference to the present anthology, 'This is a great time to be involved in Australian genre



fiction, which is still in its 'Golden Age'! I cannot share Dann's confidence in terms of mainstream genre access and distribution, and certainly not for SF publishing by Australian authors. Fantasy is a different commercial matter in Australia. And while self-publishing online is easier than ever before, there is still the problem of reputation and access. Even John Birmingham, who had major commercial success with his *Axis of Time* trilogy, has been forced into self-publishing because of disappointing sales of his last *David Hooper* action adventure series.

In his introduction, Dann refers to the small press and self-publishing environment 'going gangbusters', but there is still the problem of national access, distribution and reviewing for these modes of publication. Because much Australian SF and some fantasy has been produced only by small publishers in the last decade, there has been relatively little distribution to bookshops or review outlets.

Dann has assembled an impressive set of names in *Dreaming in the Dark*: Venero Armano, Alan Baxter, James Bradley, Paul Brandon, Simon Brown, Adam Browne, Rjurik Davidson, Terry Dowling, Lisa L. Hannett, Richard Harland, Rosaleen Love, Kirstyn McDermott, Sean McMullen, Jason Nahrung, Garth Nix, Angela Slatter, Anna Tambour, Janeen Webb, Kim Westwood, Kim Wilkins, and Sean Williams. All the stories come with postscripts from the authors.

As ever with anthologies, there is a wide range of style and content in the stories. One of the standouts in style is James Bradley's 'Martian Triptych', with three beauti-

fully composed vignettes about Mars. Bradley reflects on the life and ultimate death of the universe as seen through the spectrum of Mars in the near past and far future.

A number of the stories in the anthology tackle contemporary social issues, perhaps too many for the overall balance of the collection. Venero Armano's 'Heat Treatment' is a claustrophobic disturbing story, with a father fighting his irrational fear of hurting his own child. This begins with his fear that he would hold his baby over a hospital balcony, presumably in the style of Michael Jackson. Armano, in a lengthy postscript, notes that this fear is called PostPartum OCD.

In 'Fade To Grey', Janeen Webb, co-editor with Dann of the previous two *Dreaming* anthologies, has her main character, a retired journalist, moving into a Newcastle beachside apartment block, only to find a dozen female ghosts, who seek her journalistic help to expose an incompetent, and ultimately deadly, surgeon, known as 'the Pig'. Libby faces a personal race against time as she realises she may come under that very same surgeon's scalpel.

In 'Neither Time Nor Tears', Angela Slatter juxtaposes 'memory and materia' as a girl sifts through the contents of her deceased grandmother's Paddington terrace house. A 1917 war medal is the key to a dark family secret, as family fraud and deception take a bitter twist.

The last story in the collection, 'Moonshine', by Simon Brown, like Slatter's, is built upon personal memories, in this case to re-create a story of dual identity in the bootlegging 1920s.

'His Shining Day', by Richard Harland, based on Harland's memories of Greek travel, is set in a small, remote Greek village, where the sins of the village are expunged in a deadly cleansing ritual.

'Sing, My Murdered Darlings' by Sean Williams extrapolates upon contemporary developments in scanning, compression, and 3-D printing to provide a dark, sardonic riff on matter transmission.

'Midnight In The Graffiti Tunnel' by Terry Dowling, dedicated to Harlan Ellison, is a disappointing story, given Dowling's track record in the genre. Set in the Graffiti Tunnel at Sydney University, it is a relatively short piece in which the supernatural is used as a *deus ex machina* to resolve personal conflict.

Kim Wilkins, another talented author, in 'In Hornhead Wood' provides another relatively run-of-the-mill supernatural story. Her short story is set in late Victorian Dartmoor, where the main character helps a young girl's ghost to be reclaimed by the Green Man.

More original is 'Luv Story' by Kim Westwood, described in the blurb as 'a future myth, a dark and deadly and joyous combination of Old Testament and Anthony Burgess'. Certainly the language of this four-page short story echoes Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, but its extrapolation of the Adam and Eve story, set in Canberra's War Memorial, is a little too short to carry off its daring concept.

Sean McMullen's 'The Luminarium Tower' has a medieval court fantasy setting in which the erection of a giant telescope allows McMullen to mix science with a clever act of revenge.

'Burnt Sugar' by Kirstyn McDermott is an effective Angela Carter-type fairy-tale, spinning off the original story of Hansel and Gretel.

Rosaleen Love's impressive 'Snowflakes All the Way Down' takes its cue from nineteenth-century naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace's travels to Ambonya (present day Ambon) and contemporary censorship in China. Her main characters embark on a trip to Abonya, which has become isolated after the apocalyptic 'plankton wars', resulting from global warming. They realise that their freedom will be relative but not that the outcome of their visit will be dramatically life changing.

Dreaming in the Dark would have benefited from more editorial rigour in terms of short story quality and the sequencing and balance of subject content. Despite those caveats, however, it is a collection to be much welcomed, and a fine beginning for PS Publishing in Australia.

Books about SF and fantasy

Seriously Funny: The Endlessly Quotable Terry Pratchett

Terry Pratchett (Doubleday; \$27.99)

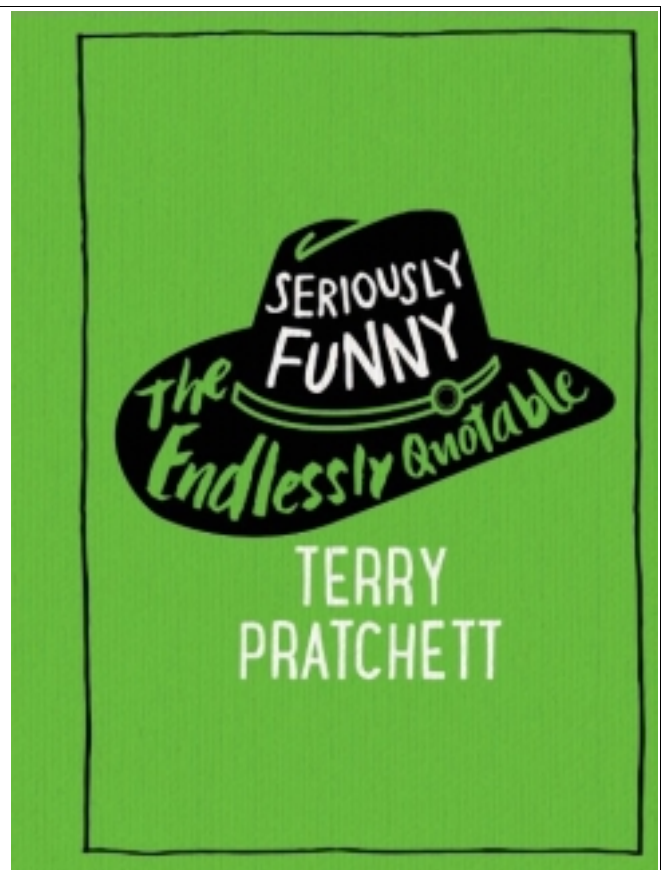
Seriously Funny is a small book. It can therefore only contain a small sample of the wit and wisdom that filled **Terry Pratchett's** novels.

The Preface is taken from an address Pratchett gave in 2010 at Trinity College, Dublin, an institution that gave Terry an honorary doctorate. Pratchett states: 'For the whole of my life since I was nine years old I have enjoyed words. Words turn us from monkeys into me. We make them, change them, trace them around, eat them and live by them — they are workhorses, carrying any burden, and their usage is the skill of the author's trade, hugely versatile; there are times when the wrong word is the right word, and times when words can be manipulated so that silence shouts. Their care, feeding and indeed breeding is part of the craft of which I am a journeyman.' Pratchett was, of course, far more than a journeyman.

I met Terry Pratchett a number of times in Australia. Face to face he was not a man for rapid-fire quips, but his dry humour was always evident. At one event with him at the Australian National University, however, he was quite extrovert. When I was introducing him on stage, he began making ape-like gestures and going 'ook-ook' behind me, riffing off the Orang-utan Librarian of the Unseen University. I was then the University Librarian of ANU.

Pratchett's Unseen University is a superb satire of the culture of universities. The following section from *The Last Continent* is quoted in *Seriously Funny*: "But we're a university! We have to have a library!" said Ridcully. "It adds *tone*. What sort of people would we be if we didn't go into the library?" "Students," said the senior wrangler morosely'.

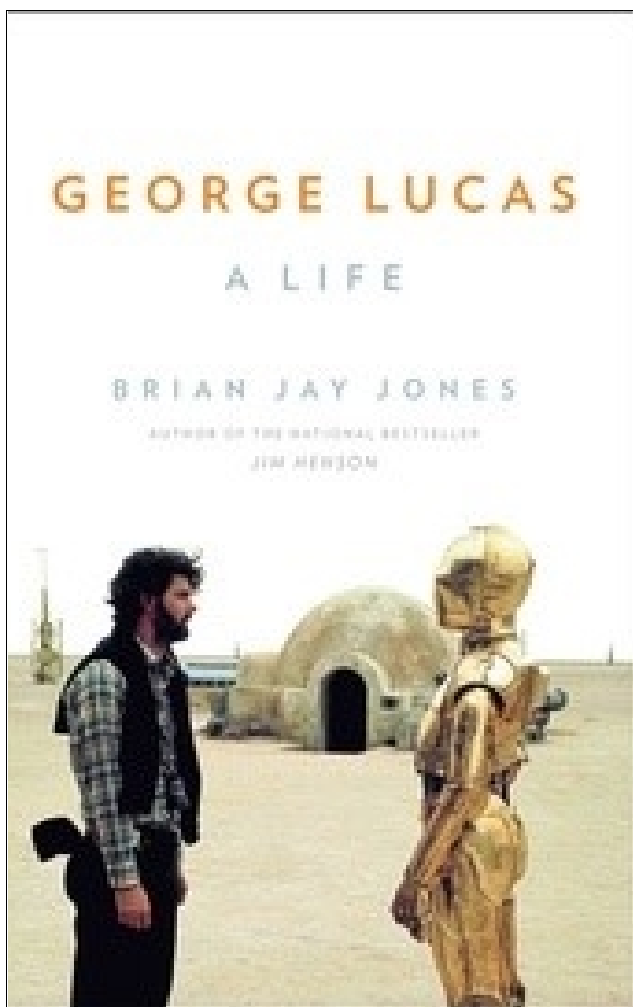
The best way to give a flavour of *Seriously Funny* is to provide a few examples of the quotations organised under nine subject headings, Human Nature, Romance, Learning and Wisdom, Success, Life and Death, Ani-



mals, Religion, Politics, and Words and Writing.

- 'Inside every old person is a young person wondering what happened'. (This reviewer can empathise with that).
- 'Goodness is about what you do not what you pray to'.
- 'I'll be more enthusiastic about encouraging thinking outside the box when there's evidence of any thinking going on inside it'.
- 'Steal five dollars and you're a common thief. Steal thousands and you're either the government or a hero.'
- 'It is a long-cherished tradition among a certain type of military thinker that huge casualties are the main thing. If they are on the other side then this is a valuable bonus'.
- 'Taxation, gentlemen, is very much like dairy farming. The task is to extract the maximum amount of milk with the minimum amount of moo'.
- 'Real stupidity beats artificial intelligence every time'.
- 'Education was a bit like a communicable sexual disease. It made you unsuitable for a lot of jobs and then you had the urge to pass it on'.
- 'DON'T THINK OF IT AS DYING, said Death. JUST THINK OF IT AS LEAVING EARLY TO AVOID THE RUSH'.

Pratchett will live on through his writings as new generations discover his Discworld novels. *Seriously Funny* provides a delightful sample of Pratchett's view of 'life, the universe and snoring'.



George Lucas: A Life
Brian Jay Jones (Headline; \$35)

George Lucas has had an incredible impact on contemporary culture through the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* film series, while he has made significant technical innovations with sound (THX), Industrial Light & Magic, and Pixar in its early form.

George Lucas: A Life has been publicised as the first comprehensive biography of Lucas. That's undoubtedly correct in terms of the chronological detail in its 550 pages, but also somewhat inaccurate, as **Brian Jay Jones** fails to provide the deep personal insights of the best biographies.

David Marr, in his 15 September 2016 Seymour biography lecture 'The Art of Biography' at the National Library of Australia, stated that 'biographers must command the lives they write, they must make sense of them. Telling is not enough.' Jones tells the basics well enough, but since this is an unauthorised biography, largely based on secondary sources and a number of interviews, it lacks the 'command' that Jones might have had if he had had personal access to Lucas.

Jones's short prologue, headed 'March 1976', cameos Lucas at the beginning of the *Star Wars* filming. Lucas faced many problem. Overall, there was Twentieth Century Fox's lukewarm support. Then filming fell behind because of bad weather and mechanical failures, such as R2-D2, who 'refused to work'.

Jones quotes Mark Hamill as saying, 'the robots would go bananas bumping into each other, falling down, breaking — some of this caused by having their signals scrambled by Arabic radio broadcasts'. A year before the release date, 'the *Star Wars* project was a mess' and Lucas was convinced the movie 'was going to be terrible'.

Jones is good at detailing the minutiae of the screenplay drafts and original castings. He recounts how Christopher Walken nearly became Han Solo, while Harrison Ford, who had appeared in Lucas's earlier successful film, *American Graffiti*, was initially overlooked because Lucas did not want to be seen to have a 'stable' of actors. *Star Wars* opened on 25 May 1977 in only 32 US cinemas. But the rest, as they say, is history.

The success of *Star Wars* gave Lucas both the financial and production independence he wanted after his frustrations with Universal, Warner Bros, and Twentieth Century Fox. His view that 'they have no idea what making a movie is about' led to him setting up Lucasfilm. His subsequent work with Stephen Spielberg on the *Indiana Jones* films also contributed to his financial success.

Lucas was born in Modesto, California, in 1944, a location that Lucas says 'was really Norman Rockwell ... very classic Americana'. Lucas grew up in the Eisenhower 1950s with a love of comic books, TV serials, and cars. He was a self-avowed bored student in high school, but managed, with his father's financial help, to get into the prestigious University of Southern California film school.

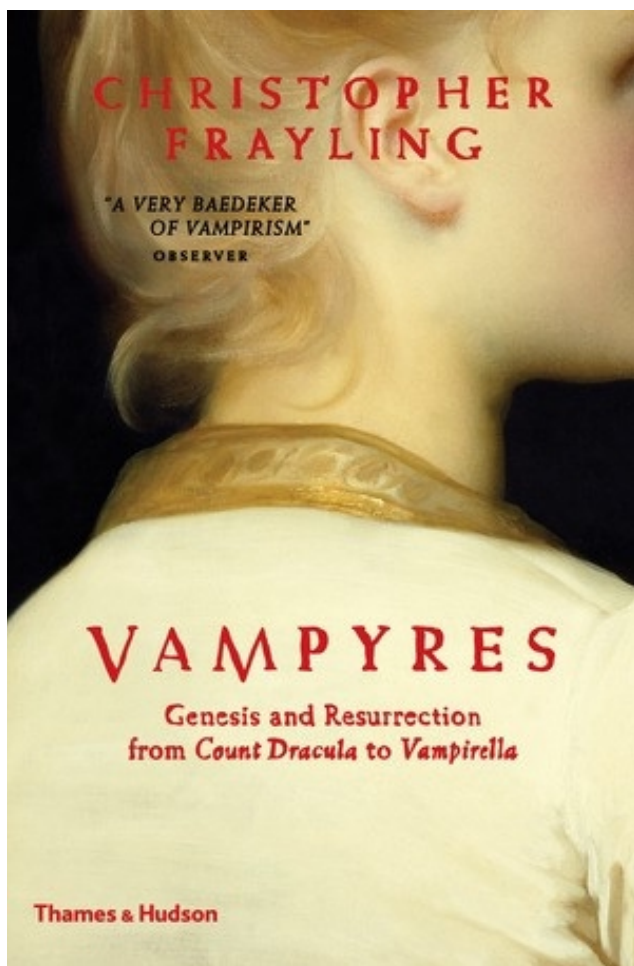
Jones documents Lucas's meetings with the also young Francis Ford Coppola, who helped with Lucas's first experimental film, *THX 1138*. *American Graffiti* followed in 1973, influenced by Lucas's teenage years in Modesto. Lucas and Coppola were to fall in and out of friendship during the next two decades over movie collaborations and finances. Interestingly, Lucas nearly directed *Apocalypse Now*.

Lucas emerges in his relationships as a loner, an obsessive perfectionist, hard on himself and his actors. Mark Hamill says, 'If there were a way to make movies without actors, George would do it.' George married Marcia Griffin in 1969. Friends then thought 'they seemed an unlikely couple'. Marcia was also to become a talented film editor who would eventually win an Oscar.

Marcia later commented that George was ultimately more in love with his work than her, 'he was very emotionally blocked, incapable of sharing feelings. He wanted to stay on that workaholic track'. They were to be divorced in 1983 after a difficult settlement.

Subsequent relationships by Lucas, for example, with the singer Linda Ronstadt during the 1980s, and his second marriage in 2013 to Mellody Hobson, whom he met in 2005, are not deeply analysed as to their impact on Lucas's personality and creative endeavour.

While Jones never probes too deeply into Lucas's dark side, nonetheless *George Lucas: A Life* provides a solid coverage of his life and his films.



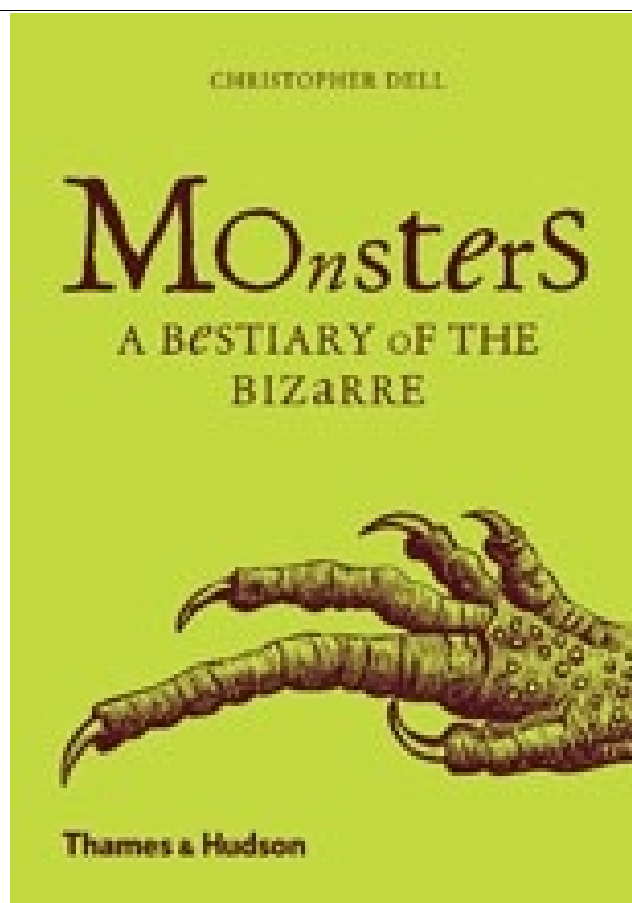
Vampyres: Genesis and Resurrection from Count Dracula to Vampirella
Christopher Frayling (Thames & Hudson; \$39.99)

Monsters: A Bestiary of the Bizarre
Christopher Dell (Thames & Hudson; \$19.99)

Sir Christopher Frayling is Professor Emeritus of Cultural History at the Royal College of Art in London, where he was Rector from 1996 to 2009. His numerous books include a study of Fu Manchu, *A Cultural History of Insanity*, and *Memento Mori: The Dead Among Us*. His latest book is an update of his 1978 classic, *Vampyres: Genesis and Resurrection from Count Dracula to Vampirella*.

Vampyres is divided into several sections. The first is a lengthy literary analysis, 'Lord Byron to Count Dracula', extending to just over 100 pages. The second section comprises six chapters with extracts from relevant vampire books, ranging from famous works, such as John Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Lord Byron's *Fragment of a Story*, to lesser-known items, such as *The Fate of Madame Cabanel* by Eliza Lynn Linton and James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampyre*. It is very useful to have these lesser-known stories, as the well-known ones are already easily available in a variety of formats.

Chapters 5 and 6 are largely devoted to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* from the genesis of *Dracula*, including Stoker's 'Working Papers' and the final 1897 version. The final Postscript consists of Angela Carter's 'The Lady of the House of Love', based on her radio play *Vampirella*,



introduced by Frayling's personal interaction with Carter.

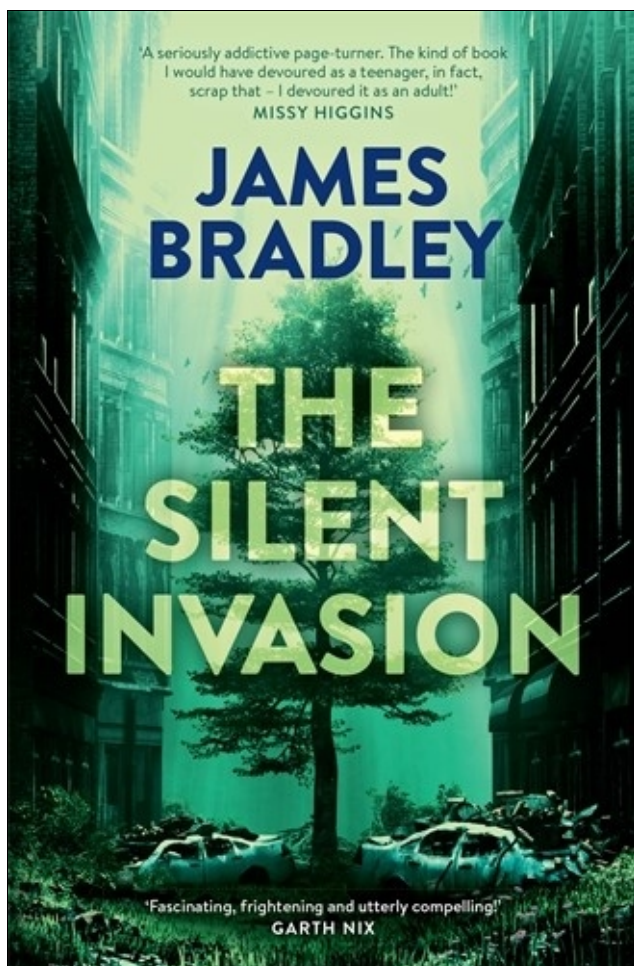
Well-selected colour illustrations, ranging from eighteenth-century prints to recent film stills, complement the text, although the opportunity to analyse more recent vampiric cultural manifestations is not taken up by Frayling, with only short references to Anne Rice, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *The Twilight Saga*.

Vampyres thus essentially comprises literary analysis of the vampire 'bloodline', supplemented by extensive selections of the relevant literature, mostly relating to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Frayling covers, within the vampiric framework, discussions of sexuality, the class system, social history, and folklore, often in a non-linear fashion. *Vampyres* is recommended source material, although an index would have been helpful for such a comprehensive volume.

Christopher Dell's *Monsters: A Bestiary of the Bizarre* is a much less ambitious work, published in a small compact hardback format, with numerous colour illustrations. In his 10 chapters Dell adopts a thematic approach with topics such as 'Dragons and Flying Monsters', 'Ghosts and Ghouls', and 'Transformations and Hybrids'.

His examples are necessarily selective because of the shortness of the chapters, but Dell does range fairly widely, globally, culturally, and chronologically. He notes 'every single culture on earth has its own monsters ... creatures that go against the laws of nature'. His monsters range from the Loch Ness Monster to the Yeti, from Bigfoot to the Chupacabra, a supposed goat-sucker monster from Puerto Rico.

Monsters, while an appealingly visual history, is



ultimately only a taster of what monsters reveal about humanity.

Australian young adult SF

The Silent Invasion

James Bradley (Pan; \$9.99)

James Bradley begins his competitively priced Young Adult 'Change' trilogy with *The Silent Invasion*. Bradley, an award-winning writer and critic, knows his SF, which he occasionally reviews for *The Australian*. His last novel, *Clade*, was an inventive vision of a climate collapse future seen through the prism of a family.

Of his new YA novel, which will equally appeal to an older audience Bradley has commented, 'Through it all though the idea of this alien intelligence — the Change — possessed me, as did the idea that those absorbed into it were altered, transformed into something blank, indifferent, other. In it, I saw something of the strangeness and haunting we increasingly feel when we look at the world around us. I saw something of the ways in which climate change is altering our ideas about agency, forcing us to grapple not just with the idea of landscapes as a whole but with the interconnectedness of all things.'

The Silent Invasion is set in 2027, when society, almost totally contained within an East Coast Australian setting, has been dramatically affected by alien seedpods. The DNA of those infected transforms them into 'Something

Other'. The Government has imposed a rigorous 'Quarantine', although 'In the ten years since the Change arrived so many had been infected it was impossible to keep track of the true numbers of those lost or taken by Quarantine'.

Bradley's main character, 16-year-old Callie, decides to evade the Quarantine after she finds her younger sister Gracie has been infected. The main part of *The Silent Invasion* follows Callie and Gracie's dangerous travel northwards in an attempt to reach the mysterious Zone, 'the place where meaning ran out, where the map ended and uncertainty took over'.

It would be fair to say that, like all trilogies, a full appreciation will need to await publication of all three books. Bradley's intriguing retrospective two-page overview, at the beginning of the first book, promises much to come. In the meantime, enjoy Bradley's exploration of the value of family, and what it is to be both human and inhuman, as our world is transformed.

British science fiction

The Gradual

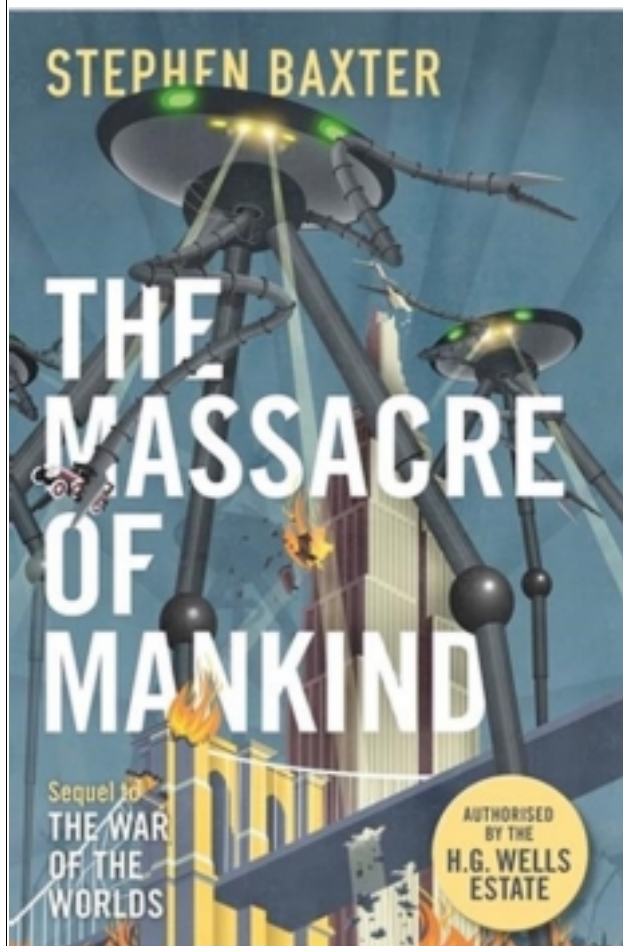
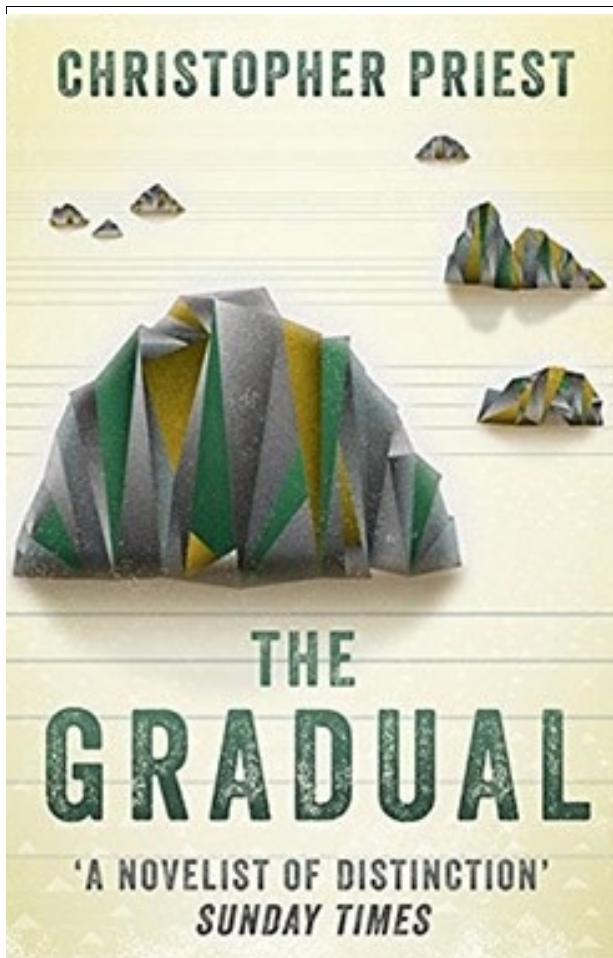
Christopher Priest (Gollancz; \$45)

On the first page of *The Gradual*, British writer **Christopher Priest** writes, 'time is a gradual process — like ageing, you do not notice it happening'. In the context of the issues of ageing and the slippage of time in *The Gradual*, Priest must surely reflect on his own literary passage of time. Priest is now 73. It doesn't seem very long ago, at least for this reviewer, that Priest was listed in the first *Granta* List of Best Young Novelists in 1983. Although he has won mainstream literary awards, such as the James Tait Black, most of his awards have been in the science fiction and fantasy category, such as the Arthur C. Clarke and World Fantasy awards.

It may be that Priest suffers from being labelled a genre writer, because he remains relatively unknown to the general reading public, compared to some of his fellow 1983 nominees, such as Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, Ian McEwan, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Salman Rushdie.

The Gradual, with its haunting and dreamlike prose, is the latest in his Dream Archipelago series, based on an imagined huge set of islands, which began featuring in short stories in the 1970s, but, more lately, in novels. At the beginning of *The Gradual*, Priest's main character, Alessandro Sussken, is a talented musician and composer living in the junta-controlled state of Glaund, which seems to be at perpetual war with another island, although the war is physically distant. Alessandro's older brother Jacj left for the war many years ago.

At the beginning of the novel, Alessandro undertakes a concert tour of several islands, but time on the islands can slip and become 'gradual'. Alessandro finds on return to Glaund that while the tour only took him a few months, nearly two years have passed. His parents are dead, while his wife, faced with bankruptcy and loneliness, has left him. 'I was dealing with the sordid reality of a broken marriage, an abandoned home, read, isolation, loss. And inner silence.' Other members of the



concert tour suffer similarly through their passage of time.

Alessandro's inner silence is broken when he is summoned to the headquarters of the Democratic Council of Leaders, where the female junta leader persuades him to accept a very well-paid commission to compose a triumphal piece for the regime. Alessandro, however, on reflection, and after banking the money, decides to flee Glaund and travel through the islands again. But travel is complicated, not least in requiring the services of hawker-like 'adepts', who claim they can alleviate the 'temporal detriment' of travel.

Alessandro is on the run in more ways than one as a warrant has been issued for his arrest. Much of the storyline follows his seemingly mundane travels, encompassing customs bureaucracies, changing money, staying in tawdry hotels, and eating in cheap restaurants, but always affected by the movement of time.

Alessandro ultimately finds his long-lost brother, who denies their family relationship and tries to arrest Alessandro. Their relationship will eventually come full circle, as indeed does the novel. Priest superbly explores individual and collective freedom as time has an impact on experience and memory. Time may be ripe for more public recognition of Christopher Priest's literary talents.

The Massacre of Mankind

Stephen Baxter (Gollancz; \$32.99)

Obelisk

Stephen Baxter (Gollancz; \$35)

Stephen Baxter is one of Britain's best and most prolific SF authors. In 1995, Baxter's *The Time Ships*, an authorised sequel to H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, was published. *The Massacre of Mankind* is another authorised sequel, this time to Wells's classic, *The War of the Worlds*.

On the penultimate page of the original publication of *The War of the Worlds*, Wells writes, 'A question of graver and universal interest is a possibility of another attack from the Martians. I do not think that nearly enough attention has been given to this aspect of the matter.'

Now Baxter does, with the new Martian invasion beginning in 1920, some 13 years after the first Martian attack. It is narrated by Julia Elphinstone, the journalist and suffragette sister-in-law of Wells' unnamed original's narrator, who is now given a name, Walter Jenkins. Baxter follows the style and format of the original, although perhaps with too many social and political pastiches and science infodumps to maintain the narrative pace.

The Martians soon occupy a large part of England, which ultimately becomes the launching pad for a global assault on America, Russia, China, South Africa, and indeed Australia, where the Dome of the State Library of Victoria is destroyed in spectacular fashion, exploding 'in a hail of concrete shrapnel, and the incineration of the precious books, began with a tremendous flair of flame'.

Baxter provides a solid alternate history of the 1920s, featuring Churchill, Freud, Edison, and Sun Yat-sen,

while a certain German corporal has a walk-on role. Baxter moves beyond Earth, with the Jovians providing an unexpected plot development.

The Massacre of Mankind will appeal especially to fans of the original text, who will appreciate Baxter's detailed textual homage to H. G. Wells.

Baxter ponders issues such as the power of religion and the ethics of science in some of the 17 stories collected in *Obelisk*. Fifteen of these had been previously been published in magazines or anthologies in the last decade, but it's very useful to have them collected in one volume.

The first section, 'Proxima Ultima', comprises four stories set in the universe of Baxter's novels, *Proxima* and *Ultima* (2013–14). As Baxter notes in an afterword that these stories have been lightly revised for compatibility with the finished novels.

The first story in the book, 'On Chryse Plain', is a relatively slight piece as the fly cycles of two young Martian men and the skyskimmer of an Earth girl collide in a remote desert. Their fight for survival is aided by an ingenious use of the ancient Viking One lander.

Six stories are collected under the header 'Other Yesterdays', which cover alternate histories; for example, what if the Catholic Church had suppressed Darwin's theories? 'Darwin Anathema' has an Australian female academic from the University of Cooktown arriving in Catholic-dominated England to defend a young female relative of Darwin and indeed his bones at an inquisition trial.

Baxter asks, in the 'The Unblinking Eye', what if the

Incas had become a truly global empire and were more technologically advanced than Europe? The Incas travel by boat to an alternate 1960s Europe, returning with the son of Emperor Charlemagne. Baxter's main character, a young girl Jenny Cook, unearths the hidden plans of the Incas for a sun bomb attack on London.

The 'Other Todays' section comprises two stories. 'The Pevatron Rats' begins with a school visit to a Harwell particle accelerator in a story that ultimately mixes particle physics, time paradoxes, and a rat invasion of Earth.

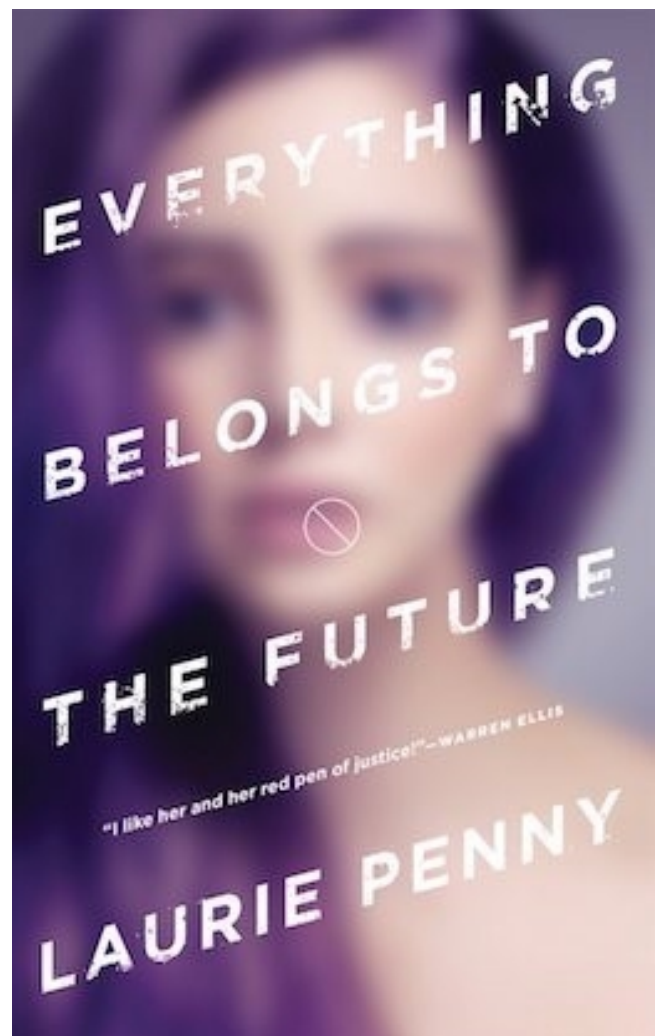
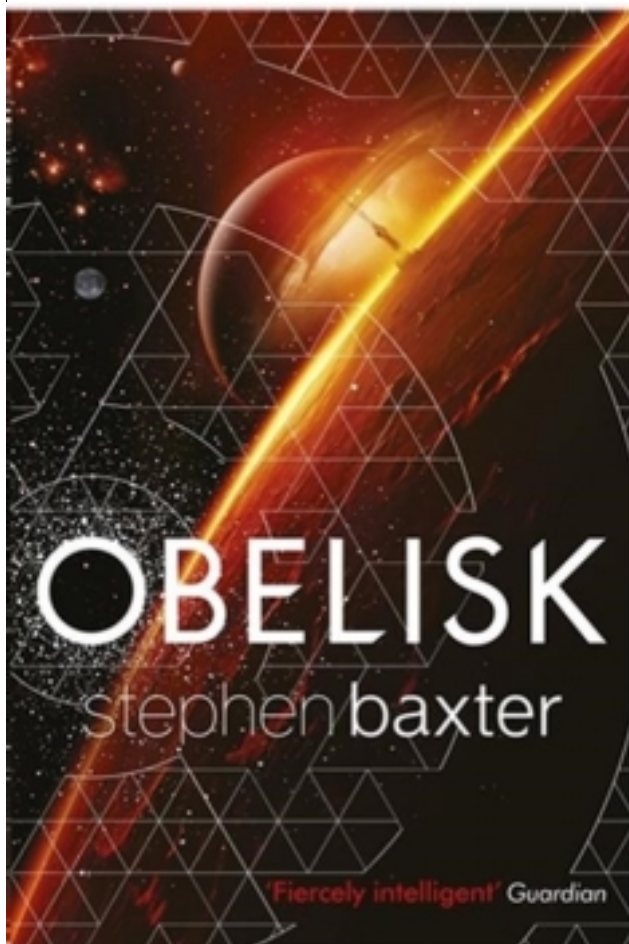
The standout in the five stories collected in 'Other Tomorrows' is 'Turing's Apples', which mixes brotherly competition and a SETI search in a way that evokes greater beings, in the manner of Arthur C. Clarke's 2001: *A Space Odyssey*.

Everything Belongs to the Future

Laurie Penny (Tom Doherty; \$22.95)

Everything Belongs to the Future is non-fiction British columnist **Laura Penny**'s first novel, or rather, first novella. At 114 small pages, it is too short a book, however, to successfully encompass the big issues that Penny attempts to address.

Penny's non-fiction essays have focused on social justice, feminism, and politics, issues that come through strongly in the book, although, at times, the polemics



distort the narrative structure.

Everything Belongs to the Future is set in the late twenty-first century, a world portrayed through the microcosm of Oxford University, and, in particular, Magdalen College. A longevity drug has been developed by scientist Daisy Craver, who is one of the major characters in the book.

Longevity, however, is only available to the ultra-rich, while the vast majority of the underclass struggle to survive. The description of the long-living elite of Oxford University in their inner-city College sanctuaries, and the disease-ridden outer city, seems to be more in tune with the Oxford of the nineteenth than the twenty-second century.

Penny provides relatively little background detail as to how the rest of the world, let alone Oxford, is functioning when beset by such dramatic inequality. Would simple checkpoints be enough to restrain the downtrodden subclasses in the slums of Cowley, Headington, and Blackbird Leys?

The local inequality is challenged by a small group of activists, who seem a throwback to the 1960s anarchist generation. They aim to steal the longevity 'fix' to redistribute to the poor and thus overthrow 'gerontocratic biopower and the money system'. They are joined by a disillusioned Daisy, but her motives may well be leading her to a different global conclusion.

None of the characters, including Daisy, is fully developed, but the stereotypes allow Penny space to philosophise on inequality, the ethics of scientists,

venture capitalism, and other contemporary angsts.

Defender

G. X. Todd (Headline; \$32.99)

G. X. Todd's debut novel *Defender* is the first in a four-part post-apocalypse series 'The Voices'. As a 34-year-old librarian from the West Midlands in England, Todd would certainly know the appeal of the apocalyptic. Probably for commercial reasons, her novel is therefore set in America, with little reference to the rest of the world.

Seven years before the story opens, people began hearing voices, which told them to kill — either themselves or others. Most of the population of the United States ends up dead, with towns and cities laid waste in the ensuing carnage. A few individuals have survived, like Pilgrim, who has learnt to communicate, although often uneasily, with his own 'Voice'.

Pilgrim and orphan teenager Lacey are the two main characters, and their relationship is at the core of the novel. Pilgrim reluctantly decides to help Lacey find her sister in Vicksburg, which necessitates a trek across country, but this only leads them into the path of a psychopathic gang leader.

Pilgrim is the archetypal loner, but with, it seems, a heart of gold, in his aim to protect Laura, an innocent, who becomes increasingly hardened by the problems she and Pilgrim encounter. Pilgrim, and ultimately Lacey's, interactions with the Voice are the original elements in what otherwise would be a routine post-apocalyptic storyline. Todd may be also hinting at a sub-theme of mental illness and voices in the head, but that never really come to the fore amidst the narrative's growing physical and sexual violence.

A poignant and realistic ending promises well for the next three volumes.

Daughter of Eden

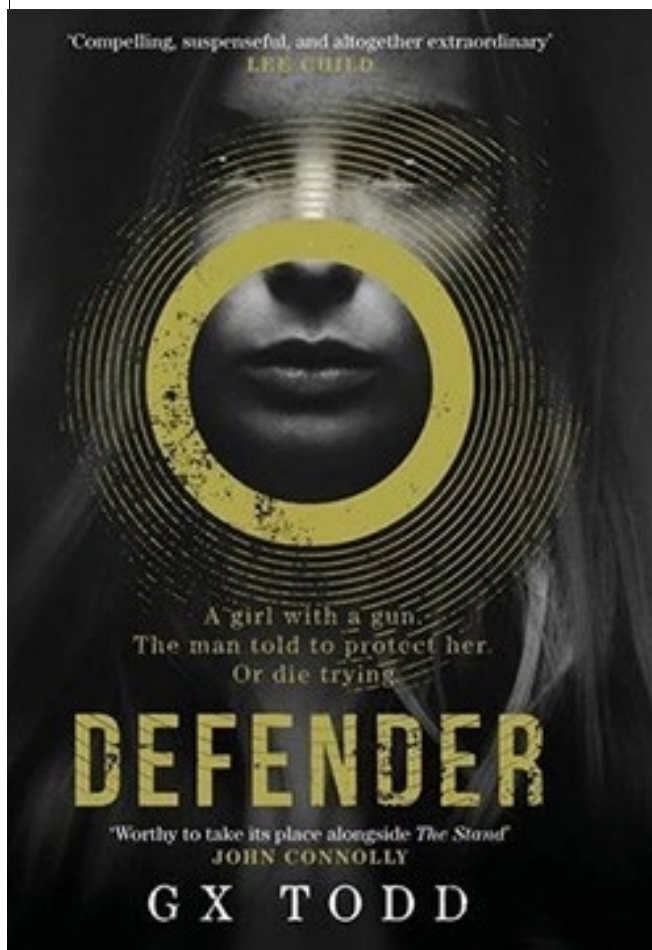
Chris Beckett (Corvus; \$29.99)

Daughter of Eden completes **Chris Beckett's** Eden trilogy, which began with *Dark Eden*, the winner of the 2013 Arthur C. Clarke Award. *Daughter of Eden* follows closely after the events of the second book, *Mother of Eden*.

Beckett's trilogy is set on Eden, a non-solar planet, its ever-present darkness only relieved by flora bioluminescence. Society on Eden has developed from a now largely forgotten Earth spaceship landing. This is no idyllic Eden, however, as genetic problems have resulted from inbreeding. The narrator of *Daughter of Eden*, Angie Redlantern, part of the 'Davidfolk', was born with a cleft palate and a hairlip and is known as a 'batface'.

Beckett has extrapolated from his own experience with claw feet, and childhood reactions to it, to examine the place of outsiders in society. He has said in an interview, those 'people who are "broken" are seen as reminders of a kind of original sin committed by the first generation of Eden (when a brother and his sisters had no choice but to sleep with one another if there was to be another generation at all)'.

Eden is divided between the 'Johnfolk', who are tech-



nologically more advanced, and the more fundamentalist Davidfolk. Beckett has acknowledged that when he began writing the trilogy, he was thinking about the divisions between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims.

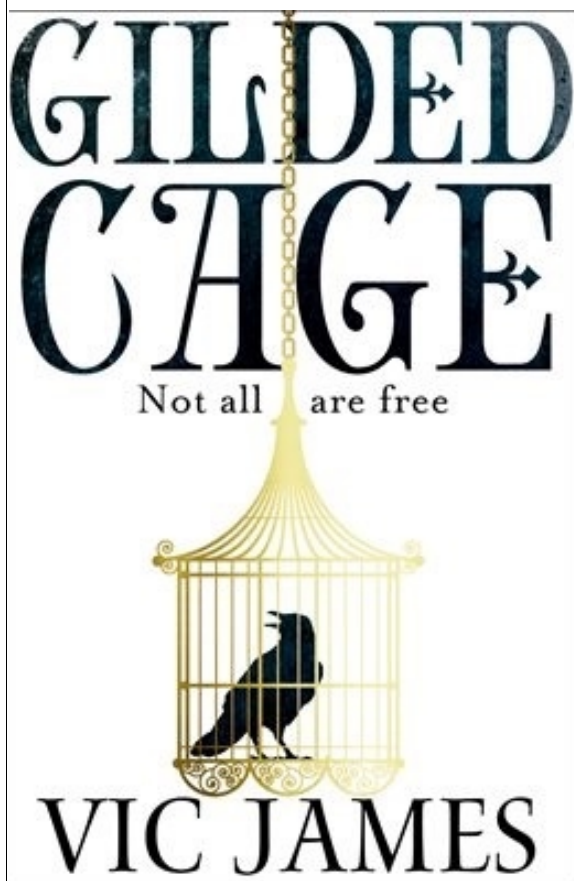
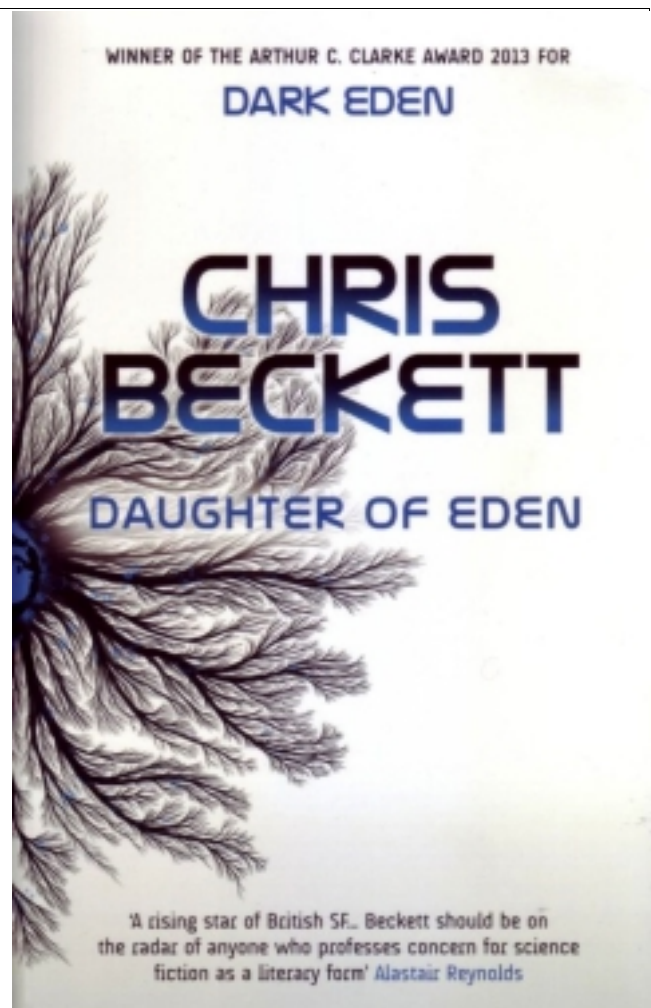
Beckett's text reflects the limited vocabulary of Eden's backward society. Beckett has said in an interview, 'All I really knew at first was that I wanted the language of Eden people to be noticeably different to the English we speak on Earth. Well, it would be, I reckoned, after 160 years with no contact with Earth and no written language to speak of to act as a stabiliser'.

At the start of *Daughter of Eden*, the Johnfolk have launched an attack on the Davidfolk, which forces Angie and her family to flee. The conflict itself remains largely in the background, as Beckett explores, through Angie and other women, the interaction of myth and truth in the lost colony.

Historical facts have become blurred over time, and become dogma, inspiring conflict. Beckett has argued, in an interview, that religion often provides the base context for conflict and 'aggressive tribalism', which has often become separated from its religious origin.

The arrival of a spaceship from Earth through a wormhole provides the catalyst for Eden's discovery of its past, although ultimately, 'The Earth people had shown us light, but we were still where we'd always been, in dark, dark, Eden.'

Beckett's trilogy, like the best science fiction, has as much to say about the contemporary world as it does about its decidedly inventive future world. The Eden trilogy stands comparison with Brian Aldiss's epic *Hellconia* trilogy.



British alternative world SF

Gilded Cage

Vic James (Pan; \$16.99)

Vic James's debut novel, *Gilded Cage*, is the first volume in his 'Dark Gifts' trilogy. James, a former current affairs TV director, once made a BBC series called *The Super Rich and Us* 'which was a serious look at widening income inequality and a lack of social mobility, with bright, motivated young people having to go into jobs with very few prospects'.

James extrapolates from that experience to imagine a modern England where a small group of privileged and magically skilled aristocrats, 'the Equals', rule, while the vast majority of the population are consigned to servitude, which includes a mandatory ten-year sweatshop experience.

As the book begins, the Hadley family learn that they are to begin their ten years of 'slavedays' in a grim factory in Manchester. The eldest daughter of the family, Abigail, manages, however, to get the family placed within the manorial estate household of one of the major aristocratic families, the Jardines. The only drawback is that her younger brother, Luke, is not accepted by the Jardine family and is packed off to 'Manchester's filthy unforgiving slave town Millmoor'.

The story, which intertwines the fate of the two

families, moves between the depressing factory environment and the Jardine estate at Kyneston, where Abi and her younger sister become drawn into the aristocratic family. Luke finds resistance against slavery and oppression is brewing in his Dickensian workplace. James references here the eighteenth-century French and American Revolutions. The Equals, for their part, are increasingly riven by dynastic power struggles, setting up well the continuing story for books two and three in the series.

Gilded Cage is an interesting dark fantasy, echoing many of today's societal concerns on the increasing divide between rich and poor.

British fantasy, dark fantasy, horror

The Travelling Bag and Other Ghostly Stories Susan Hill (Profile Books; \$24.99)

Susan Hill has been called the 'Grande Dame of English supernatural fiction'. *The Travelling Bag*, her latest collection, comprises four supernatural short stories that mix traditional ghostly mores and contemporary life.

In the title story, Hill extrapolates from the current academic curse of publish or perish. Dr Walter Craig, an eminent researcher, finds his research data stolen while he is on a long period of sick leave and subsequently published by Silas Webb, his junior researcher. On return to work and being unable to prove the theft, Craig's career goes into freefall, while Webb ultimately gains a knighthood and a Fellowship of the Royal Society. Craig's ultimate revenge in the heart of London's clubland is decidedly macabre but not, ultimately, without a cost to Craig himself.

In 'Boy Number Twenty-One', Toby Garrett, a lonely boarding-school student, is delighted when he is able to befriend new border Andreas. Their friendship becomes very close, so Toby is bereft when Andreas mysteriously disappears. A school trip to a seventeenth-century manor house may prove the clue to Andreas's mysterious heritage.

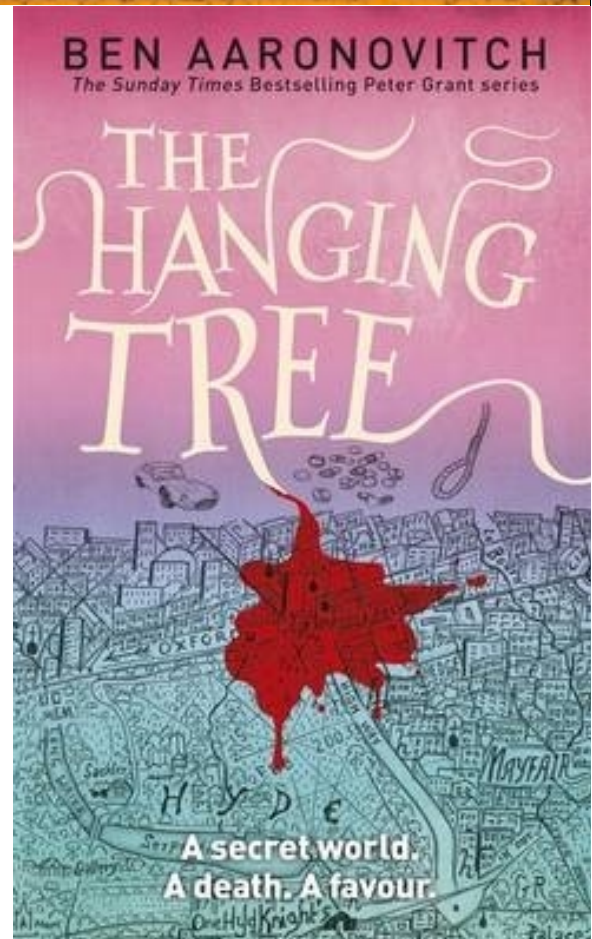
In 'Alice Baker', the arrival of a new worker in a small friendly office environment soon causes problems. Alice is reclusive, never wants to talk about her family background, and emits a distinct odour. The answer comes when new office building work uncovers, in more ways than one, another tragic link to the past.

In 'The Front Room', a family takes in an elderly stepmother, but she is far from being grateful. Hill depicts an evil stepmother in the classic fairytale tradition, her dramatic impact on the family and the children stretching beyond the grave.

The stories in *The Travelling Bag* are not Hill's career strongest. Narrative and characterisation are a little too economical, so that the impact of the macabre frameworks of the stories is ultimately not fully realised.

The Hanging Tree Ben Aaronovitch (Gollancz; \$29.99)

The Hanging Tree is Ben Aaronovitch's sixth instalment



Norse Mythology

Neil Gaiman (Bloomsbury; \$27.99)

The global publishing success of Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology* has surprised even him, a success which reaffirms that Gaiman is now a cultural superstar.

Gaiman writes, in his Introduction, that he has been fascinated by Norse mythology since he read, at the age of seven, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee's *Thor* comic, then became entranced by Roger Lancelyn Green's *Myths of the Norsemen*.

Gaiman read the thirteenth-century source texts for many Norse myths, the Prose *Edda* and Poetic *Edda*, compiled by Snorri Sturluson, when he was in his thirties. As a result, Gaiman says the 'Norse tales have accompanied me through pretty much everything I've done. They ran like a vein of silver through *Sandman*, they were the bedrock of *American Gods*', in which Odin and Loki also feature strongly. The 2017 TV series of *American Gods* will undoubtedly send many viewers out to seek out Gaiman's new retelling of the Norse myths.

Gaiman says, however, that he had to 'play fair with the Norse scholars and I have to play fair with kids who pick up the book and read it and think they know the stories. And so I may add colour, I may add motivation, I'd go and put in my own dialogue ... What I want to do is tell you the story and make it work as a story.'

Gaiman's comment that 'the Norse gods came with their own doomsday: Ragnarok, the twilight of the gods, the end of it all' has made him reflect on the contemporary world. 'Had Ragnarok happened yet? Was it still do happen? I did not know then. I'm not certain now.'

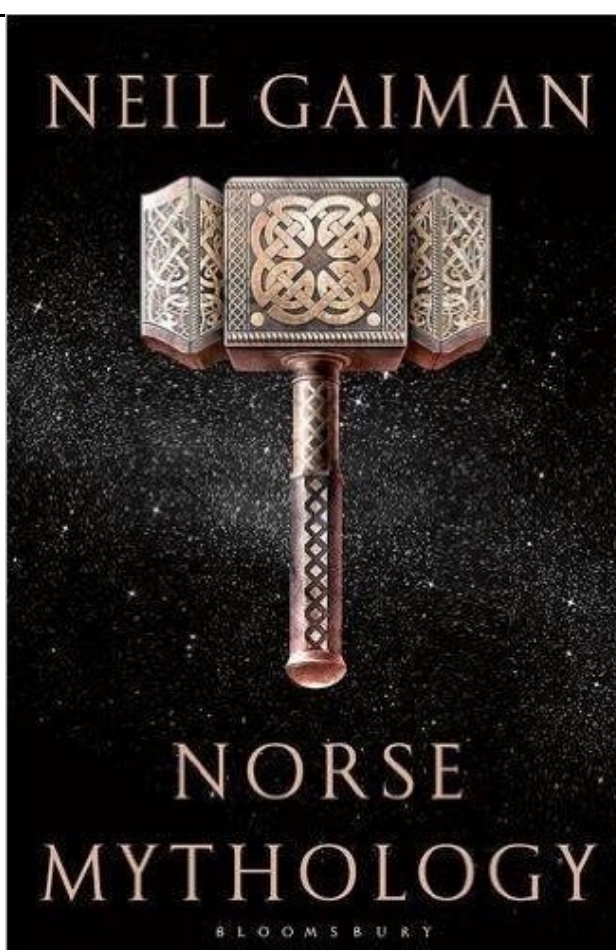
Norse Mythology is embellished with typical Gaiman style and wit, with the panoply of Asgard gods exhibiting all too obvious human foibles. Gaiman's favourite character is the trickster Loki: 'You resented him even when you were at your most grateful, and you were grateful to him even when you hated him the most.'

Thor is a far cry from the original 1960s Marvel superhero. 'Thor, bless his heart, has no narrative arc: he is the same person all the way through. He is not the brightest hammer in the room, but he's good hearted, and you know he will die at the end, but he dies the same person he's been all the way through.'

in his 'Rivers of London' series. Aaronovitch has built up a considerable following for the series, which features PC Peter Grant, a detective with magical talents, working in a special department of London's Metropolitan Police.

Aaronovitch's narrative verve and dry humour drive these police procedurals, which involve Thames river gods, ghosts, and spirits. New readers, however, may wish to start with the first book in the series, *Rivers of London*, in order to become familiar with the large cast of characters and plot lines.

At the beginning of *The Hanging Tree*, Grant is asked by his friend Lady Ty, a major river god, to extricate her teenage daughter Olivia from the consequences of a drug overdose death at a Mayfair superrich party. This is a request that Peter is reluctant to comply with, but then, you never turn down a powerful river goddess. Matters



The Norse myths, as superbly retold by Gaiman, have already proved popular, particularly drawing in those who were only aware of them through other media, such as comics and blockbuster films.

Gaiman's clear and almost staccato prose also lends itself to reading aloud to children. As Ursula Le Guin has commented, 'the property of genuine myth (is) to be accessible on many levels'. Gaiman certainly succeeds in this respect.

China Miéville continues to extend the boundaries, as he has done in his last two adult books.

get complicated, however, when Olivia acknowledges buying drugs, and magic residue is found at the death scene.

While Peter, as a character, doesn't develop significantly in this latest book, there is no shortage of exotic characters, old and new, including DC Sahra Guleed, Peter's ninja-hijabi partner, who proves herself extremely capable in the dangerous magical battles, and the decidedly strange Monsieur Reynard. Throw in the continuing search for the murderous Faceless Man and Aaronovitch fans will not be disappointed with *The Hanging Tree*.



Chalk

Paul Cornell (Tor; \$26.95)

British author **Paul Cornell** is, to date, best known for his London-based urban fantasy police procedurals and his work on *Dr Who*, but *Chalk* is a dramatic authorial change. *Chalk* is a dark revenge novel set in Margaret Thatcher's 1980s Britain.

Cornell has said that it is a book 'that's been with me for over twenty years. It's taken that long, and many, varied drafts, to shape the ideas in it into a story that, hopefully, works. That was partly because the subject matter is intensely personal to me in several ways. It's a book about bullying, about growing up in the 1980s, about Wiltshire's prehistoric landscape, so often I found myself having to force onto the page material I had found difficult to express in real life. It's a novel about

the interaction between magic, consensus reality and the mind.'

The main character, mild-mannered Andrew Waggoner, attends a lesser public school where he is bullied, a bullying that culminates in an awful mutilation one night in the nearby woods. Andrew's deep physical and emotional wounds tip him over the edge into a sort of Jekyll and Hyde existence.

'Are you an evil twin?' Andrew at one point asks the other version of himself, known as Waggoner. Cornell has commented, 'Waggoner who narrates the story isn't "the good one" ... *Chalk* is a book about cycles of abuse, and as a victim, Waggoner's only possible heroism is in seeking to break those cycles.'

Chalk is set appropriately in the chalk hills of the West Country, where a cutting of a chalk horse cutting represents a site of ancient power. This may or may not have infused Andrew's alter ego. Waggoner tells Andrew 'you can only be healed when your revenge is complete'.

Cornell interweaves throughout the text the hit songs of the early 1980s to reflect the changing relationships between Andrew and his fellow students, particularly the girls. It is no coincidence that a playlist of the songs is also available.

Chalk is an uncompromising, but decidedly effective psychological horror novel, depicting a world of teenage bullying and an adult disregard of that abuse that allows terror to gradually infiltrate the school, leading inexorably to a dramatic conclusion.

British children's fiction

The Worst Breakfast

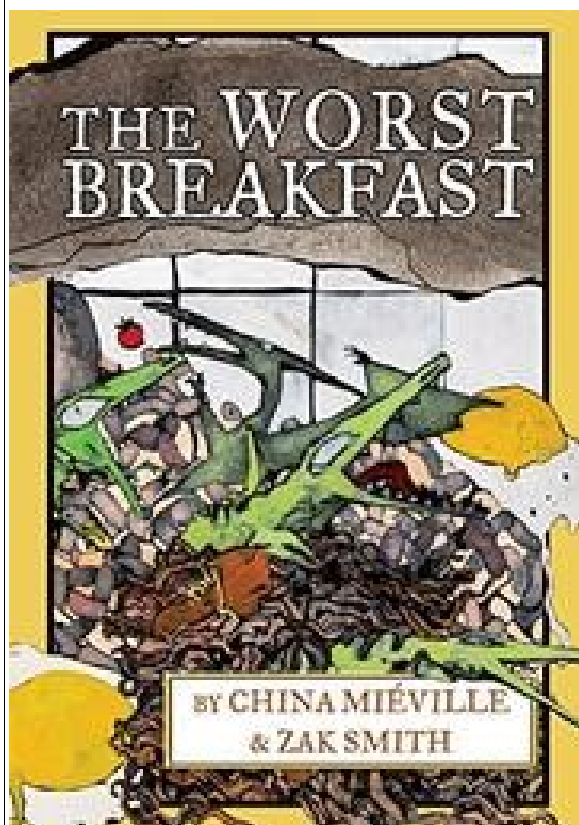
China Miéville & Zak Smith (Black Sheep; \$24.99)

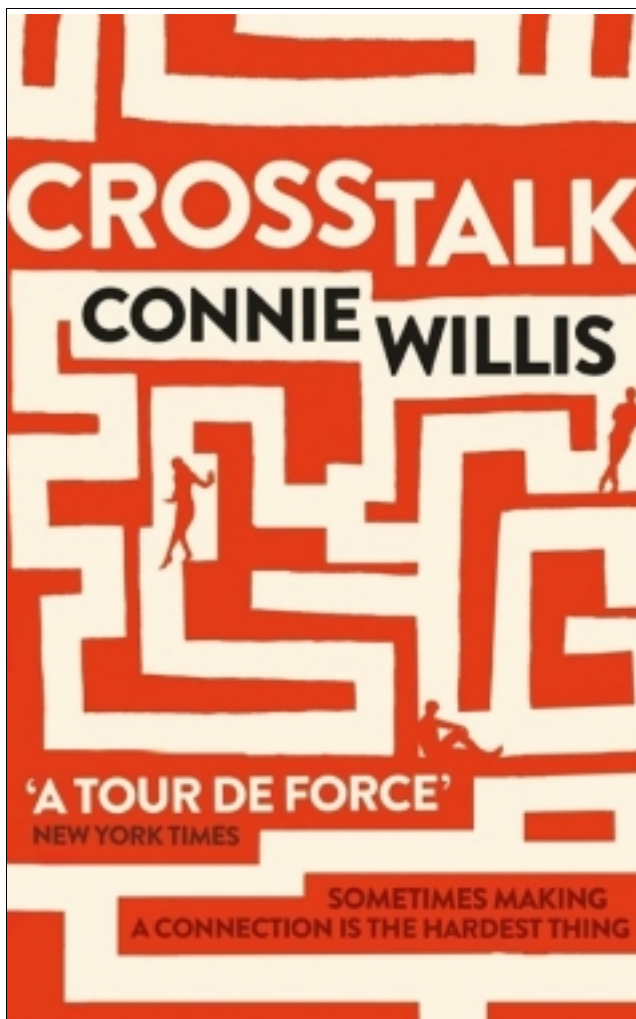
Both **China Miéville** and **Zak Smith** are well known for their critically acclaimed books and artwork. They have collaborated for a small-folio, profusely colour-illustrated children's book on the worst breakfast ever.

It begins with two dark-skinned sisters sitting at a kitchen table and the older cries to her younger sister, 'You can't have forgotten the worst breakfast! The toast was burnt! The smell! The smoke! It made us choke!' The continued forgetfulness of the younger sister, leads the older to proceed through a litany of breakfasts that are increasingly extreme and yucky. Miéville's text is neatly encompassed in Smith's dialogue boxes in each full-page colour illustration.

The dialogue boxes become more numerous as the breakfast lists increase; for example, on one page, 'Salmagundi, gruel, stinking bishop, and liver. Scrapple and blue stilton ... corn dogs and warthogs ... cows fleas and cocoa nibs, weaselface and warts, with raspberry tortes ... And plovers wrapped in sticking plaster'. Strange creatures also begin to peer out from the growing piles of food.

Much will depend on the reaction of children, their empathy to the girls' dilemma, and the appeal of the increasing grossness of the breakfasts. Their reaction may also depend on the captions, some rhymed, some not, being read aloud.





US science fiction

Crosstalk

Connie Willis (Gollancz; \$29.99)

In *Crosstalk*, Connie Willis mixes old-fashioned Barbara Cartland romance with connectivity in the world of social media and smart phones. In the near future, a simple operation EED allows for improved emotional empathy between couples. Briddey Flannigan, a decidedly Bridget Jones type figure, works for Commspan, a smartphone company that is keen to surpass Apple.

Briddey is encouraged by her boyfriend, Trent, 'the most eligible guy at Commspan', to take the EED neurological procedure, which will allow them greater emotional empathy. Briddey, however, becomes connected with more than she bargained for through real telepathy.

Connie Willis has written on her blog that 'The novel was partly inspired by our wildly over-connected world, in which we're constantly bombarded with communication, most of it unwelcome, and partly by the misconceptions people have about what being telepathic would be like. They always assume it would either be profitable (finding out people's computer codes or social security numbers or blackmailable personal secrets) or fun'.

Crosstalk is a pleasant, if overly long, girl-seeks-to-meet-

right-boy story. The often infuriating Briddey is completely besotted by Trent, her caddish boyfriend, and completely ignores C. B. Schwartz, the office geek, whom she will ultimately need both in amorous and telepathic contexts.

Willis' mixture of romance, farce, and paranoia aims to examine current human connections in the digital age, but the repetitive plotline and the frequent info dumps often lead to *plotus interruptus*. *Crosstalk* is an accessible formulaic read, but it's a long way from Willis's excellent early books in the genre, *Lincoln's Dreams*, *Light Raid*, and *Doomsday Book*.

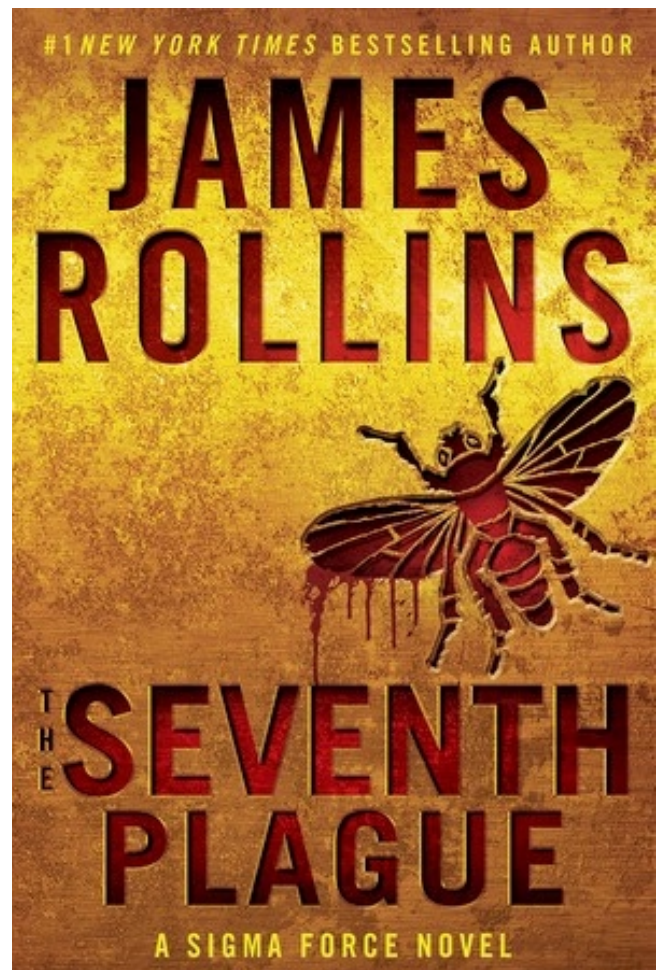
The Seventh Plague

James Rollins (William Morrow; \$29.99)

The Seventh Plague is bestselling American author James Rollins' twelfth 'Sigma Force' novel, but unlike many multi-volume fantasy series, which often run out of steam, this series has not lost any of its original verve.

Archaeology Professor Harold McCabe has spent his life trying to prove Moses' ten plagues actually occurred. His emergence from the Sudanese desert after a two-year absence may prove his point, because he is the carrier of a deadly ancient virus. Unfortunately his success now constitutes now a viral threat to humanity.

McCabe's subsequent death means that his mummified infected body needs to be isolated, but will that be too late? Jean, McCabe's daughter, and bio-archaeologist Derek Rankin fly out to Egypt. Their mis-



sion will be assisted by Sigma Force's crack personnel Seichan and Grayson Pierce. Sigma Force, a fictional unit within the United States Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency program. They will need all of its resources to combat deadly opponents who have their own role to play in relation to the viral microbe.

Jane and Derek must race against time, and numerous threats against their lives, to seek out the source of the virus. Rollins weaves in Mark Twain, scientist Nikola Tesla, and explorers Stanley and Livingstone in an historical pursuit that leads Jean and Derek deep into Africa to seek an antidote to the virus.

A parallel plotline linked to the virus, centres on a mysterious Arctic installation, run by a tech billionaire, that aims to seed the ionosphere with the 'electric microbe'. Another potential global apocalyptic catastrophe looms.

The Seventh Plague's pace nullifies the implausibilities of the plotline and the limited characterisation. Ultimately, however, *The Seventh Plague* is vintage wide-screen Rollins, mixing exotic locations, historical puzzles, scientific expositions, and action in abundance.

New Zealand slipstream

Hunters & Collectors

M. Suddain (Jonathan Cape; \$32.99)

New Zealand author **Matt Shirley**, based in London, writes under the pseudonym **Matt Suddain**, which he assumed to help him compartmentalise his work life. He says he didn't mean to name his second novel after the famous Australian rock band, but 'decided to keep it anyway, because my cryptomnesia supported the book's theme'.

Hunters & Collectors has echoes of Douglas Adams, William Burroughs, and Jorge Luis Borges. Suddain has been called a 'slipstream' novelist, which means his writing is not easily categorised. In *Hunters & Collectors*, Suddain takes the reader on a surreal journey, which often mixes the hallucinatory with the real, in a mash-up of crime, humour, dark horror, and SF.

The story is told through a mixture of narrative voice, including letters, magazine articles, notes, critical reviews, and transcripts. John Salvador Tamberlain, the main character, also known as 'Tomahawk', is a renowned galactic food critic, a 'forensic gastronomer' and 'gustatory wonderkind', with echoes of Gordon Ramsay and Anthony Bourdain. His ultimate aim is to find the fabled mysterious restaurant universe in the Hotel Grand Skies, where the house rules are often deadly for its customers, and especially restaurant critics.

Suddain interviewed Gordon Ramsay in November 2016 for a New Zealand newspaper, and noted that 'the global travel boom — as well as the internet — has broadened the minds of his customers. These days, people go out to dine "fully armed", so to speak.' Fully armed is required in some of the restaurants visited in the novel. John writes of one restaurant, 'the waiters who all look like brothers from the same crime family, linger near the bar where one of them languidly removes fingerprints from a glass. I sense these boys have

removed a lot of fingerprints.'

At another restaurant, he decries its rating of two 'Grand Orchids', writing, 'the cuisine here would be a fitting final insult to a child murderer before a dose of sodium thiopental'. John has collected many enemies and lawsuits, but also a large fan following, with one fan giving birth on meeting him — his shoes are 'drenched in amniotic liquor'. John often has to resort to subterfuge to avoid being recognised in restaurants; for example, 'I sometimes take a young prostitute who I pay to be my adolescent child'.

John travels with two companions on his gastronomic road trip, his agent, Daniel Woodbine, known as 'The Beast', and Gladys Green, his security guard trained to kill, with whom he has a love-hate relationship. Their interactions constitute a significant part of the novel.

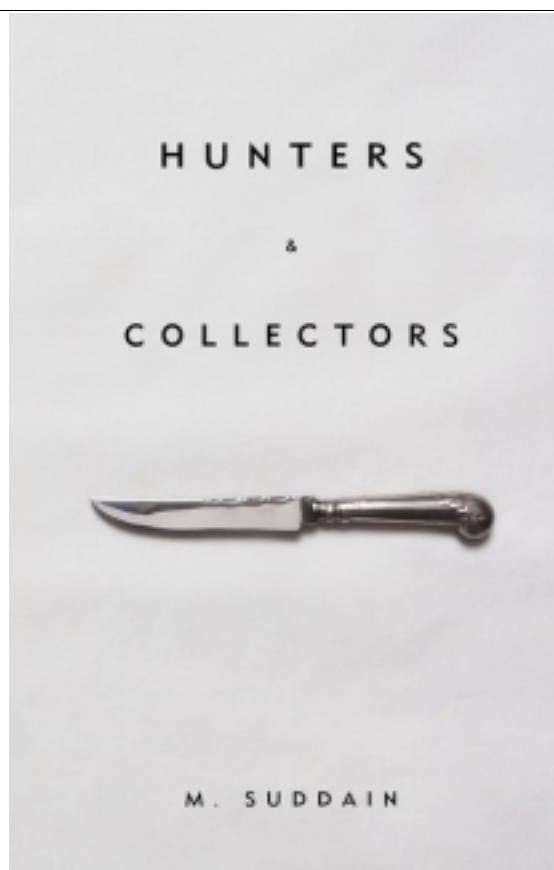
Suddain satirises contemporary totalitarian states, as the dictator, the 'Great Butcher', looms large in John's life. John's statement, 'the greatest possible horror is not that humanity might end, but that our Empire of Stupidity might last forever', certainly resonates in today's contemporary global political environment.

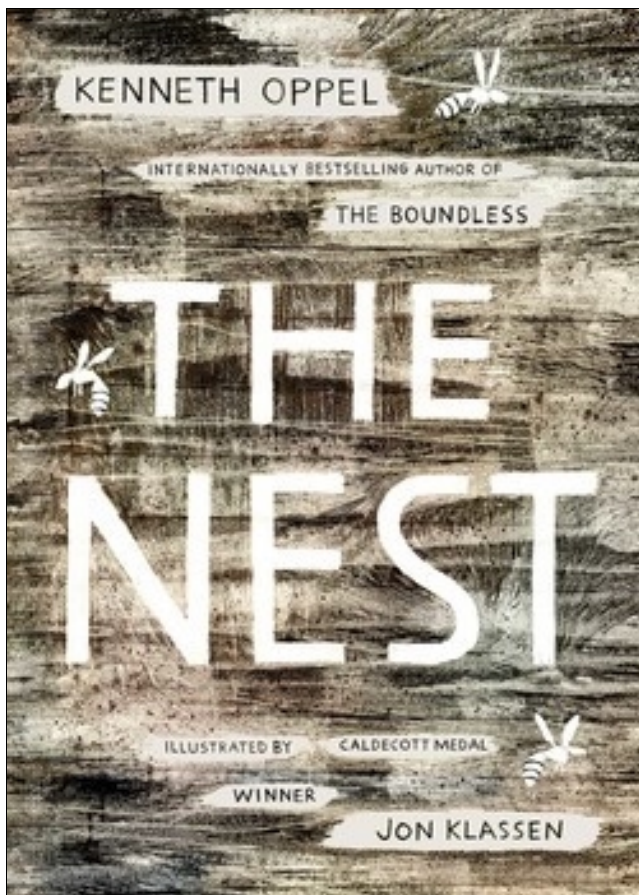
Canadian young adult SF and fantasy

The Nest

Kenneth Oppel, illustrated by Jon Klassen
(David Fickling Books; \$22.72)

Canadian author Kenneth Oppel is the author of the bestselling 'Silverwing' trilogy, while the illustrator of





The Nest, Jon Klassen, is a previous winner of the Kate Greenaway medal. They provide a winning combination in a book that is targeted at a young readership, but will definitely appeal to many adult readers.

The narrator is Steve, a young boy with symptoms of OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder). His situation is worsened by feeling neglected by his parents, who are giving all their attention to his baby brother Theo, who is about to face major surgery because of a life-threatening condition.

The Nest begins, 'The first time I saw them, I thought they were angels.' Steve dreams — or does he? — that 'angels' offer to cure Theo, but they initially don't tell him how: 'We come when people are scared or in trouble. We come when there's grief.'

The angels turn out, however, to be a strange breed of wasps. Steve makes a pact with their Queen in order to save Theo, an arrangement that he soon comes to regret, when it turns out their solution is a genetically identical baby incubated in their nest on the side of the house, a nest that Steve's time-poor parents have not had time to remove. Oppel thus takes an unusual riff on the changeling baby story.

Steve's parents dismiss his story as bad dreams or simply another manifestation of Steve's anxieties. Steve has nowhere to turn, except perhaps to the mysterious knife grinder who wanders the streets of Steve's neighbourhood, but why does he not have any customers?

Oppel superbly captures Steve's increasing sense of danger not only to Theo's life, but also to his own. Klassen's stark black-and-white illustrations emphasise the narrative tension as the story moves to a gripping

conclusion.

The Nest is surely destined to become a classic in the style of Roald Dahl.

South African science fiction

Lament for the Fallen

Gavin Chait (Doubleday; \$32.99)

Lament for the Fallen, Gavin Chait's debut novel, set several centuries in the future, begins when a silver-skinned man falls to earth near Ewuru, a small remote Nigerian village. The man is Samara Adaro, a physically bioengineered soldier, who has just escaped from Tartarus, an American orbital space prison. Samara's 'space city' world of Achenia, with 850,000 citizens, has tried to sever its ties with the USA, but this led to conflict. Samara, a 'defender' of his people, is imprisoned.

The Nigerian villagers, led by elder Joshua Ossai, help to hide Samara from the local marauding regional warlords who observed the crash of the spacecraft. Their protection of Samara also allows him time for his not inconsiderable wounds to heal and also his consciousness, which he shares with a symbiotic AI called Symon.

Chait uses his considerable knowledge of African history and mythology to contextualise the agricultural village society and its developing relationship with Samara. Ultimately, however, Samara knows he must return to combat the threat to Achenia, its sister space cities and, perhaps, ultimately Earth itself.

Lament for the Fallen meanders somewhat, because of its juxtaposed narrative structures in Ewuru and space, but ultimately proves to be an inventive SF mixture.

— Copyright 2017 Colin Steele



I must be talking to my friends

2016: the year the world went away

Somebody once said that as you age, you do not leave the world, but the world leaves you. You know what kind of world you live in. You operate reasonably well in it. You are comfortable with most if its shifts and shapes. And then it disappears.

This seems to have happened to most of us, to judge from the *SF Commentary* and *Treasure* letters of comment and the ANZAPA mailings I've been reading recently. In 2016 we lost the world of rationality, where things have been run more or less in favour of more or less the majority of people in Western societies. Now we know that the few rich people who have stolen most of the world's income really do mean to steal everything. They will rub all of us into the dust if they can get away with it. However, it is not clear why a percentage of Americans voted for the person most likely to ruin their lives — a billionaire who has surrounded himself with billionaires. Australians will have to live with this decision, or not live with it.

My own world has not yet fallen apart dramatically in the way the real world has, but 2016 an odd and disappointing year nonetheless. I haven't written much about it, because I found myself wasting words on Facebook. I stayed on Facebook to keep in touch with members of my immediate family, some fans, especially from overseas, and John Bangsund. John is not the only Facebook member who treats his site as a series of well-considered blogs, but he does show his Friends how to do it.

The most interesting posts often come from members of the various Facebook groups in which I'm a member. Some of these groups specialise in the history of Melbourne and my childhood home suburb, Oakleigh. Two groups specialise in the work of Philip K. Dick. All very interesting, but probably I would have written many more fanzine pages if Facebook didn't exist.

In 2016 my life's pattern became very restricted. I still needed to compile indexes as an addition to my income. So I would finish an index. I would go back to *SF Commentary*. I would try to remember where I was, and what needed to appear in the next issue. I would produce some fanzine or other, then another index would arrive. The result?

CAROL KEWLEY
Albion VIC 3020

Thanks for the copies of SF Commentary 92. They

arrived today. Just one thing. SFC 92 has the Graham Joyce cover instead of the 'Space Race' one.

(25 July 2016)

I was totally shocked when I received from Carol much the same cry of anguish as I had received from Steve Stiles when I stuffed up his cover for *SFC* 91 earlier in the year! All I could do was apologise and eventually (in the same packet as the paper copies of *SFC* 93) redo the covers for both issues and send them to people who receive print copies. People who download from efanazines.com will find there the correct covers.

In *one* year on *two* occasions I had stuffed up the covers of the paper editions of *SFC* because I was struggling to regain the flow of publication after finishing an index. I ruined a cover by Steve Stiles, Hugo winner; then ran a cover by Carol Kewley a second time. She had put a lot of trouble into supplying me with two covers that were supposed to appear within a few weeks of each other. Instead, the two issues appeared a year and a half apart, so I completely forgot I had the second cover sitting on file, and repeated the *SFC* 88 cover on *SFC* 92.

During 2016 I found the social aspects of fandom a bit wearying. I resigned from one committee because I realised I was not wanted on it. Nevertheless, before I gave in to the inevitable, a group of us managed to box up the **MSFC fanzine collection**, and arrange with Dr Stephen Herrin at Monash Rare Books Collection for it to be transported to Monash. I assume the contents of the 46 boxes are being archived. I did give a talk to the Club about fanzine editing, which jolted Jocko Allen into writing the very lively article that appears in *SFC* 93. My own MSFC talk, edited for a non-SF audience, seemed to be enjoyed by members of the Book Collectors Society, Victorian Branch, and has appeared in the society's magazine *Biblionews* (as well as in *SFC* 93).

And in December a group of us prepared the boxes of **Meteor Inc.'s fanzine collection** to be transported to the Monash Rare Books Collection. (However, for many reasons they have not yet reached their destination.) Elaine did much of the heavy lifting, although (a) there were five males present at the time and (b) she had never before wanted to get involved with Meteor Inc. The full story can be found in **Leigh Edmonds' iOTA 2** (available from efanazines.com):

My social highlight of 2016/2017 was New Year's Eve. I haven't been to a New Year's Eve party for many years. Jenny and Russell Blackford used to invite me down to



The gang after the work is done: Robin Johnson, Bruce Gillespie, Bill Wright, Thomas Bull and Carey Handfield. Not in the picture is Elaine Cochrane who wasn't of a mind to want to be photographed with this mob. (Once we all had hair like Thomas's, what went wrong?)

Above: The Meteor Inc. packing crew. Extract from Leigh Edmonds' *iOTA* 2.

Middle Park each year, but in those days the trains didn't run late enough to get back to Greensborough. This year public transport ran all night. I enjoyed greatly visiting **Jenny Bryce** and **Tony Thomas** and their guests in Elwood. The weather was perfect. The conversation was sparkling. I drank one too many glasses of shiraz. About 1.30 in the morning the party broke up. I set off with three other people to grab a tram back along Brighton Road to the city. We waited for over half an hour. A group of much younger people walked toward us. One of them carried a mobile phone that could pick up the official tram information. A tram was expected in a few minutes. It did not arrive. We walked up to the corner of Brighton Road and Carlisle Street. Still no tram. We had waited 50 minutes already. Great conversation, but it was beginning to look as if no trams were running back to the city. So I left the others and walked down to Balaclava Station, and soon caught a train. When I arrived at Flinders Street Station, all the platforms were packed. People were just leaving the city after watching the midnight fireworks display along the Yarra. Everybody was having a great time. There was no sign of aggression or public drunkenness. I caught my train to Greensborough and arrived home right on 4 a.m.

I don't know whether Elaine had slept or not. She said sleepily, 'I thought you might not get home till 4.' She was very glad she had stayed at home. Not only had the usual locals been letting off the usual illegal fireworks, but some hoon in a car had been circling around the suburb letting off explosions designed to terrify both humans and pets. Elaine had managed to keep Harry and Sampson safe and calm.

Other highlights of the year? Thanks very much to **David Russell** for taking a group of us to dinner at Florentino, and later in the year, to lunch at the NGV restaurant. Thanks to both the **Melbourne SF Club** and the **Nova Mob** for some entertaining nights, including Justin Ackroyd's guide to the Arthur Clarke Award nominees. This was a great help to me in finding some good British SF books during the year.

I don't see my sisters very often. Robin came down from Queensland, and Jeanette from Guildford (near Castlemaine) for the **100th anniversary of the Oakleigh Church of Christ**. Our family went to church at Oakleigh during the first 11 years of my life (1947–58), and Mum and Dad retained their deepest church-based friendships with the Oakleigh people who also retired to Rosebud. Jeanette also invited her son Colin, his new partner Anita, and his four children (Ryan, Kaiden, Mason, and Eboni) to the 100th Anniversary service. Oakleigh has only 35 members these days, but 100 people turned up. I've never written about religion in my fanzines, and I'm not starting now. (Much of what I might say about growing up within the Churches of Christ is said much better by Tim Winton in his most recent book of essays, *The Boy Behind the Curtain*) I still can't sing, so I had to mumble the hymns, but the average singing volume of this congregation was much louder and more enthusiastic than I remember from childhood. Also, the Oakleigh congregation can now look *up* to slides showing the words instead of looking *down* into their hymnals.

After the service, which included quite a bit of local history as well as sermons, prayers, and singing, we went to lunch in the hall at the back of the church. I caught up with people I hadn't seen for 50 years. Lots of historical photos were on display. Colin for the first time realised that not only his mother and father (my sister Robin and her first husband John) had married at Oakleigh, but so had his grandparents. So Colin popped up onto the platform, knelt in front of Anita, and very publicly proposed to her. We, his family, were very embarrassed, of course, but Anita and Colin's children and everybody else loved it.

Less successful to me personally was the **Oakleigh High School reunion** in March 2016 at the Notting Hill Hotel, Ferntree Gully Road, Notting Hill. It was organised superbly by Ron Sheldon, his wife Chris, and the committee over the internet, and several hundred people turned up. My own personal disappointment was that I found very few people from the period of four years (1959 to 1962) when I attended the school. Eventually Ian Phelan found me, and I was able to catch up with a few from our era. There was a very good turnout from among the people who attended the school during its first year, 1957 — but not Bill Impey, famous schoolboy debater, who died a few years ago.

More enjoyable was an afternoon I spent with **Ron Sheldon** a few weeks later. He showed me the last vestige of Oakleigh High School, the Ferdinand Fliegner Hall. Named in honour of the formidable principal of the school while I was there, it took many years to raise the money to build it. It was finished long after I left the school, but it remains there, turned into an equipment storage site for local social groups. The rest of the school

and its grounds? Now nothing but a housing estate for well-off people.

Ron also took me to see the exhibition of Oakleigh High School memorabilia that was put on by the Oakleigh Historical Society. All the items had been shown at the Reunion, but I had a much better chance to look at them when few people were around.

We also ate lunch at Nikos in Oakleigh. Aaah! Who would have believed in 1962 that Oakleigh, a rather run-down and grim-looking area 14 km to the south-east of Melbourne Business District, could transform itself and become Greater Melbourne's centre of fine Greek restaurants? There is nothing like Nikos in Greensborough or anywhere near by. Everything fresh and delicious. Great coffee.

Lowlights of the year?

The lowlight of the year was being forced to change internet providers. Telstra had bought Pacific Internet (Pacnet) a year or so ago, but now insisted that we change to a Bigpond address. A person made a very attractive offer to Elaine over the phone, and we understood that we would change to this new arrangement. It would save us at least \$60 a month. However, we should have asked for a written contract. Elaine spent more than 12 hours on the phone trying to get various techs to fulfil the various bits of the contract. Eventually the Bigpond address worked, but it seems our Pacific address will be turned off this coming May, so I will be excluded from the various Yahoo e-lists of which I am a member. Telstra seems to have deteriorated as an organisation even since our travails last May, and many of our friends report exasperating difficulties with their phone service or with Bigpond as an ISP provider.

During 2016 famous people kept dying with monotonous frequency, including some of my favourite SF people, such as **Peter Weston** and **Dave Hartwell**, and public figures such as **David Bowie** and **Nikolaus Har-noncourt**. Among the most missed rock and roll casualties have been **Leonard Cohen**, **Chuck Berry** (90, in 2017), and **Leon Russell**, who died at the age of 74. He had a late-career bout of success, thanks to the CD he made with Elton John a few years ago. Most of the deceased pop music people have been about my age or only slightly older. This does not help my peace of mind.

As you will see from the letters of comment, the most missed casualty of 2016 in fandom has been **Joyce Worley Katz**. She and **Arnie Katz** were the leading fannish fanzine publishers in the 1970s, when they lived in New York. They dropped out of fandom for over 20 years, then re-emerged in Las Vegas, where they became the nucleus of the Vegrants, one of the most active fan groups of the last 20 years. Both of them began publishing fanzines again on the internet. Arnie and Joyce offered to become the American agents for the Bring Bruce Bayside Fund in 2004, which raised enough money to enable me to travel to San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas in February–March 2005. Although Joyce was suffering from severe problems with her feet when I arrived in Las Vegas, she put on a wonderful party in which I could meet all the Vegrants. I'm very sorry that the last 12 years have not been kind to either Joyce or Arnie. Last I heard, Arnie was suffering

from near complete loss of eyesight. I have no idea how he is getting along without Joyce. Many fans feel bereft.

Dave Hartwell was killed by an accidental fall at home early in 2016, at the age of only 74. Otherwise he might well have expected to become the elder statesman of SF, since his record of achievement extends back to before I joined fandom. Carey Handfield, Rob Gerrard, and I — Norstrilia Press, 1975–85 — owe a huge amount to Dave Hartwell, who published the paperbacks of some of our books in America. At Pocket Books/Timescape, and then at Tor, he has been the publisher and editor for quite a few Australian writers, especially as a champion of the work of George Turner. When he began the *New York Review of Science Fiction*, he arranged to trade copies for copies of my magazines. Fortunately, *NYRSF* continues, despite his loss.

I owe an even greater debt to **Peter Weston**. When in 1968 I was searching for models for my proposed fanzine *SF Commentary*, *Speculation* was a powerful influence, along with John Bangsund's *Australian Science Fiction Review* and Dick Geis's magazines. His special quality as an editor was his willingness to include a wide range of opinions without agreeing with most (or often, all) of them. Peter was an unreconstructed Golden Age–Robert Heinlein fan, yet *Speculation* became the major British forum of opinion that gave momentum to the British New Wave.

Pete and Eileen were very generous hosts to me in 1974 when I visited Birmingham; Pete visited Elaine and me in Collingwood sometime during the 1980s when he was in Victoria sourcing some material for his business; and he was a great friend when both Pete and I were at a loss for fannish company during the week between Corflu and Potlatch in 2005. If it had not been for his help, I would never have travelled by BART out to Charlie Brown's house in Berkeley. We had both been agents for *Locus* in the 1970s. During the last 20 years, Pete's fanzines of British fan history, *Relapse* and *Prolapse*, have been among the most entertaining fanzines to be distributed via Bill Burns' eFanzines.com. Fanzine and pro writers have been listing his many other achievements, including running conventions and editing anthologies.

Other lowlights of the year included yet another attack on the **ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission)**, and yet another increase in overseas postage and the sharp increase in local postage. I spent \$1000 on postage in the last few months of the year. *SFC* 93 was probably the last issue with a print edition.

The ABC hired a new CEO, Michelle Guthrie, to destroy the organisation instead of defending it. Her public statements and service cuts to Radio National and Local Radio indicate that Guthrie has never read the ABC Charter, and doesn't have much respect for people who read books or listen to music. ABC Classic FM was not destroyed, as rumoured, but only because of a clever campaign organised by *Limelight*, Australia's classical music magazine.

The most radical thing I did during 2016 was cancel daily delivery of **the Age** newspaper. Our monthly bill had just hit \$100. Enough! Over the last two years the *Age* has sacked most of its good journalists and cartoonists and

has run down or deleted nearly every feature that once made it indispensable. Only the Saturday edition retains any resemblance to the *Age* of its great years. For many years, I'd taken the *Sunday Age* only because it would have been too difficult for the newsagent to persuade the delivery person to refrain from tossing a paper on the footpath on one day out of seven. Now I walk down to the Greensborough Plaza and buy the *Age* on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays sometimes, and Saturdays. I suspect the *Age* will soon drop its week-day print editions. I go down to the Greensborough Plaza for morning coffee so I can catch up with the *Herald Sun* for free. I don't really want to contribute my dollars to Rupert Murdoch's coffers, but the *Hun* includes all the stray bits of news that the *Age* never mentions. Vastly more people die in the *Herald Sun* than they do in the *Age*. Yes, the *Herald Sun* features all the fascist columnists you would expect in a Murdoch paper, but it is still a *newspaper* in a way the *Age* no longer is.

So we wait patiently for the end of the world, including

harassment and impoverishment of pensioners by members of the current Australian government, would-be Trumps.

In 2016, I did enjoy reading a lot of books, listening to many CDs, and watching many DVDs and Blu-rays, as you can see later in this issue.

And, of yes, I turned 70 on 17 February 2017. At the age of 70, my father had just died, after suffering from memory loss for about 10 years and two years of bowel cancer. I know I feel not much different now from how I felt 30 years ago, and my lousy memory is no worse than it was then, but I couldn't help feeling nervous about trundling past my seventieth.

SF Commentary turned 48 on 1 January. Eric Lindsay turned 70 on 2 February. Lee Harding turns 80 two days after I turn 70. We were able to celebrate these anniversaries before the bombs start falling. I'm too old to dig bomb shelters.

What a time it was!

It is not, as everybody kept saying, every day that I turn 70. It seems only a short time since I turned 60.

I spent several months trying to set up an event that was (a) celebratory and (b) affordable. I would love to have invited 100 of my closest friends to a great restaurant, as happened for my 50th birthday. I thought of various ways of doing it on the cheap, but I couldn't think of a restaurant that would not be overcrowded and noisy.

Jean Weber and **Eric Lindsay** — and **Carey** and **Jo Handfield** — solved the problem for me. A few weeks before my birthday, Jean sent a message on Facebook to say that she and Eric would be visiting Melbourne on the week of 12–19 February to celebrate of Eric's 70th birthday (on 2 February), Jean's birthday (on the 24th), and my birthday (on the 17th). They would put on a big bash (at their expense) for their friends. But not too many of them, as Jean doesn't like large crowds.

She also emailed me, saying that she would be issuing the invitation list, but would I like to add a few names of people who should be there.

Then Carey Handfield was struck by the brainwave. He suggested the long side room at the **Mail Exchange Hotel**, at the Spencer Street end of Bourke Street, Melbourne. The Meteor Inc. committee had used it several years for the AGM. The food was quite good, and the room itself was separate from the main restaurant. Our maximum number of invitees, 50, would fit there comfortably.

Jean and Eric sent out their invitations. I added some names, but only a small percentage of the names of people I would like to have invited. The event would be held on Sunday, 19 February, two days after my birthday, but the exact day of **Lee Harding's** 80th birthday. Then Jean, Eric, Carey, and Jo began thinking of other people who celebrated their birthdays about the same time. **Gordon Lingard** (turning 60) could come down from

Sydney with his wife, **Jack Dann** could be there with **Janeen Webb**, and **Robin Johnson** could get down from Ballarat. In the end, **Valma Brown** (whose birthday is the same day as mine) could not bethere. Neither could my sisters **Robin Mitchell** and **Jeanette Gillespie**. Robin could not get down from Buderim, Queensland, and Jeanette faced a hospital procedure the next day, so would not be able to eat anything. **Dick Jessen**, my first choice, would not have been able to descend the elevator from the street to the restaurant area, so he declined our invitation.

The pub would prepare 'finger food', plus one drink per person. (At the event, everybody was satisfied with a good large plates of delicacies.)

On the Wednesday night Elaine and I had taken Jean, Eric, Jo, and Carey to dinner at Spaghetti Tree in Melbourne to thank them for all their trouble.

On Friday night, we gathered with the usual crew (and some) at David Jones Food Hall and then to Il Nostro Posto in Hardware Lane. Ciao now shuts on Friday nights, so we are still searching for a replacement.

On Saturday night we gathered with my sister Jeanette and a small group of my oldest and best friends for dinner.

And then the afternoon bash at the Mail Exchange! It was successful beyond our expectations. I kept meeting people I hadn't seen for anything up to 20 years. In the case of **Bob** and **Margaret Riep**, who had come down from Canberra, I hadn't seen them since a convention on Australia Day 1975. It was great to catch up with Janeen Webb and Jack Dann, rarely glimpsed since the end of Race Mathews' Film Nights a few years before.

The only casualty was **Carey Handfield**, our Melbourne organiser. He had suffered an accident that morning at home, and had not realised how badly his leg

The theme is Bruce

Derived from Brix in Normandy —
'Willow-woods', they say it meant.
Then round 1066 some **Bruce**
Invaded Scotland — bad luck, Celts.
But Gaelic girls and Normans mated
Doughty warriors were the outcome;
Robert the **Bruce**, mightiest of these,
Attempted his own medieval Brexit.

Since then the world's deluged with **Bruces**,
Men of action, notoriety,
Actors, rock stars, spinning cricketers,

Martial artists, even PMs,
Quite in contrast to our **Bruce**,
Who chose instead to make a life
Of contemplation, cerebration,
Thousands of intimate friends at hand,
Constant presences on his shelves:
Creation privileged over action,
This is the highpoint of civilization,
The pen is mightier than the sword.

[With birthday greeting from Jenny and Tony!]



Left: (l. to r.) Jennifer Bryce, Tony Thomas, Bruce Gillespie.
(Photo: Jeanette Gillespie.)

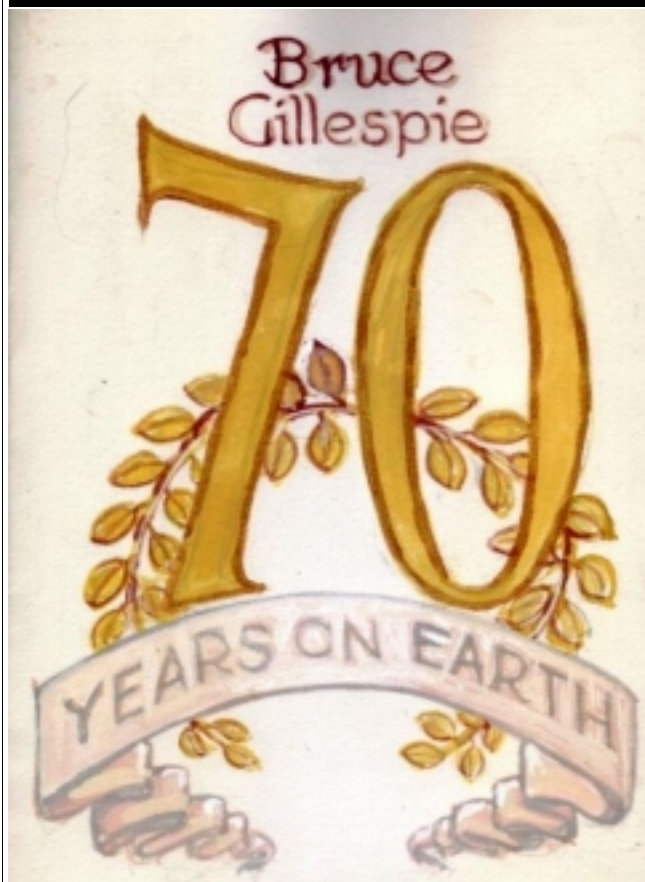
Below: The birthday people, Mail Exchange Hotel, 19 February 2017: (l. to r.): Jack Dann, Bruce Gillespie, Eric Lindsay, Jean Weber, Gordon Lingard, Lee Harding, Robin Johnson.
(Photo: LynC.)



Happy 70th Bruce



ditmar 2017



Two hand-created birthday cards, from (top) Ditmar (Dick Jenssen) and (below) Stephen Campbell.

had been hurt until he arrived in town. He limped around for awhile and caught up with old friends, but had to retire hurt. (His leg is healing well but slowly.)

What of the people who weren't invited? Sorry, sorry, sorry. 50 was the limit for the room, and we ran out of places fairly quickly. Jean says to blame her if you feel slighted.

Many of us had the same idea: why don't we put together and Old Pharts' Convention every year? Not a big convention costing squadrillions, but an afternoon at the Mail Exchange or somewhere similar. \$25 a head. No panels or events, just good food and drink and a chance to catch up with each other. Watch this space. Watch Facebook. Or wherever.

I did ask people not to bother giving me presents, but a few people disobeyed.

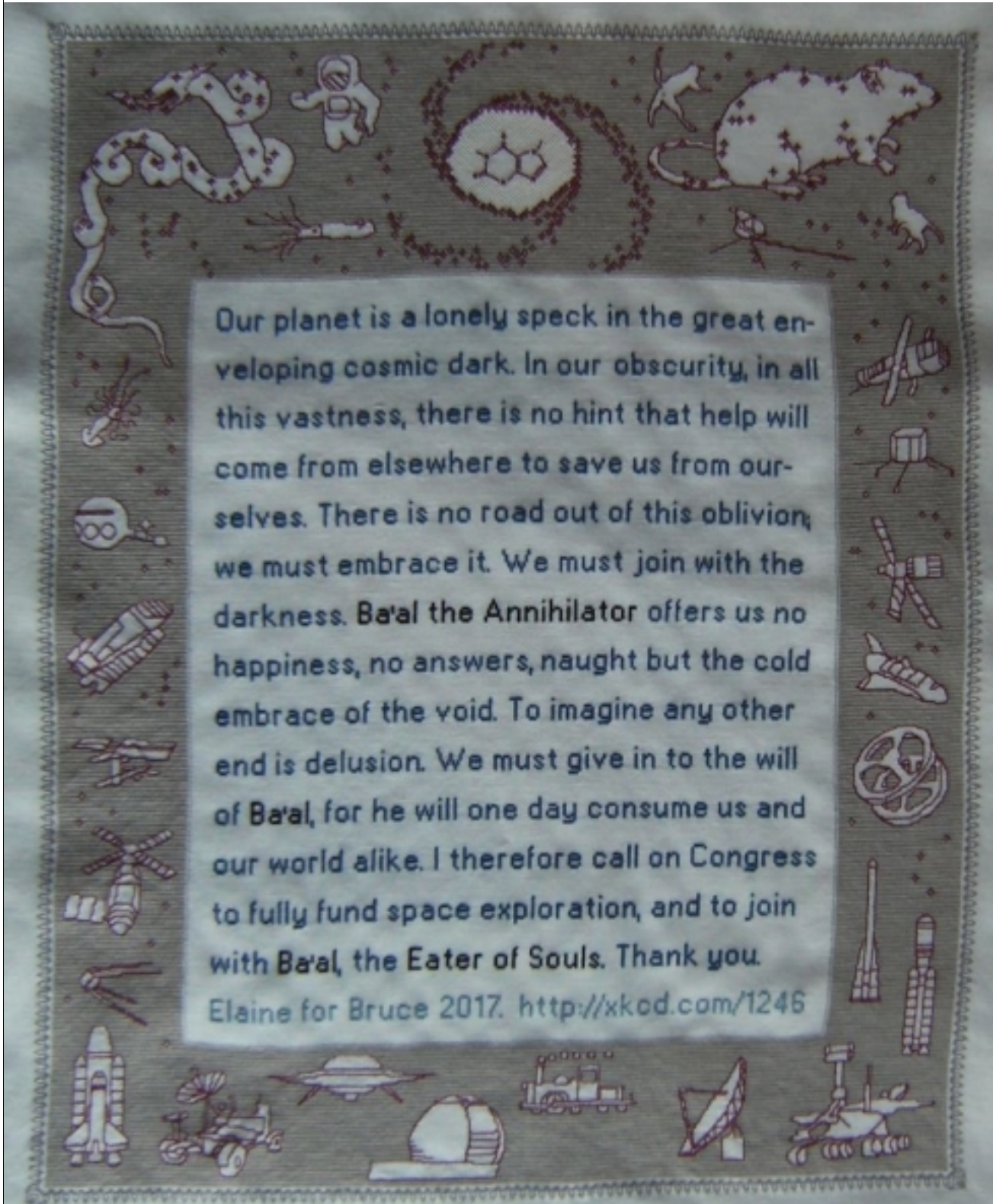
Elaine Cochrane spent a year making an amazing embroidery. Now it is framed and hangs on the kitchen wall. It includes images from Cordwainer Smith's 'The Game of Rat and Dragon' and *2001: A Space Odyssey*; and a little *Steam Engine Time* steam engine.

In late January, the committee for this year's **Continuum**/Australian national convention emailed me to say that somebody has paid for my membership. Who? I have no idea. She or he asked for anonymity. So if it's you, thanks very much. I hope to see lots of old friends at the convention, which will be held at the Jasper Inn, Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, Queen's Birthday weekend, 9–12 June.

David Russell gave me some bottles of Rawson's Retreat wine, **Dick Jenssen** gave me a hefty volume (Alain

Elaine Cochrane's birthday present embroidery

Elaine Cochrane began this embroidery about the time of my 69th birthday in 2016, and finished it a couple of months ago. I am still a bit puzzled about the meaning of the text (from the xkcd site), but was able to spot most of the Gillespie-based literary references in the surrounding band of images. How many can you pick? This photo does not show it in its full splendour. To see it hanging on our wall, you need to visit us in Greensborough.



Silver & James Ursini, *Film Noir Compendium*), **Thomas Bull** handed me a handsome set of Mervyn Peake's illustrations for *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, **Lee Harding** gave me *Graham Greene: A Life in Letters* (ed. Richard Greene), and **Jenny Bryce** and **Tony Thomas** gave me a copy of *Bruce* and a birthday poem (see p. 2).

Thanks also for the many cards I received: from my sister **Jeanette Gillespie** and **Duncan Brown**, and from my other sister **Robin Mitchell**; self-created cards by **Dick Janssen** and **Stephen Campbell** (see p. 1), and cards from **Werner** and **Ulla** from Germany, **Geoff Allshorn** (plus a JB Hi Fi purchase card) and **Robert Elordieta** (plus another JB Hi Fi card), **Yvonne Rousseau** and **Vida Weiss**; **Margaret** and **George**; **Natalie** and **Murray**; **Nic** and **Charlie**; **Helena** and **Merv**; and **Sarah** and **Jamie**. The card sent by **Jo** and **Carey** so well fits a Gillespie fanzine that I'm reprinting it below.

As you know, my sister **Jeanette Gillespie** is part of a very fannish-like social group, the folk music performers and listeners of Australia. Recently she and they lost one of their greatest friends, **Danny Spooner** (1936–2017), who has also been a leading figure in folk music in Australia since the 1960s. He was part of the Australian folk music revivalists, including Glen Tomasetti and Margaret Roadknight, and Judith Durham, who were famous before I heard any of their records. Danny was, I'm told, a history teacher much of his life, but his real life was playing and singing all over Australia at concerts and festivals and around campfires. He and **Duncan Brown** performed sea shanties and working ballads every year at the Port Fairy Folk Festival in Victoria, so at this year's festival many people joined in remembering his life and work.

Ian Roberts' obituary for Danny in the *Age/Sydney Morning Herald* tells us that he was 'a leading light in the folk revival from the 1960s ... Danny left school at 13 and found work on a steam tug with a singing skipper, Bob Roberts. He joined the lad up to three libraries and insisted that he read history and "tell him the story". When he added a song to illustrate the story, it brought history alive ... Danny worked his passage to Australia on the ocean liner *Canberra*. On his arrival he found thriving folk music clubs where people were paid to sing the very songs that had emigrated with him from the East End. At Frank Traynor's late-night jazz club in Melbourne he found that folk fans filled the earlier part of the evening, dressed in duffle coats and desert boots and drinking coffee in the candlelit rooms. He had found a new home.

'Danny was inspired to recall his traditional British



Jeanette Gillespie and her older brother Bruce. (Photo supplied by Jeanette Gillespie.)

Isles songs of work and war, love and other pastimes. He read voraciously the social history of working people and in the 1970s, caught the ear of University of Melbourne lecturer Weston Bate, who got him on to the history staff.

'There he met **Gael Shannon** and their partnership lasted for the rest of his life. The quiet life with her in Carlton balanced his boisterous public life, and a few years later they moved to Geelong where he worked at the new Deakin University and the Geelong College.

'Danny ... never stopped singing. In Geelong he took part in the Geelong Folk Club's transformation into the Port Fairy Folk Festival and was absorbed into Geelong's busy theatre culture, appearing in *Worzel Gummidge*, *Great Expectations*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *My Fair Lady* (the vigorous dance routines necessitated giving up smoking.).

'He died on March 3 and was buried quietly in a bush cemetery near Daylesford. He is survived by his wife Gael, his English brother Terry and sister-in-law Marion, his Australian sisters-in-law Janet Shannon and Catriona Ebeling and their generations of children who loved him dearly.'

— **Bruce Gillespie**, January, March, May 2017



Danny Spooner (1936–2017). (Photo was included in the SMH obituary, so I assume it was supplied by Ian Roberts.)

Mike Glycer

Rotsler Award to Ditmar

Reprinted, by permission, from *File 770*.

Martin James Ditmar ('Dick') Jenssen is the winner of the 2016 Rotsler Award, given for long-time artistic achievement in amateur publications of the science fiction community. Established in 1998, the award carries an honorarium of US\$300.

Known among fans as Dick or Ditmar, Jenssen got his first look at SF art — a painting of Saturn by Chesley Bonestell — when he was eight. Immediately his imagination kicked

into gear, and he found himself able to visualise variations in the color, the point of view, and other details or hardware. By the time he was a teenager, he was producing art for his friends' mimeographed fanzines, which involved using a metal stylus to draw on waxed master sheets.

Seeing for the first time Morris Scott Dollens' black-and-white space and planetary scenes made him want to learn another technique, scraperboard. This was a thin white clay bonded to a cardboard base, which could be



Early Dick Jenssen art
(Pre-Ditmar days)

Cover: *Perhaps* 3, 1954.



Above: Dick Jenssen in 2000.

Below: Ditmar: *Dagon*.

covered in India ink, then scraped away with a scalpel to reveal the white underneath. Ditmar's efforts in this vein were published on the covers of Australian fanzines.

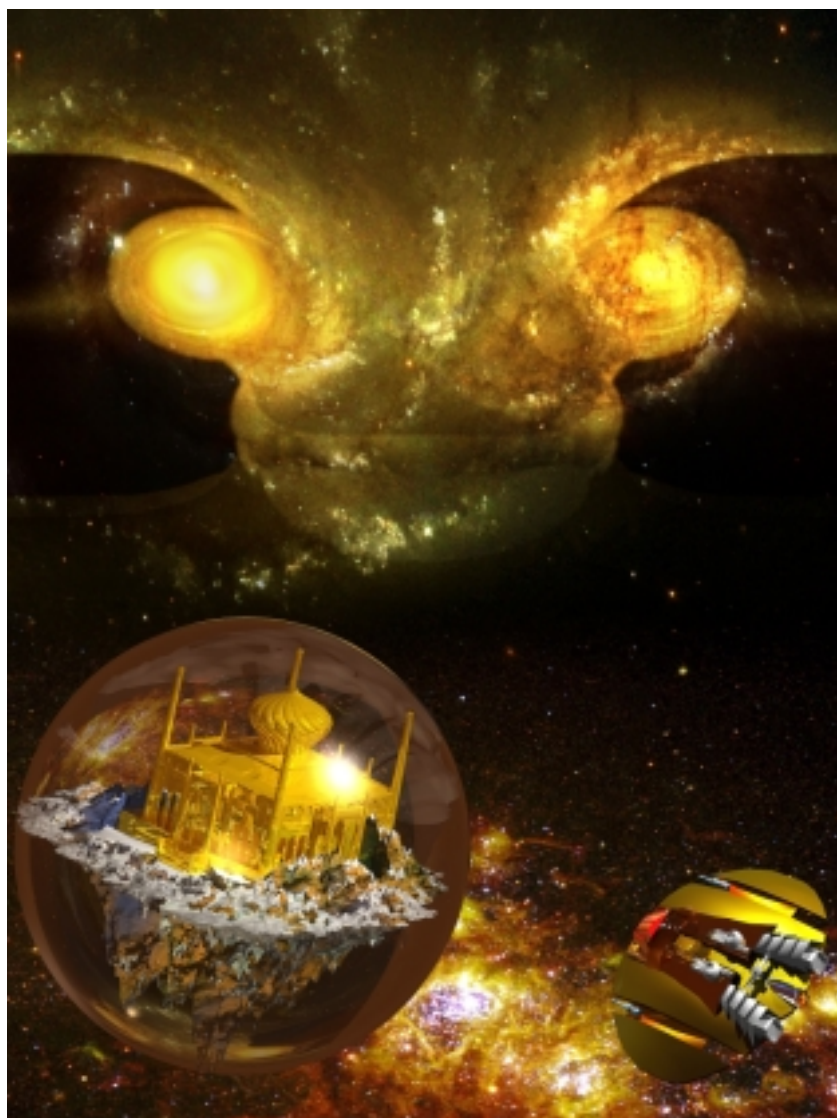
The advent of computers gave Ditmar a new tool for producing exotic color compositions. 'Since I usually always wanted to redo what I had created, in order to reorganise the compositional elements, and/or the colouring, and/or the elements themselves, it seemed that graphic packages would be ideal. Software which would allow me to generate three-dimensional objects in a vir-

tual world, to organize their spatial distribution and relations, to color them as I wished, to manipulate them in unreal ways.' And digital and online fanzine publishers, freed from the cost of printing color art on paper, responded with approval, publishing several elaborate folios of these images.

The Rotsler Award is sponsored by the Southern California Institute for Fan Interests, a non-profit corporation, which hosted the 1984, 1996, and 2006 World Science Fiction Conventions. The award is named for the late Bill Rotsler, a talented and prolific artist over many years. Sue Mason, Mike Glycer, and John Hertz served as this year's judges.

The award was formally announced at Loscon 43. An exhibit honoring Ditmar's work was displayed in the Art Show.

The Ditmar gallery is in *Challenger*.



Leigh Edmonds' 'History of Australian Fandom' Project

LEIGH EDMONDS

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I had occasion to travel down to Melbourne yesterday so I took *SFC 91* with me. I found your lists interesting but then, if you think you're getting behind, I am a light year or more behind you. Most of the authors and musicians you mentioned are new to me and I envy your ability to take in so much of what is new. As for your list-making proclivities, I think I may already have written that I too find that amazing — not being a list-maker.

In the past year I've done a lot more book reading than I usually have time for, but it's all been history in connection with the work I'm doing, so a lot of airline histories and aviation policy history. Also, a lot of general Australian history, including Stuart Macintyre's one-volume history of Australia and his history of early twentieth-century Australia and Geoff Bolton's volume of the latter period of the century published as part of the *Oxford History of Australia*. There was also the huge *Cambridge Economic History of Australia* and its two-volume history of Australia which, if memory serves me well, also involved Stuart Macintyre. In fact, Macintyre has probably become my favourite writer of late, with his well-researched and written history on some of the key issues in Australian history. I've just bought a copy of his history on post-war reconstruction. (Booktopia were having a 'free shipping' period so I also bought Geoff Bolton's relatively recent history of Western Australia as well.)

When I did my PhD at Murdoch I had three supervisors. Geoff Bolton was the first, and taught me all about

how Western Australia works. Then he got a post in Brisbane, so I went off to Lenore Layman, who taught me how to be a proper academic historian.

When Geoff's replacement arrived as the new professor in the History Department I was shuffled off to him: Brian DeGaris, who piloted me through the whole process of getting a PhD submitted and passed. On one occasion Brian had to disappear off to the eastern states and asked me to take one of his tutorials which, as it happened, was on the Menzies period. So, I wander into the professorial office, sit in the professorial seat, and say to the keen faces around me something like, 'They say that Menzies set out to do nothing, and did it very well.' All I got was silence and stunned faces. (There was another time when I told a tutorial group that it was difficult to fail my course, but some of them were working hard to achieve it ... but that's another story.)

I mention this aside because, when I came to Geoff Bolton's history of the second half of the twentieth century (*The Oxford History of Australia, Volume 5: The Middle Way 1942–1995*), he has said more or less the same thing about Menzies, only much more eloquently than I could ever do, and in great detail. This will come out clearly in the second volume of the civil aviation history, and probably also make it into the history of fandom, too, in writing about the cultural milieu in which post-war fandom developed. This prompted me to write Geoff a long email about how much I had enjoyed his book and we began a little correspondence about this and that which ended when he died. He was one of that generation of Australian historians who had grown up when Classics was still taught at university and had, along with Manning Clark and a couple of others, a way of writing that I still enjoy very much. Macintyre is not quite of that generation, but still wrote with something of that style.

The occasion for me going to Melbourne was to visit Race Mathews in the morning and Lee Harding in the afternoon to talk about their experiences of that period of early Melbourne fandom — although Race had drifted away, and Lee had been expelled before Olympicon 1956, which is my notional starting point. I spent an interesting couple of hours with both of them and recorded a lot of interesting material. It turned out that Race had already read the Macintyre book on post-war reconstruction, so our conversation drifted off into that and other interesting areas, but it's all useful in starting to construct an understanding of the early 1950s and the environment in which fandom developed and the personalities of the people involved. Some interesting little facts turned up, including that when Race went to that first convention in Sydney in 1952 he was billeted with Kevin Dillon. (I think that's right; I haven't listened back to the recording yet.)

Next week I'm off to talk to Bill Wright and Merv and Helena Binns, and Dick Jenssen and John Bangsund are on the list to get done in the coming couple of months too. (2 June 2016)



Geoffrey Bolton (L.) and Leigh Edmonds, Murdoch University, 1988.

I may never be warm again! As you know, I usually catch up on my *SFC* reading on the train, but this time I did it while sitting still in one place. In fact, I was huddled over a little heater in a freezing cold room out at our country estate at Springbank. (Actually, it's just a suburban block stuck in the middle of farmland, but it amuses me to think of us being landed gentry.) Outside it was even colder, the wind was blowing, it was sleeting, and there was fog all around — totally miserable is the word you're looking at. While I was huddling inside there were five or so young men clambering around on the roof above installing solar panels, an act that seemed totally incongruous in that weather. If I was them I wouldn't have been doing what they were doing in that weather, but they were subcontractors; if they didn't work they didn't get paid. I occasionally went outside to see how it was going, in a show of solidarity with the workers, but didn't last long out there. And then it came to the stage where they had to turn off all the electricity to connect up the system, and it was soon as cold inside as it was out there.

But you'll be glad to hear that while all that was going on I read my way through *SFC* 92, most of it anyhow.

Not having the poetry gene, I found Ray Sinclair-Woods' long article heavy going. Still, I soldiered on in the hope of learning something, and I did. What I learned was that the poets that Ray discussed were a bunch of reactionary romantics who had a particular way of seeing beauty that did not include lots of modern stuff of an industrial age way of thinking. I found interesting all the different ways in which poets have imagined and expressed the moon. I must have a different kind of mental wiring to poets, because when I look at the moon I find myself transfixed, not by what I'm seeing but the idea that what keeps it there is gravity. 'What an amazing thing gravity is,' I say to myself.

Perhaps, as Ray suggests, something like a *Saturn V* was just too big and too powerful — and too manmade — to fit into their compass of understanding and expression. Perhaps words in the English language (and any similar language) are simply not the right format in which the beauty of a *Saturn V* can be expressed. I'm reminded of an interview I did with Dick Jenssen in which he tried to convince me that there is a beauty in mathematics. Since I don't have the maths gene, either, I can't see the beauty that Dick sees, but I can understand that there is something there that I can't see. Poetry might be good for expressing a human perspective on things to do with the nature of humanity — but what about things that are outside that perspective?

Perhaps something smaller might work better. While reading Ray's article a photo I saw many years ago of a person standing under one of the *Saturn Vs*' F-1 rocket motors, which is much bigger than the person, came to mind. The elegant shape of the rocket's bell is an expression of mathematical beauty in physical form. Then there is the metallurgy, the engineering, etc, etc, which combine into an expression of what humans can do: a completely different kind of language than what poetry can achieve.

The other thing that occurred to me is that two of the three poems that Ray discussed were about flying, not about the space race. The other ones were more about a poet's reaction to the moon landing, not about the

human achievement that it represented. Does this mean that poets had become more inward looking by the late 1960s that they wrote about their own feelings rather than the adventure and achievement of going to the moon? And, of course, flying is a process, not a thing — and the moon is a thing. The poem on Lindbergh's flight is not about a Ryan NYP and 'High Flight' is not about Supermarine Spitfires, they are about the experience of flying and the human reaction to that.

I wonder what a poet might have to say about the noise, vibration, and G forces of being shot off on a *Saturn V*. Would it be terror or exhilaration?

As I was reading your cat article, Lily Belle wandered into the room and insisted that it was time for a tummy rub. Since this place has central heating there was no place where the cats could lay and warm their tummies in winter. To resolve this I bought an electric heater with bars that glow nice and warmly, and a little fan to puff out warm air too. The cats love lying in front of it, but every so often one or the other of them decides that it's time to wander into my room and torment me until I give them a tummy rub. If it was up to them I'd get no work done and my fingers would be worn down to nothing from giving all the tummy rubbing they believe they deserve. Where would we be without cats?

But these two fill up our house to bursting point.

Thanks for the egoboo, Doug Barbour. I do my best.

Jerry Kaufman might well be right in correcting me on my use of the phrase 'these days' when writing about the segregation of bookshops and libraries into categories, including SF. I reckon, however, that there are probably two kinds of time: 'these days', which is more or less 'before I was younger', and 'those days', which means 'when I was younger'. If your gentle reader is willing to accept this definition — as loose as it might be — you, Bruce, will recall from 'those days' when it was hard to find science fiction in bookshops, let alone lined up on their own shelves. Getting SF in Australia before the advent of Merv's Space Age Books was very problematic and so I don't recall seeing, from 'those days', separate SF sections in any book shops, and not in any libraries I visited either. Thus, using this unique form of reasoning, I'm right in drawing a distinction between 'these days' and 'those days'. Of course, this shortage of SF might not have existed over there in the US, and therefore Jerry might well be right too. Good for both of us.

(30 July 2016)

[*brg* Thanks very much, Leigh, for taking Ray's article so seriously and in such detail. I find that very few SF fans or readers can read poetry these days — based on reactions at a Nova Mob to an exposition that Tony Thomas and I did about Tom Disch's poetry after he died — let alone conduct an argument about its direction. You will probably set Ray off on another of his longer articles. (After I published one of Ray's longer and better articles, he emailed me to say that he had quite forgotten writing it. There are articles from 40 years ago I have forgotten writing.)*]

Perhaps one of the problems I have with poetry is my

experience of it in the 1950s at primary school when we had to learn fairly ordinary stuff by heart. It seemed a total waste of time and put me right off. I thought that Shakespeare's blank verse was much more interesting when we were introduced to it at high school. The result is that I really don't have the background knowledge and experience that is necessary to understand poetry in the way that Ray apparently does. In fact, I enjoyed his explanation of the poems more than I did the works themselves.

JoJo has now gone away contented after a tummy rub. JoJo has become a semi-zombie cat. One day we realised that the iris and pupil in his left eye had disappeared and his eye was just milky like a zombie's. We took him off to the vet for an explanation, which turned out to be a long word which meant, more or less, that his lens and all that had detached from the front of his eye and was just floating around inside there somewhere.

This set him back for a while and he lost weight and wasn't taking care of himself, but he seems to have got over it and is now back to his relaxed self. Both he and Lily Belle are coming up to their sixteenth birthdays (being twins) and while JoJo spends a bit more time lying around in front of the heater, Lily Belle still doesn't realise that she is no longer a kitten, and does a lot of hurtling and wants to stick her nose into everything.

Re Robin Johnson, who is now a neighbour. One of his hobbies had been the collection of airline timetables and he has a very impressive collection of them. He also has other interesting stuff and recently loaned me a hefty volume, from about 1959, that included all the train timetables of United States railways. It also had airline and shipping timetables. I'm finding this kind of thing interesting because I have recently become interested in the history of how long it took to travel from one place to another, what it cost and the travel experience itself. So, Robin and I will be driving somewhere and the conversation will drift from the SF that he is reading to the latest state of the Hugo voting to current seating arrangements in various airlines' A380s to the state of Boeing 737 production and sales. All these interests we share. We could spend hours talking about all kinds of things but Valma has made it very clear to Robin that he is not to disturb me until after 1300 because that is when I am working on history. Up until a week or so ago I was beaver away on the history of Australian fandom — I finally got around to re-reading Vol Molesworth's history ... OMG. What can I say!

About three weeks ago I went down to a private hospital in Melbourne where I spent an hour being unconscious while an oral surgeon did some work, pulling out a tooth, putting in three implants, and removing all the plates and screws that had been put in after the assault. The procedure — as they call it — went well, except that in the process a nerve got damaged and I'm now experiencing pain (it's not really pain in the usual sense of the word, but there's no other word to express the distracting discomfort) which is slowly diminishing and will hopefully be gone sooner than later. It was distracting enough that I found it difficult to go on with the fannish history, so I have gone on to a revision of the second volume of the aviation history instead. The current timetable for completing the oral procedure is that

I will be back to the surgeon for the all clear in mid October after which crowns will be put on the implants, and things will then be better than new.

After that I will be free to go over to the Special Collection at Murdoch University to trawl the fanzine collection there, after which it will be back full throttle on the fannish history. I note your mention of Tony Thomas, so I assume you are still in touch with him. He is another person I'd like to interview because he was already well established at the MSFC when I arrived there, as was Myf, so I would like to hear his memories of fandom in that period.

Back to Robin. Since I am no longer a great collector of anything (apart from scale model aeroplane kits) I scan myself a copy of things like the latest *SFC* and *Aviation Heritage* and pass them on to Robin, which makes me feel much more virtuous than just throwing them out. So, don't worry about sending Robin a paper copy of *SFC* if you don't have one spare because he will end up with mine.

(30 July 2016)

SFC 93:

The 20 pages of Colin Steele's reviews made lively reading. There sure is a lot of SF going around, and I guess that Colin is seeing only a fraction of it. I particularly liked the first section reviewing books about fantasy and SF. Is it my imagination or is there a lot more marketing of stuff about stories in various forms of medium? Of course, the whole of media fandom is based around creation of more material to fill in the gaps left by the stories given out by the producers, and I suppose that these books about SF and fantasy do the same thing. There also seem to be two kinds, given Colin's reviews, those about the creators — the Inklings, for example — and those about their product — *The Keys to Middle Earth*, for example.

If I had not been introduced to the field of fandom studies of late, the intended audience of *Fan Phenomena: The Lord of the Rings* would have sailed right over my head.

I come to John Litchen's long article, just over 20 pages, on writings about Mars. I enjoyed this a lot, partly John's weaving of the history of humanity's growing knowledge about Mars with the changing content of the stories written about it, and partly because his long, detailed plot descriptions means that I don't have to read any of the stories he has commented on. This is probably a good thing, because I'm unlikely to get around to reading them anyhow. I was disappointed that John did not go back and re-read the Edgar Rice Burroughs stories, because I'm sure that we all would have found interesting the juxtaposition between his memories of reading them in youth and coming back to them with a more mature palate. I'm looking forward to the second part.

Jocko's contribution was the shortest and the most lively. It also displays, I think, some of the spirit that came across fandom with the increasing availability of the photocopier. It was a much easier medium of reproduction than mimeos, and my use of our trusty Roneo 750 probably began to decline when I started to have access to photocopiers, at work and then at Murdoch Uni. I cannot now recall setting up the Roneo when we got to

Perth, but that was at about the time when doing a PhD put the squeeze on fanac.

What pushed my nostalgia buttons even more was the photo of the IBM Selectric. It was a fine machine, although, when you cut stencils on it, the correcting ribbon Jocko refers to wasn't very useful. The range of golfballs was like magic and the touch of the keyboard was like silk.

Still, they were very expensive machines, and the only reason that Valma and I could afford one was because while we were in America on our DUFF trip the Australian dollar was revalued rather spectacularly, so we ended up with more money than we expected when we turned our unspent US dollars back into real money when we returned home.

Jocko's experience of fandom is a lot more like the kind of fandom that I'm reading about in fandom studies. It seems to me, on first thought, that the change comes partly from the enthusiasms of media fans and also from the photocopier, which made reproduction so much easier that many more people were willing to indulge in it than had been the case with the humble mimeo. There is, as Jessie Lynn recently made me realise, a lot more craft skill in cutting stencils, etc, etc, etc than there is in pushing the button on a photocopier.

This brings me to the beginning of the issue and your story of your experiences in fandom. I had read it before, but it is an interesting read. I have re-read it again, however, against the comment you made to me on the weekend along the lines that doing historical research was a matter of going out and talking to people who remembered the past. You expressed this strange notion as though it was so blindingly obvious that any dunce would know it. It made me rather cranky, partly because it suggested to me that you think there is a right way to do history, and if I'm not doing it that way I'm not doing it the right way. You are, of course, wrong. But I'd be interested to know where you got that notion from.

When historians — people who do history for a living that is — get together they nod their heads sadly at the folks who think that anyone can do history because they remember what happened in the past. This is like saying that I can fix the innards of my computer because I read *Access for Dummies* or I can perform open heart surgery because I know how a washing machine works — they're both a matter of plumbing aren't they? The unfortunate fact is that it is possible to write something that looks like history without knowing what you are doing, but 99 times out of a hundred it will be bad, often very bad, history. Doing good history is another thing again and takes training, skill, and a little bit of talent. You didn't learn to do critical analysis of literature by reading comics; you've got the training of your BA and then years of experience behind it to do what you do. I don't tell you how to write litcrit because I know that you know what you are doing and I'd appreciate it if you gave me the courtesy of acknowledging that I also have years of training and experience behind me and know what I'd doing.

Given that agreement, I'll tell you a little about why I am not a great fan of going out and talking to people as the primary source of historical research. Let me back it up by reminding you that I taught a post-graduate level course in oral history in Perth, have done (by my rough

calculation) around 500 oral history interviews, and have used it extensively in most of the commissioned histories that I've written.

Going out and talking to people who remember things that happened in the past goes under the general heading of oral history, and has a highly technical structure and many modes of recording, storing, and making use of the material recorded in interviews. After that, there is even more debate about how the material collected in such interviews can and should (if you are dogmatic enough) be used. Generally speaking, however, it is agreed that one of the serious weaknesses in oral history is that it depends on human memory. Memory is not a fixed thing; it changes over time, the emphasis of memories get changed, new details are added, and other details overwritten. As I am sure you know, two people at the same event will see it quite differently and remember it even more differently, so that it is not a very good or reliable source of historical evidence. What memory is good for, to some extent, is in recalling what it was like to experience an event and almost all the use I've made of oral histories in my books has been to give that 'what it was like to be there' sense to an event. Of course, even that it only a recounting of the memories of those experiences, but it is the best that we have in most cases and so we have to use it even though we are aware of its theoretical weaknesses.

Now Bruce, one of the great pleasures of doing this history of fandom is that I don't have to concern myself too much with these theoretical problems. Fans have been very verbose over the years, and I'm finding that the various repositories around Australia hold just about every Australian fanzine that was ever published. Some of them, like *Bacchanalia* and *Forerunner*, are setpieces, but many others are much more informal, and reading them is almost like listening to a fan of the 1940s or 1950s talking into a typer as a form of recording device. The difference between that source of historical evidence and a person's reminiscences a handful of decades later is that one source is immediate and not mediated by the passage of time, the more recent source of the oral history interview is.

Let me give you an example of this: I've had the pleasure of interviewing both Lee Harding and Dick Jenssen in the past few months, but I'm talking to people to whom the events I'm interested in are distant memories. On the other hand, the Lee Harding and Dick Jenssen who wrote for *Etherline* and produced *Perhaps* are the real voices of those young men recounting their experiences and thoughts in a way that their elder selves cannot. Of course, being the early 1950s, there were some things that they could not write or say, which they now can, but it is my job as a historian to take the evidence of their written word, apply to it tools of a knowledge of Australian culture in the 1950s and the state of stf at the time using what historians call 'the historical imagination' and what E. P. Thompson called 'historic logic'.

Another example of this. One of the most touching pieces of writing I've so far come across is the final issue of the *Melbourne Bulletin* published by Warwick Hockley in December 1941. Here is a youngster — probably 16 at the time — talking into his typer for his friends in

fandom about what is ahead. He doesn't write about it directly, but chats with them about this and that and then signs off by saying that he doesn't know when he will be able to publish again. It seems that he never did. It seems that Hockley is now dead, so I cannot interview him to retrieve this piece of historical evidence, and even if he were still alive I am sure that his memory of this period could not be as clear and personal as what he said to his friends in fandom on that day.

So Bruce, these are a couple of examples of why I am not in a rush to interview people. The other reason is simply that when I recently went out to interview members of the Melbourne SF Group from the early 1950s I had not done my research, so I did not understand what they were telling me half the time and when I did, I still didn't know what the useful follow-up questions might be. It will require months of detailed and rigorous research before I feel properly equipped to go out with recorder to do a decent job of talking to people, and, even then, those interviews will be subject to all the problems I mentioned above.

Having written all the above and only scratched the surface of some of the historical issues I'm thinking about in researching and writing this history, I come back to your story. It is written as a reminiscence and has historical validity as your memory rather than proof that events took place or the people involved were actually where you say they were when you say. I will use your article here as a source of historical evidence but it will have to stand comparison with other material including, for example, what you might have written in ANZAPA about the experience of publishing early *SFCs* and, all things considered, I will probably find your earlier writing more valid. Good history is not a simple process, but one of the things about good history is that it has to look simple when it finally appears on the page.

That's enough for now. I hope I don't sound too cranky or didactic, or both.

(20 December 2016)

The Christmas season has passed, more or less, and my brain is beginning to resume normal service. In three days Valma, Robin, and I watched over 10 hours' worth of *The Lord of the Rings*, which is shorter than the *Ring Cycle* and, dare I say it, more interesting too. Not being a Wagnerite these days, I listened to fair bit of the recent Melbourne *Ring* on the ABC but, after a while, it all gets to sound the same. I got to the final chords of *Twilight of the Ghods* with a sense of relief rather than elation. I wonder what Anna Russell would have made of *Lord of the Rings* had she been aware of it.

What makes a fan, sercon or fannish, or both, is one of the big questions that I have to sort out for this history. I'm sure that lots of fans would agree with Bill about the MSFC (or their local equivalent) being a refuge from mundane life, particularly wowserist Melbourne in the '50s and '60s. I've already been thinking about this and I'm about to make some explorative notes on the topic for the next issue of *iOTA*, because this is something I have to have well resolved before I even think about starting to write. It may not be an understanding that everyone agrees with, but it has to be something I can work with.

I agree with you entirely about PhD candidates 'doing' a subject. I'm going to try avoiding this approach as much as possible, especially as I will end up being one of the specimens with a pin through my tummy. The trouble with PhD candidates is that they lack of sense of humour (not that I had one when I was doing mine), but that's the nature of the process these days and I'm glad that I did mine back at the end of the 1980s before the process became so formulated. I was reading Richard Bergeron's editorial to *Warhoon* 28 last night. He made the vital point about 'the absolute necessity to entertain: writing that doesn't entertain will have to surmount the obstacle of boredom before it can communicate'. I might have to get this carved into tablet of stone and mounted somewhere where I can go and bang my head against it when I start to take my writing in this project too seriously.

Let me worry about the finances and logistics of this project. The main thing is that it is done. I'm beginning to have some thoughts about this, too, which I will probably also unpack in *iOTA*. One reason is that as our generation begins to enter the age of senility and the stars of Sixth Fandom have now blinked out (almost all anyhow), what fandom was and what it achieves needs to be recorded. Although I did not set out to do this, the two or three decades I've spent doing history professionally have given me the skills, experience, and competence to research and write a decent history of fandom. It would be better if we had somebody with my historical skills and the fannish writing skills of a Willis or a Bangsund to do this, but we have to make do with the tools we have at hand. The second reason is that the '60s and '70s was a culturally turbulent period and fandom was swept up in it — so why not write about the two things together? The third, and this has only become apparent to me since rubbing up against academic fandom studies, is the need to state a clear case of the distinctiveness of stf fandom with an evolutionary path which was different from and longer than other fandoms due in part, I think, to its international networks. And also to ensure that the notion of 'fannishness' is explored with a fannish sensibility because to do it in a dull academic style would be to put more than a pin through its tummy; it would be to attack its wit and intelligence with a battleaxe that would thoroughly obliterate it.

You sound like those sirens in the Odyssey, trying to lure me back to ANZAPA with your hints of David Grigg and Gary Mason et al. at the height of their powers. How tempting it sounds, how alluring. However, I am already tied to the mast with strong bonds of work and more work so that I hear you, I struggle with the temptation, but I resist. I managed to get out four paltry pages for SAPS just before Christmas, but there is so much else that has to be done too. But this reminds me to ask you as OBE (you are still OBE aren't you?) whether you would be willing to put the first couple of issues of *iOTA* through ANZAPA for me as a way of letting fans know that it is around and the project is happening.

(28 December 2016)

[*brg* Thanks for the newsy and mind-stimulating letter, Leigh. Looks as if we agree about the nature and direction of your history of fandom. I'll try to alert

you to sources when I hear of them. For instance, Chris Nelson seems to have done us all a great service by interviewing all the Sydney veterans before they died with monotonous regularity during the last 10 years. However, Chris seems to have been struck by work-itis, and his *Mumblings* about Graham Stone seems to have been his last for the foreseeable future. A pity. I enjoy *Mumblings from Munchkinland* greatly. (I think they are all now available on efanazines.com.)

On Facebook I heard about your ultimate Christmas present to Robin — *Warhoon 28*. What a great writer Willis was! I suspect if Bangsund hadn't dropped out of fandom, he could have written more material of Willis's standard (and he certainly did in the early seventies), but that was back then.

I could frank through *iOTA* in ANZAPA. After all, I'm putting my own fanzines through there at the moment, but contributing the cash needed for the extra postage. All preparatory to dropping the print editions altogether, I suspect — my bank balance is in trouble after doing *SFCs* 92 and 93 and *Treasure 4* in succession.

There are many topics that come to mind when thinking about Australian fandom. One is the matter of being OE/OBE of Anzapa and the many other apas we've had over the years. Twenty years ago Irwin came up with a list of 13 apas that Australia had hosted, and there are probably more that people have remembered. A conference of Official Editors, with a recording device in the middle, would yield much of interest (to me in particular; I can feel very isolated when I'm trying to hold up my end as an official editor of an apa.)*]

Thanks for offering to put *iOTA* through ANZAPA. Do you want me to send you copies and if so how many?

When is the next deadline?

I'm not surprised that there were so many apas. I'm just glad that only ANZAPA (so far as I currently know) was in action before 1975. The more I look at the available material the more I am glad that I've drawn that as the end date for the history proper. I've been downloading as many Australian fanzines as I can find from the period on the interweb, and some I copied at Monash, so I have over 250, and that's barely scratching the surface. I'm feeling rather cranky today. I spent yesterday going through Vol Molesworth's history in some detail and its annoying for being such a bad history but also crankifying for all the time Sydney fans wasted in fighting with each other rather than getting on with having fun. And then it occurs to me that maybe being nasty to each others was what passed for fun in Sydney. Do you think it's something in the water?

You'll have to face it Bruce; the time for posting fanzines is over. I do the newsletter for the local scale modelling club and I limit each issue to 16 pages because even that costs \$1 to send these days. That's why *iOTA* is going to be limited to electronic publishing only except for exceptional circumstances. To save yourself at least a little you should stop sending me hard copies of your fanzines. Just let me know that it is available, and I will download it at no expense to you. I know, it's not quite the same thing. My most recent history was published electronically and I miss the fact that there is nothing to sit on the shelf next to my other published works. That, however, is the modern age in which we live in.

So much for now. You can return to your indexing and I will return to Vol Molesworth. You have the better of the deal, I can assure you.

(30 December 2016)

Leigh Edmonds

In hot pursuit of fanzine treasure: the Perth trip

I've just returned from a trip to Perth where I spent three days diving into the fanzine collection in the Special Collection in the Murdoch University Library, and I've come away drained and exhausted. Part of it was the weather, which was so fearfully hot and humid that even Perth folks were complaining about it; part of it is the amount of work that will be involved in trawling the collection to get full benefit from it; and part of it was all the people I met and talked to. One of them, Tracie, said that she thought I looked familiar, and came back later with a couple of photos of Geoff Bolton (my first PhD supervisor) and I and several other people at an informal presentation in 1988, which was rather astounding and delightful — and of which I have no memory.

I had the opportunity to meet and talk with the University Librarian, **Susan Ashcroft**, who told me, and later said in public, that the only thing that distinguishes one university library from another is their Special Col-

lections, so she is determined to use the Murdoch collection to the fullest. She is starting with the fanzine collection — which is only a small part of the overall collection — because the nature of fandom makes it the part which is most easily promoted in public. This is an amazing concept to me — seeing as how it's science fiction we're talking about here — but I guess the point is that fandom is about communities of people, and while there are many other communities (you write about the community of the Churches of Christ in **brg** 94) they do not record themselves for the future in a way that fandom does. Not that we intended to; it's just that our process of communicating on paper preserves the interpersonal communications of our community in a way that (so far as Grant Stone is aware) no other community has and does.

In the east we've seen the rumours of the poor or neglected state of the fanzine collection at Murdoch but,

as far as I could determine, those rumours are largely untrue. It is true that **Grant Stone** was removed from the library staff rather unceremoniously and unpleasantly by a previous University Librarian, but now that the new librarian has established herself Grant has been welcomed back to advise on the collection — a task that he fulfills admirably. He tells me that in all that time that he was not there the collection has sat quietly on the shelves, sleeping until it was needed. I have to emphasise that the special collection at Murdoch is vast, and that our fanzines, and even the professional stuff, is only a small part of the overall collection. Last Friday afternoon, Grant showed me only the comic and student newspaper parts of the collection (and we found the *Esquire* and *Playboy*

part of the collection by accident when Grant misremember accession numbers (so he says)). The feminist and gay/lesbian collections are also, so I am told, big and extensive, and they are also only small segments overall, which has a major focus on popular culture, which is where we come in. In short, if I had any fanzines that I wanted to get rid of they'd go to Murdoch because I would have no fear about their long term preservation. I would think that the fanzines could become a hidden corner of the collection and not promoted, but that would not threaten their survival.

The Murdoch Library has recently advertised the position of Special Collections Librarian to take responsibility for the collection, and Grant will not be applying for it — he enjoys being retired too much and has too many other interests. However, it is highly likely that he will mentor the new holder of the position, and it may also be that his services, knowledge, and experience will be used in other ways to promote and strengthen the collection.

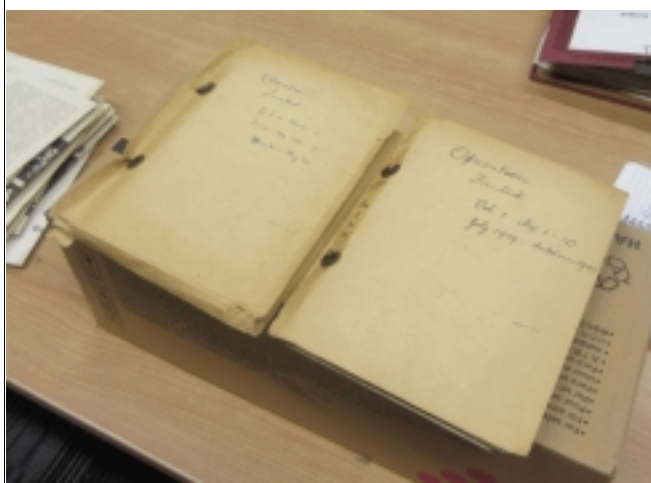
Enough of the free plug for the collection.

Jessie Lymn, who I mentioned in *iOTA* 1, was also there from her home in Wagga Wagga. She is a lecturer in librarian studies and that kind of thing at Charles Sturt University. She discovered fanzines through the Murdoch University Library on-line catalogue. At the moment she is fascinated by apas and, in particular, ANZAPA, and spent all the time I was there reading, thinking, and writing about what she found there. We were set up in the seminar room in the staff section of the library with free access to the special collection on the floor below if we wanted it. Jessie was on one side of the conference table working her way through parts of the first 100 ANZAPA mailings, and I was on the other side photographing pages of old fanzines as quickly as I could. (I took my laptop and scanner to get better copies of fanzine covers but it failed to work when I set it up — bugger). There were lots of interruptions when people dropped in to talk to us, and Grant Stone is an irrepressible distraction. Still, we got a lot of work done.

Jessie is also aware of and has made contact with the major fanzine collections in the Monash and Sydney University Libraries. There is also, it seems, a significant collection (including John Ryan's collection) in the National Library in Canberra. While her short-term area of study is the Murdoch collection, I gather that her longer-term plans involve all three collections, which is encouraging. Jessie comes from a background in 'zine making, which is perhaps one of the grandchildren of fandom, but she started out with photocopyers and their potential, rather than the restrictions of the mimeo and ditto machines, not to mention hekto, which I never used. She is very sympathetic to fandom and fanzines, and it is interesting to watch her working her way to an understanding of what we were and are about and how we operate. On one occasion she said that she needed a copy of *Fancyclopedia* by her so that she could understand some of the things we were writing about, but she's getting the knowledge. At lunch one day a group was talking about apas and I mentioned 'minac' to her, a concept she found so novel that her eyes lit up with excitement. We won't get a convert to the path that least to the *Enchanted Duplicator* with Jessie, but we will get a



Grant Stone with part of the fanzine collection. The shelves on his right begin with a few pulps, then hold the Australian fanzines, with my old fanzines at the end. More of the fanzine collection fills up the shelves that he is leaning against, with more again in the next compactus along. (Photo: Leigh Edmonds.)



For my money Don Tuck's fanzine collection is the treasure of the entire fanzine collection. He had a special way of binding his fanzines in cardboard covers to protect them and here is his set of *Operation Fantast*, beautifully preserved in their cardboard jackets. (Photo: Leigh Edmonds.)



The panel discussion during our presentation (l. to r.): Grant Stone, Jessie Lymn, Leigh Edmonds, and Anne Surma, the moderator.

keen fellow traveller.

Before I rattle on forever, I should give you a quick report on the event on Friday afternoon. Over 60 had said they were coming, but only about 40 or so, I'd guess, turned up because, we'd like to think, of a prang on the Kwinana Freeway and if you want to get to Murdoch that's the prime way of getting there. The lecture theatre was nice and modern, with a few innovations I'd not seen and would have used had I known that they existed.

The University Librarian led off with a short explanation about what was happening and why, with special mention of the reason of promoting the special collection and the SF part of it in particular. Following that, Jessie talked for 15 or 20 minutes about the collection and about fanzines and how they work. All this is obvious and commonplace to us, so much so that we don't even think about it. As a result, I didn't take any notes, but I have asked Jessie to write me something along those lines for a future issue of *iOTA*.

Grant Stone gave a short talk about how he built up

the collection, then I gave a short talk about how my part of the collection had come together and then an observation on what it was like to come back to all the fanzines that we had produced decades earlier. After a general discussion, we went outside for 'refreshments' (which did not include bubbly) on the lawn, where we talked for another hour or so. The Librarian and the library staff were mightily pleased with the event, which was a relief for me. I gather that the whole session was recorded by cameras built into the ceiling of the lecture theatre and it will be included as part of the special collection. I do not know how or when it might be made publicly available, though I'm sure the library would prefer to use something like that on-line as part of their promotion of the collection. So I wouldn't be surprised if you get to see it at some time down the track.

The whole visit was enlivened by having dinner with Grant, Sheryl (or is that Cheryl?), and their daughter on Thursday and Friday evenings. No wonder I'm worn out.

(5 March 2017)

Robert Day

Three years (nine issues) of SF Commentary

ROBERT DAY

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England (change of address)

I've taken to blogging in a moderately big way. I don't blog regularly. I started my first blog, *Steer for the Deep Waters Only*, mainly to try to keep myself visible online as a way of attracting work. Not a great success, but I seem to have got a small coterie of readers worldwide, even if many of them seem to be checking out why I'm not Robert Day the UK theatre photographer — my post on

that subject is the most regularly read item! I then realised that I'd written over 600 reviews for *Library Thing*, and I felt that quite a few of them were worth being seen by a few more people. So I started cross-posting them to a second blog, *Deep Waters Reading*. About 60 per cent of what I review is SF/F, and so I'm happy to give you permission to reprint any of the reviews from that blog that you think might be of interest to the readers of Gillespie fnz. (You never know when you'll go short of reviews ...) Having spotted Yvonne Rousseau's extended article on Connie Willis's time-travel books in the 40th anniversary *SFC*, I elevated those to the top of the reading pile and afterwards produced some quite substantial

reviews of them. *Doomsday Book* I liked; I had increasing problems with *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, *Blackout*, and *All Clear*.

(16 May 2016)

SFC 85 arrived just as I was about to start a two-week contract (a sub-contract, actually) for a multinational print handling/outsourced office services firm. It was an American company with some slightly odd ideas about employees — as a contractor, I was not allowed to go through the front door, though I suspect that rule was created to prevent rufy tufty blokes in hard hats traipsing cement dust through Reception. It took a while to get used to the high levels of security inside the building (the company handles documentation and personal information for UK banks), and indeed it took nearly a week to get clearance to go onto the production unit shop floor where I had to do my testing because there was no test environment and I had to test on the Live environment after the day's transactions were finished. This did mean putting in a couple of 10-hour days to get the project done in the time allotted. And the daily rate as a contractor was not great to start with.

But it was interesting to consider that, in our knowledge-based economy, I was looking at what a hundred years ago would have been a heavy factory floor. Now our new clerical factories move data and paper, and bureaucratic processes from which IT was supposed to free us still take up large amounts of time and space and human effort.

So pleased you enjoyed the film *Hugo*; I rated it immensely, and was really very surprised when it barely had an impact on the film-going public's consciousness when it came out. In the UK it was marketed as a children's film, which is to do it a very great disservice. It certainly hit all my buttons — railways, early film, mechanical toys, automata, and other strange devices, science fiction, bookshops, Art Deco posters, and digging around in archives, all with a slightly steampunkish vibe. There was one visual joke that I saw coming a few seconds before it arrived, and loved (the train crashing through the end wall of the station and falling into the street — based on a real event), and many of the actors were a complete

delight, even down to Sacha Baron Cohen channelling Arthur Bostrum's performance as the fake gendarme in the BBC World War II sitcom '*Allo! 'Allo!*' — and then turning a cruel and arbitrary authority figure into a flawed and tragic figure by suddenly revealing his injuries at Verdun (little appreciated by the British, whose main interest in World War I centres on the British involvement in the Western Front to the exclusion of almost any other theatre of war — with the possible exception of Gallipoli — so that most Brits almost forget that it was a Great War), let alone Ben Kingsley's depiction of Georges Méliés. I had a few problems with it — Méliés didn't give up pictures because of the horrors of the war; he sold out to Pathé instead (but that doesn't make such a human story); and the production designer seemed to think that all passenger trains in and out of Paris were Wagons-Lits, and the CGI people managed to make most of the steam engines look like German World War II freight engines, dressed up with Swiss-style smoke-box headlamps — but these were minor quibbles. (I do moan a bit when CGI people get real-world stuff wrong, because there can surely be no excuse.)

As for Havergal Brian's '*Gothic*' *Symphony* — I heard it via BBC Radio 3 in 1980 in a performance conducted by Ole Schmidt, and I still have that on cassette somewhere. Later, I obtained the Lenard recording on Marco Polo, and then recorded Martyn Brabbins' Proms performance off-air in 2011 straight onto CD. Quite why *The Curse of the Gothic Symphony* is not a regionalised DVD I cannot imagine. You said that '... parts of the last movement ... are almost jolly.' I found a lot of the next-to-last movement very exciting with its rushing choral climaxes, and the work as a whole is something I return to fairly often (though you can't exactly hum tunes from it). There is now getting to be quite a bit of Brian on disc, even if it takes a bit of finding — the Wikipedia page has a partial list of recordings (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Havergal_Brian#Recordings_of_the_symphonies), and looking at my catalogue, I find I have quite a bit of Brian on CD and LP myself (see panels).

Somewhere I know I once also had his 1916 comic opera *The Tigers*, also on cassette. I must devote some time to transcribing my surviving cassettes to recordable

BRIAN,
Havergal

1908 Festival Dance		Adrian Leaper	National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland	1992 Marco Polo	£ 223481	1992 CD
1910 In Memoriam		Adrian Leaper	National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland	1992 Marco Polo	£ 223481	1992 CD
Do Moresbairn: a 1912 comedy overture for orchestra		Harry Newstone	London Symphony Orchestra	1999 Vocation Dutton	CDBP 9796	2010 CD
1927 'Symphony No.1 in D minor, 'Gothic'	Susan Grillon Rice (soprano) Christine Rice (mezzo-soprano) Dagmar Puckova (soprano) Eva Janiskova (soprano)	Peter Aary (tenor) Alastair Miles (bass) Vladimir Dolenz (bass) Peter Michals (bass)	Martyn Brabbins Huddersfield Choral Society, London Symphony Chorus Slovak Philharmonic Choir, Slovak Opera Chorus	BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales Czech-Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra	2010 1989 Marco Polo £ 223288-281	2010 CD Off-air recording 1990 CD
1932 'Symphony No.3 in C sharp minor		Lionel Friend	BBC Symphony Orchestra	1985 Hyperion Helios	CDH55028	1990 CD
1933 'Symphony No.4, 'The Sargasso'	Jana Valadkova (soprano)	Adrian Leaper	Slovak Philharmonic Choir, Slovak Opera Chorus	Czech-Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra	1992 Marco Polo £ 223447	1992 CD
1948 'Symphony No.6, 'Sinfonia Tropica'		Myer Friedman	London Philharmonic Orchestra	1973 Lysia		1973 LP
1949 'Symphony No.8 in B flat minor		Charles Groves	Royal Liverpool Philharmonic	1977 HMV Greenlee	ED 29 0468 1	1978 LP

1953 Symphony No.9 in A minor	Charles Gounod	Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra	1977 HMV Gramophone	ED 29 0889 1	1978 LP
	Harry Newman	London Symphony Orchestra	1999 Veeiton Dances	CDBP 9798	2000 CD
1954 Symphony No.11	Norman Del Mar	London Symphony Orchestra	1999 Veeiton Dances	CDBP 9798	2000 CD
1957 Symphony No.12	Adrian Leaper	Czechoslovak Radio Symphony Orchestra	1992 Marco Polo	S.223447	1992 CD
1960 Symphony No.16	Myer Friedman	London Philharmonic Orchestra	1975 Lyrita		1975 LP
1961 Symphony No.17	Adrian Leaper	National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland	1992 Marco Polo	S.223481	1992 CD
1968 Symphony No.31	Charles Mackerras	Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra			1989 MC Off-air recording
1968 Symphony No.32	Adrian Leaper	National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland	1992 Marco Polo	S.223481	1992 CD

CD before they deteriorate completely. So far, the only thing I've done that with was Philip Glass's SF opera, drawn from Doris Lessing's *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*, which to my mind desperately needs a commercial recording.

I've been buying quite a lot of second-hand classical vinyl recently, as it is now becoming available at silly prices in charity shops. Even CDs are becoming available at silly prices in charity shops, as everyone rushes to stream music live and download. If I can't hold a physical carrier in my hand, I don't trust it. Too many people are assuming that the Net will always be there, that they'll always be able to access it, and that the material they want will always be accessible. I've heard enough stories about licensing arrangements resulting in downloaded e-media being withdrawn from devices suddenly for my lack of trust in the corporate Net to keep me from dumping all my recorded music and video for the dubious promise of 'accessible forever'. And many of these services appear to demand a regular subscription — I'd sooner pay once and have always than pay always and have for some indeterminate time.

To TV: I watch very little TV these days, mainly unwinding of an evening after work with re-runs of *Stargate SG-1* and *The Avengers* on digital channels. However, *Sherlock* has been something I've made time for. I like its take on updating the Conan Doyle stories for the modern world and how well depicting Holmes as a high-functioning sociopath works in our terms. Indeed, I see the show as a sort of British *Big Bang Theory*. (Many disagree.) I also like Martin Freeman's Watson; although in the original stories Watson was not a fool, over the years film and TV adaptations have made him into a bumbling duffer. Freeman rolls that back. After all, anyone who has done service in Afghanistan is not going to be any sort of shrinking violet; and indeed, the parallels between the nineteenth century and today for Watson's back story are remarkable. Having said that, the series is not perfect; in my case, it was (perhaps inevitably) the episode which had people disappearing from the Tube that made me froth at the mouth a little, as the plot completely disregarded any sort of reality when it comes to railway operations. And this is not anorakism on my part; we are talking here about basic facts like 'you can't take a carriage off of a train and have it run under its own power', let alone the fact that people would notice, especially if it was the end coach (it's got a driving cab on the end that would be noticed if it was missing). Others have offered more detailed criticism.

One fascinating thing, though, occurred in the series

2 cliff-hanger, *The Reichenbach Fall*. As a follower of genre fiction, I of course knew what it was referencing, and the interest to me was 'How are they going to do the trick?' My sister, however, revealed to me that she did not know the Holmes canon, and so thought that Sherlock had actually been killed off at the end of the show. I'm afraid I delivered her a spoiler ... And again; the ingenuity of the writers impressed me, with the title of the come-back episode for season 3, *The Empty Hearse*, referencing the original come-back story 'The Empty House'.

Recently I have been watching a UK-France co-production, a historical drama, *Versailles*. This is centred on Louis XIV and the building of Versailles; what makes it interesting is that it discards the UK approach to costume drama for a more modernistic French approach. Writing, plotting, and staging are definitely twenty-first century; opening titles and music are very contemporary and hugely refreshing. Two different friends from two different spheres of my life recommended it to me, and they were right.

There was also a nice BBC adaptation of Conrad's *The Secret Agent* that caught my eye.

Patrick McGuire's letter of comment brings me back (in sorts) to Connie Willis, and the comment from Jo Walton that 'she had British editors'. I'm noticing a creeping tendency for British books to take up Americanisms. I recently read Graham Joyce's *The Year of the Ladybird*, and had to comment that, although I accepted the reasons for the re-titling of the American editions — *The Year of the Ladybug* would just have sounded wrong — there were other Americanisms that seemed to have been put in and not taken out for a UK audience, which is odd considering that Graham was a British writer. Alas, I can't ask him now, but I did raise an eyebrow where the UK text makes reference to handing out 'sticks of rock candy' when the accepted British usage would just have been 'sticks of rock'.

SFC 86:

I was very interested in George Zebrowski's C. P. Snow lecture. I recently took it into my head to re-read James Blish's *Cities in Flight* — the second piece of serious SF I ever read after Aldiss' *Report on Probability A*, though, because of the way books came back into our local library, I actually read the books in reverse order — and the thing that struck me the most was how erudite Blish was and how (technically) well written the books were. I first read them in about 1969; I probably haven't re-read them for 30 or 35 years. What I found was the pacing, the language, and, much to my surprise, a lot of the

cosmology all stood up well. What worked less well was the technology — Bakelite telephones and slide rules — some of the attitudes (I kept thinking ‘This isn’t too bad for 1958’, and then I’d hit a big chunk of mansplaining, or Amalfi admitting to regretting somewhat euthanising a number of his children over the centuries because of irreversible radiation damage), and a big failure in explaining quite where New York’s black population had gone in the time between 1958 and the time of the novel. And *They Shall Have Stars* was pretty appalling, consisting mainly of talking heads and a lot of ‘Tell me, professor, what makes your spaceship go so fast?’

All the way through, even when part of me was being highly critical, another part of me was relishing the revisiting of an old friend, and easing back into a story I knew, rather like meeting up with said old friend after a gap of many years and picking the relationship up exactly where it was left off. And then I read the bit in *Earthman* about the Okie hiring fair conducted via multi-participant video link and my mind’s eye automatically brought that up to date with video conferencing and flat screens, and it worked.

In your article on Joanna Russ, you deconstruct *We Who Are About To ...*, making reference to ‘the great American fallacy, that the only way to solve problems is with violence ...’. I’m so pleased to see that someone else has spotted that. I call it the American Death Cult — the answer to any question in America seems to be ‘death’. How shall we entertain ourselves? With death. How should we police our streets? With death. How should we pursue foreign policy objectives? With death. How do we provide affordable healthcare? We don’t; we rely on death to take the hindmost. Other examples will probably occur to me after sending this mail.

And George Zebrowski and John Litchen now make me want to re-read Clarke. And Stapledon. So many books, so little time ... But I’m waiting to hear if one job interview was successful, and if another one was good enough to get me through to the next stage of the recruitment process.

(26 August 2016)

SFC 88:

I was really very sorry to miss Brian Aldiss’s birthday serenade at Loncon. But I hadn’t planned staying for the closing ceremony, because I hadn’t really expected to be there. I’d been out of work up until the beginning of July in 2014, and money was incredibly tight. Then I got a job and I’d actually had my first pay packet in about eight months. So I was quickly able to arrange to go to Loncon, but I had to make a few economies, one of which was nominating the trains I wanted to travel on to get to and from the convention to get the best price on tickets.

The thing is this: because it was an unexpected trip and the first time in ages that I’d been able to indulge myself a little instead of watching every penny, I really enjoyed Loncon, despite hardly knowing any fans these days and spending most of my time in odd program items instead of the big events. I have a few photographs, but I doubt these are of too much interest to people two years after the event — and so much water has flowed under the Worldcon bridge since then ... !

If you are interested the pictures are here: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/30301546@N06/albums/72157648378953150>

www.flickr.com/photos/30301546@N06/albums/72157648378953150

I was interested in Patrick McGuire’s pieces on the detective SF of J. D. Robb; not because I’d ever read any of them, or even heard of J. D. Robb (knowingly — I’ll probably see her stuff everywhere now!), but because of the discussion as to quite how science fictional her work actually is. I saw it like this: all too often, SF puts forward a future date for the action of the story, and everything in the story’s fictional ‘environment’ is contemporary to the story. In fact, our world combines a range of artifacts, from personal possessions and cooking utensils up to buildings and other everyday structures, of all ages; and when Patrick was expressing a little surprise that Robb’s world of 2060 isn’t more different to the present day, I found myself disagreeing with him that. SF practitioners have got better at this over the years, but even so I tend to sometimes feel that the remains of the present day depicted in our futures are only there for the convenience of the writer or director. I regularly use drinking glasses that I know are probably about 60 years old because they are the same ones I used in my childhood; and despite having downsized a couple of years ago, I can still go through my flat and pick up everyday objects that are 40, 50, 60, or possibly even more years old. They don’t incorporate technology, and their form has been fixed for centuries, so there is no need to change them. As with artifacts, so with relationships and personal interactions; so I find the idea of the changes in Robb’s future not being so radical compared with our own time quite acceptable.

There are other authors where the effect works differently. Jack McDevitt, for instance. I so often get the sense when I read his books that I’m watching a 1980s TV mini-series — a good one, but still an ‘80s mini-series — and this is so pronounced for me that my mental image of one of his heroines was that she had a bubble perm and shoulder pads. I can’t put my finger on what it is in his style that does this, as he’s obviously very accomplished and the stories are generally good. Perhaps the one exception was *A Talent for War*, where the effect worked in reverse. The setting for that book is a far future where the human race has spread through the galaxy (although the technology and science generally is perhaps only two to three hundred years ahead of the present day). But I read that book and had an incredible sense of the scale of his galactic society and what it would feel like to be an inhabitant of it. It was intellectually visceral.

Having said that, in Patrick’s extended analysis of Robb’s future, I was amused to see the comments on the future of the UK and his speculation that Northern Ireland might have joined the Republic. One of the consequences of the British vote to leave the European Union is that Scotland and Northern Ireland both voted to stay in, which promises further political jiggery-pokery in the next few years, as those nations are reluctant to be dragged out of the EU by the narrow majority vote of the entire United Kingdom. There has been a run on UK citizens with the right family connections obtaining EU passports, and since the Good Friday Accords, Northern Ireland citizens have been able to apply for dual nation-

ality with Eire. Since the referendum, they have been doing so in even greater numbers, and it remains entirely possible that the Six Counties might just decide to join the Republic if that was the best way to retain EU membership. Early indications are that this issue cuts across the traditional religious and Loyalist–Republican divides. So Robb may well have been prophetic!

Having been reading *SFC* and your other fanzines for so long, many of the names of your correspondents are now well known to me; and having had relatives in Australia for a long time (my uncle was the municipal Head Gardener of Hobart for many years until he moved to NZ and took up the same role in Christchurch; he died early last year), I've always had a place in my personal landscape for Australia. But it didn't mean that much to me — my uncle was a distant figure, communicated with mainly by letter and Christmas card until recent years, and the pre-Internet age didn't allow me to get any sort of virtual picture of his whereabouts. Then my eldest niece moved to Australia for work (as Australia was the only place where she would get paid for her specialism, sports science; here in the UK, plenty of well-heeled professional sports clubs wanted her services, but weren't prepared to actually pay for them — the story of so much of the UK these days generally ...) and she first went to work for Sports Queensland, based in Brisbane; then she went to Sports Australia and did conditioning training for the Commonwealth Games and Olympic cycling and rowing teams; then she was headhunted to Geelong by one of the Rules football teams. So when Leigh Edmonds wrote about Geelong, it was suddenly very immediate and alive for me, having followed Suki via social media.

(My niece was later headhunted to another team in Melbourne, just before some sort of scandal broke among the Geelong players. She suffered some of the flak from that, but in the nick of time was again headhunted, this time to a professional basketball team in the States — Milwaukee, to be precise.)

Later, Leigh asked about whether anyone's written about galactic empires from the p.o.v. of the ordinary bloke on the street. It has happened a couple of times, but I don't really recollect many narratives wholly based around Mr or Mrs Average. Oddly, there's a little aside in the one *Star Trek* novel I possess (honest!), John M. Ford's *How Much for Just the Planet?*, that reproduces some vox pops from ordinary citizens in the street in the Federation and the Klingon Empire respectively. And Ian Sales has recently done a couple of space operas where the protagonist is a fairly ordinary rating in a space navy. But the trouble is that in order to make a story, even if you start with an ordinary protagonist, you actually have to have something happen to him or her to make a story out of it! There are novels I can think of where the protagonist is very ordinary, but then stuff happens to the character. Often, these are rite-of-passage stories; things like John M. Ford's *Growing Up Weightless* or Alexei Panshin's appropriately-named *Rite of Passage*. But I can't think of a story with an ordinary protagonist who's still an ordinary protagonist at the end of the book ...

He also commented on buying scale plastic model kits. Here's another area where I have some expertise. The trouble with that is that you do end up buying more

than you could probably ever have the time to build; but it's no good saying to yourself 'I think I'll build a Scruggs Wonderplane XFY-1 today' and starting out by going to buy the kit. You will almost inevitably find that (a) you can't find a model shop — model shops are getting rarer than bookshops these days; and if you do, (b) the vendor will probably say 'Well, the only kit of that was the Airbox one from ten years ago and that's been out of production for years/the company went bust/the moulds were last heard of being sold to Burkino Fassio' or even just 'I'm fed up of telling people there's no demand for that sort of thing'. Which is why most modellers possess a stash — kits that they've bought and would like to build one day because if you see a subject that you think you'd like to build and you can afford to get it, you have to buy it there and then. Production runs these days are short, and shipping from China can take ages (especially in the UK or US); when Airfix commissioned a kit of the iconic British cancelled project aircraft from the 1960s, the TSR-2, there was almost a 24-hour running commentary online as to when consignments were loaded in China, where the ship was on the high seas, when it docked, and when its cargo was cleared!

And of course, these days, kits are far more complex than they were in the 1960s, when it was 'bought Friday, built Saturday, played with on Sunday, and binned Monday'. A fairly well-detailed kit could now take a good month of solid effort to build even part-way well. As an example, see this post from a blog I've recently started: <http://inshallowerwaters.wordpress.com/2016/09/16/lavochkin-la-5fn/>

That's a blog I've started because I'm now recording my model builds as they progress, to keep my modelling friends informed about my progress; and I don't really want all the effort I've gone to recording the build to just disappear. And also, there's now so much detail in kits that a big chunk of it isn't visible once the kit is finished, so a set of pictures of the build shows off all that detail.

Franz Rottensteiner's letter makes me yearn to go back to Vienna again. And Austria in general. I've always found it to be an utterly relaxed country, despite its politics being not really as modern as world opinion would prefer. It's always struck me as being a bit in a time warp. I'm reminded that many Austrians in Vienna also have a place in the country, as Franz mentions; the few Austrians I know socially certainly manage that. It's a country where I found from my very first visit that I could relax. And that applies to many of their day-to-day practices, such as buying things. Ray Wood's experience of ordering a book from a Swedish supplier and receiving the book and an invoice also still happens if you deal with Austrians.

Matthew Davis mentions Joel Lane, a name I heard in a review in an early *Interzone*, and I was a bit surprised as I was working in Birmingham at the time and in contact with a lot of Birmingham fans, and his name wasn't really known to them either. When I was going to meetings of the BSFG — the 'Brum Group' — his was a name never on people's lips. I ought to go through my back copies of the *BSFG Newsletter* to see if he ever got referenced — though I was only really going to BSFG meetings during

the Noughties up to about 2014.

I'm currently hanging on getting a phone call to see if I've got a job that I interviewed for on Monday; I was told on Tuesday that there were only two candidates in the final interview stage., and the other one had been rejected because their technical knowledge was not as good as mine, but when the agency pressed for something else, they were told 'Robert's given us a lot to think about ... ' And now it's Thursday afternoon and I've heard nothing. Ain't life wonderful?

(23 September 2016)

SFC 89:

I've always been a bit of a sucker for alternate histories, so when Colin Steele devoted a whole segment of his reviews to them, I was quite pleased. I started out liking Peter Higgins' *Wolfhound Century*, but quickly became irritated by all the sentences without verbs, before I crashed into the buffer-stop of the end of the novel. The ending of the first novel in a trilogy should leave the reader expecting more, perhaps with a cliff-hanger ending, or at least some sort of narrative hook to whet the appetite for the next volume. But here, they just go to catch a tram back to town. What? (Some people have even suggested that the publisher made a horrible error and didn't send the last twenty pages of the MS to the printer. There were certainly enough endpaper sheets in my copy to make that a distinct possibility.)

On the other hand, I was blown away from Lavie Tidhar's *Osama*. I acquired my copy at Loncon two years ago and virtually devoured it on the train home. There is a sequel, which I haven't seen, which I'm told uncovers all sorts of interesting and history-bending things about the protagonist. It didn't actually strike me as an 'alternate history'. For me it illustrated the difference between an alternate history and an alternate reality. It's a subtle difference, but I think *Osama* illustrates the point well.

However, it was the review of C.J. Sansom's *Dominion* that interested me. The day after I read the review, I was in a local W. H. Smiths and was able to acquire a copy. It has a nice coloured map of Europe in 1952 inside, and as soon as I saw it, I started asking questions and wondering quite how much research the author had done. Then I saw the six-page 'bibliographical note' at the end of the book and concluded that he had done his research, but there were areas that he'd missed. But the Second World War is such a massive subject that I'm hardly surprised, and it doesn't invalidate the book at all. Not that I've had time to read it yet, you understand.

One of the arguments that people often end up having on the Internet is about the role of the USA in world affairs, and when stuff gets heated. Eventually some American will say, 'Well, without the USA, you'd all be speaking German now.' This statement is almost certainly wrong (at least in most alternate histories I can envisage!) because, if Britain had sued for peace in 1940–41, Hitler was quite prepared to let the UK continue to have the Empire as long as he could have a free hand in Europe. Sansom's novel refers to this, but doesn't really work through the consequences to their natural conclusion. In those circumstances, Britain

would still be a fairly big industrial power, with supply lines from the Empire still open. It's quite likely that we would have been supplying the German war effort, as well as other areas, such as Finland; we were quite prepared to support Finland in their war against the Soviet Union until the Soviets suddenly became allies. Sansom shows the Finns as a 'German satellite state', which isn't really true; although the Finns were happy to accept assistance from Germany after Barbarossa started in 1941, it was very much on the basis of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend', and indeed the Finns refused to join the Axis, saying 'we have no quarrel with Britain'. And at the end of the war, the Russians were quite happy to conclude a peace with Finland as long as the Finns removed any German presence from their soil, which they did, turning on their former allies quickly and efficiently.

It is possible that the Germans might have made the UK a signatory to the *Wiesbaden Agreement*, a treaty that was signed between Germany and Vichy France, which committed the French to turn over two-thirds of their aircraft industry's production to the Germans. Germany actually intended to increasingly sub-contract full production of certain aircraft types to the French, and indeed the French air force in the immediate post-war years operated a number of German types as produced by French factories.

Sansom shows the British occupying Palestine and Jordan, although Syria is a German possession, but leaves Iraq unaligned. This wasn't the case; although nominally independent, the Kingdom of Iraq (as it was during the war) was a British client state. Which is why the Germans backed the nationalist Ba'athist party and bankrolled an anti-British rebellion in Iraq in 1942, deploying two Luftwaffe squadrons to Iraq to fight against the British under an Iraqi flag of convenience. How much that might have been a good thing in Sansom's alternate history is something of an unknown. Someone in the German Foreign Ministry might have thought it worth doing to secure oil supplies, and the existence of a peace treaty between Britain and Germany wouldn't have prevented Hitler from turning a blind eye to such an adventure; after all, he was quite happy for his lieutenants to make up their own policies because he was a staunch Social Darwinist who believed that the best ideas would struggle to the top and be successful. (This was, of course, one of the reasons why the German state never pulled in the same direction on many projects and initiatives, and one of the key factors behind their defeat.)

There is one out-and-out mistake on the map, and that is the designation of Eastern Poland and Belarus as the 'Ostmark'. In fact, this was the term used in the Reich to refer to Austria after the 1938 Anschluss.

One thing that Sansom has definitely got right is the impact of the absence of Lend-Lease material on Russia. Although Soviet and post-Soviet sources play down the role of such material, the equipment — tanks and aircraft — were able to fill gaps in the Russian inventory in 1941–42, just as their own aircraft and tank production was getting into its stride. In that period, a number of aircraft and tank designs were evolving and were not as effective as later versions of the same material. The

Russians were evacuating much of their industrial capacity to the east of the Urals in this period. Lead-Lease equipment enabled Russia to hold the German advance at Moscow instead of them over-running the capital and pushing further east, as Sansom has them doing.

Colin Steele comments on the unlikelihood of the 'nuclear McGuffin', 'given German probable nuclear developments by 1952'. In this case, Sansom is right. German nuclear developments were nowhere near as advanced as they were in the West; and indeed, the German nuclear scientists — Bohr, Heisenberg, and Hahn — did not want to push development of an atomic weapon because they could not countenance Hitler possessing such a weapon. In any case, the recordings made of the interred German scientists' reaction to the news of the Hiroshima attack show that they were not following the track that led Oppenheimer's team to success. The German scientists were given access to the technical details of the American weapon, and their reaction, captured in bugged conversations, was 'We never thought of that ...' The German nuclear research team was more interested in developing atomic reactors for submarines; but in Sansom's alternate history, with America and Britain not in the war and with no strategic supply lines in the Atlantic to disrupt, there would have been no need for attack submarines with an extended duration of mission; and the Germans had a track record of cancelling programs for which they could see no use.

I was interested in Gillian Polack's examination of world-building in *Big Fat Fantasies* in her review of Chris Wooding's 'Braided Path' trilogy. In particular, I was set thinking by her question 'Why the Harry Potters and *Da Vinci Codes*? I've asked myself that, too. I think it's down to a book getting enough attention to provoke people who don't normally read that sort of thing to pick it up. In the case of the Harry Potters, those of us who already knew fantasy most likely did as I did when I first heard about it. In my case, a local radio DJ was so enthused with the first book that he started reading out chunks of it on early-morning radio. (I suspect the concept of 'royalties' never occurred to him. As I'd never heard of J. K. Rowling and didn't know who her agent was, I didn't pick up the phone to tip them off — assuming this wasn't a clever marketing ploy.) After hearing the first extract, read over the air (very badly), I immediately thought 'sub-Pratchett' and dismissed it. So I was as surprised as anyone else to see it going viral very quickly. If I hadn't heard some of it and formed an opinion, I might have picked up a copy.

In the case of *The Da Vinci Code*, I have to admit that I have a copy in the TBR pile. It's there because a good friend of mine recommended it as 'the best book he'd ever read', and I generally respected his opinion. After all, who doesn't love a really good conspiracy theory? (Especially if, as Umberto Eco said, you can be pretty sure that the Knights Templar are involved somewhere.) Having acquired a copy, I then began to see opinion dividing between those who, like my friend, thought it the best book ever, and those who declared it total rubbish. But I can't bring myself to give it away unread, because my friend passed away suddenly and I owe it to him to at least give it a try. The thing is that this guy's

usual reading was more worthy fare such as *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* — he wasn't an untutored reader by any stretch of the imagination. But this was way outside his usual comfort zone and he probably would never have picked it up if there hadn't been all the marketing fuss over it. So that's my explanation — it's a combination of good marketing and exposing the book to a wider range of potential readers than the usual suspects. Those who like that sort of thing may well find that it's the sort of thing they will like; but broad marketing will also draw in people who suddenly take it into their head that they'd like to try that book, without even knowing that there's anything else like it out there.

The dark art of marketing does have a certain cycle when it comes to promoting creative work. There was an opera singer on the radio here the other day talking about her career, and she summed it up in the four stages of an artistic career:

- 1 — 'Who's X?'
- 2 — 'Get me X!'
- 3 — 'Get me someone like X!'
- 4 — 'Who's X?'

Given that books do hang around more than performing artists, if you get big enough you never get to stage 4; but I'd wager that there's plenty of authors around who recognise that cycle.

(10 October 2016)

SFC 90:

Work remains elusive, though I have an interview next week for a major UK clothing retailer whose corporate HQ is just a mile and a half away, and one the week after that for an Internet publishing house in Birmingham. I've now had to start signing on the unemployment register, which is not a good thing. The Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) changed their rules a year or so back, and now you have to sign on at the Job Centre every day for the first four weeks of any claim, just so as to stop you getting into bad habits and so they can push low-paid jobs off on people by methods distinctly reminiscent of the Milgram Experiment. Indeed, I was told today that I could volunteer for unpaid 'work experience' in the Job Centre itself. Given that I worked for one of the DWP's predecessor departments in a very similar office for nearly ten years back in the 1980s, this struck me as cosmically amusing.

All this means that I have to be able to produce evidence that I am actively looking for work and list the things I have done. I suspect that the Job Centre staff have no idea what an IT software tester actually does (which would qualify them eminently to become directors in the company I used to work for). All this means that for a while, the time available to me for loccing is a bit curtailed because of all the hoops I have to jump through to get Jobseekers' Allowance.

Very interested to see Werner Koopman's description of Miniatur Wunderland. That's on my bucket list and possibly one of the things that would draw me to northern Germany (I much prefer countryside with lumps in it, which northern Germany lacks). I'm told it recently became Germany's top tourist destination, knocking Mad King Ludwig's Neuschwanstein Castle off the top

spot! I'd toyed with the idea of overlanding from the UK to the Helsinki Worldcon next year, taking a number of days to do that, and Hamburg would be on that route. Sadly, even if I get work soon, that begins to look a bit unlikely, as the pause in my earning power will take some time to repair.

Milt Stevens used a phrase I'd not seen or heard in a long time — 'beelions and beelions'. For a while in the 1990s, I dabbled in filk (under the influence of some friends of mine), and one of the songs I heard was a satire on Carl Sagan, sung as a canon, with each line repeated four times per verse, called 'There's a hole in the middle of it all'. The lines went something like this:

There's a hole, there's a hole, there's a hole in
the middle of it all
And we're looking for the bang that started the
hole, that hole in the middle of it all
And I'll get the book contracts and the tv shows
about looking for the bang that started the
hole in the middle of it all
And I'll make beellions and beellions from the
book contracts and the tv shows about looking
for the bang that started the hole in the mid-
dle of it all
There's a hole, there's a hole (Assuming the the-
ory holds ...)

Steve Sneyd discussed the secret history of the word 'kipple', especially the old joke: 'Do you like Kipling?' 'I don't know; I've never kipped.' What he really did not point out was that this joke has lost all its meaning, because that use of the verb 'to kipple' has died out. The joke only persists because it sounds funny, independently of any double entendre. Or even a single entendre.

All the talk about yourself and various other people revisiting old stamping grounds reminds me of once when I had to go back to Derby, the city where I went regularly and indeed lived and worked in up to 1984. A few years back I had to revisit and I walked through part of the city centre that had been pedestrianised since I left. I was struck by how small it suddenly looked; and this was somewhere that I'd known since the age of possibly four or five years.

Mark Plummer talks about watching the New Year's Day concert from Vienna. I always watch this, partly to do some celeb-spotting in the audience (Sophia Loren and Roger Moore in successive years about 10 years back), but mainly to sink into some of the Viennese ambience. Vienna is a very civilised city, and the Austrian TV presentation normally includes at least one video insert of the city itself and its surroundings.

Mark's progression through classical music is something I can identify with. My musical tastes have always been a bit non-mainstream; because my sister is eight years older than me, she was bringing rock and pop into the house when I was very young, and I have a distinct recollection of asking for The Flowerpot Men's 'Let's Go to San Francisco for Christmas' (or was it the Beach Boys' 'Good Vibrations?') and getting flatly turned down by

my parents, for reasons which I couldn't fathom at the time (of course, all this 'Summer of Love' stuff puzzled my parents and they probably took the establishment view of the emerging youth culture at the time, and felt I was too young for that sort of thing). So my reaction was to go the other way completely, and when a year or so later I had a teacher who liked to popularise classical music (and who left teaching a couple of years later to go and produce opera films for the BBC), I rapidly embraced, first the Beethoven symphonies, then Tchaikovsky, then Richard Strauss, Wagner, Mahler, Bruckner, and Shostakovich. But through my twenties and early thirties, I rejected Mozart and Haydn as just 'pretty tunes', whilst chamber and instrumental music was something I'd avoid.

Then I saw a BBC2 documentary series analysing the late Beethoven quartets, and I discovered the Shostakovich quartets at about the same time. Things sort of snowballed from there, so by my forties and into my fifties I've found that I've 'discovered' for myself nearly the whole of the classical music canon. The only thing I still haven't been able to do is to appreciate the Second Viennese School (Schoenberg — apart from his early stuff — Berg, and Webern). After 45 years of trying, I've reached the stage where I understand what they were trying to do on an intellectual level, but I still can't quite take to the music itself; I haven't made the conceptual breakthrough that will actually let me listen to it.

Schubert was another composer I tagged with the 'pretty tunes' epithet. Then, probably on the two hundredth anniversary of his birth in 1997, again the BBC came to my rescue, firstly with a documentary about his life, which included fairly riotous evenings in the fleshpots of Vienna, leading to his death at the age of 32 from syphilis, and then a documentary, followed by a performance, analysing his last great song cycle, *Winterreise*. The documentary in particular concentrated on the inner monologue that the poet has and progresses through in the course of the cycle. The level of introspection quite floored me; little wonder that Freud practised in Vienna, if this was the tradition of the inner world that was a part of the city's *Zeitgeist*.

I've never had a problem listening to box sets. If it's an opera, I'll wait until I have an extended period of time to listen to a longer work while reading or writing, perhaps a whole afternoon or an unoccupied evening so that I can at least have two acts under my belt before breaking for a meal and then finishing off the last act. A boxed set that is a compilation of shorter works is just that, and can be treated the same as any other album of music. So, for example, one of my favourites is a boxed set of Richard Strauss orchestral works with Rudolf Kempe conducting the Dresden Staatskapelle on Decca recordings from the 1970s; there's nine CDs in all, but even though Strauss is one of my favourite composers, I don't feel the need, or indeed the ability, to absorb the whole box in one sitting. (The music accompanying this section of the letter are some cello and violin sonatas by the Czech composers Bohuslav Martinu and Leos Janacek.)

And Leigh Edmonds reminds me that our favourite genre got the nature of our recording devices so very wrong; tape, film, and microfilm were the formats of the

future, and digital media and instant retrieval of images were little imagined. And Jim Kirk's communicator now seems so quaint for only having one function ... Leigh talks about real research, which reminds me that I have to do some mugging up over the weekend about the clothing retailer where I'm going for the interview on Tuesday, so I'd better close this letter now.

(29 October 2016)

Thanks for the hard copy of *Treasure 4* which arrived safely here. The Graham Joyce article is progressing slowly, as I have a lot of job-hunting to do, even though I've now severed my relations with the Department of Work and Pensions. My small Civil Service pension exceeds the amount of benefit I could receive, so I get nothing for signing on as unemployed; and I have missed a job through being down at the Job Centre when an agency phoned to set up a telephone interview with an employer. Although I contacted them as soon as I could, the company obviously wanted to restrict the number of people it short-listed and had filled all their phone interview slots for that afternoon. (It later transpired that they ended up appointing internally anyway — you do wonder about some people's integrity.) I'm currently waiting on the results of two interviews, but as one result is a week overdue, I suspect that's a no-no. I have a further interview next week for a utility company. I also have some five or six applications which are out with potential employers to see if they'd like to short-list me, but as to whether I'll ever hear anything from them is another matter.

The trouble is that some employers seem to want to appoint very quickly; you get so used to that, that when another employer sets a closing date for applications, you can forget that you've had an application in and so get a nice surprise when the phone rings and it's a job you'd almost forgotten you'd applied for. And then there was the agency who phoned me about a job I'd applied for a good six weeks ago, and they asked if I was still available. When I said I was, they sheepishly admitted that they'd sent my CV up to the employer with a number of others, but they'd managed to lose the lot and the whole process had been set back when each side realised that they'd not received either the CVs or any feedback.

Then you get situations where the decision-maker is away, so things sit on their desk for a week or two. I had one application that I interviewed for where the absence of the decision-maker, first on leave and then out in the field on jobs, stretched the process out to a good 10 weeks.

Of the two interviews currently sitting in Schrödinger's pending tray, the one I suspect I've not got is for a well-paid job based only two miles from my home; the other one is 25 miles away in Birmingham, in an office on the side of town where parking is thin on the ground and expensive, and it actually pays below the going rate for my level of experience. Mr. Sod's Law says that that's the one I'm most likely to get ...

I'm beginning to see jobs that I've been turned down for re-advertised. Of course, in the IT business, you don't always know who you've applied for a job with, as many companies treat their recruitment exercises as a matter of commercial confidentiality; and sometimes, they

engage multiple agencies to try to fill posts, which makes things a bit difficult when agencies in other cities don't describe the same job in the same way and you put two applications in for the same job. This can lead to Unpleasantness, as agencies get paid according to the number of applicants they send through, though it's hardly my fault if two differently worded adverts for the same job actually place the employer in different parts of Leicester, because one gives the actual location and the other quotes the postcode town, which is about five minutes away and is also the location of a major clothing retailer's head office. Oh, how they laughed when I explained that. (Not.) The job I'm being interviewed for next week is some distance away but a reasonably easy drive; I think I may have applied for this one twice, this most recent time on re-advertisement, so perhaps they're getting desperate and I'm the best candidate left standing. Although it's an equally long commute, the money is far better, so if I get an offer on the job I'm waiting for, I may see if I can hold out long enough to do next week's interview. Who knows? I might end up sitting on two job offers and can play one off against the other. I can dream, I suppose ...

(Update: I now have another interview the following day for a software house down in Coventry; and a recruiter has been on to me about a job I was turned down for after second interview. The company re-advertised and filled the role, but now that appointee has walked because they didn't like the travelling. Let's see if their pride comes at a lower price than mine ...)

Let's look at something far more edifying ...

SFC 91:

I know a few people have commented that it's hard to write locs on a zine that's full of little more than locs, but that depends on the quality of those locs. With such a wide spread of friends for you to talk to, both in location and in interests, there's always something that will trigger a response. And so it was with *SFC 91*.

Interstellar, for example. Whilst it wasn't the best SF film of recent years — for me, that accolade belongs to Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* — it's certainly intelligent, if a bit hand-wavy in places. We saw this in the cinema, and I had no problem with the level of the dialogue. Just because the characters aren't shouting 'Holy crap! My brain's exploding!' at each other every five minutes, that doesn't mean that there's a problem with the film's conception or execution. If audiences complain because they can't hear the dialogue, perhaps they could make a start by actually listening for a change. (Seeing the film at home on the Blu-Ray edition was a different matter. My fairly new flat-screen tv has the speakers unhelpfully at the back, and that can make modern dialogue a bit difficult to hear, not only in *Interstellar* but in a lot of other films and TV drama. I'm reluctant to up the volume too much, as my upstairs neighbour sleeps immediately over the TV; fortunately, liberating a pair of headphones from the old job has helped a vast amount.) My one serious criticism of the film was the crucial scene in the tesseract. I got the impression that Nolan had visualised this scene at the outset, as an homage to *2001: A Space Odyssey* (the computer room sequence, of course), and then worked out the plot backwards to get to that scene. On

the other hand, the ‘giant, sarcastic war robots’ were excellent.

As for *Ex_Machina* itself: that certainly was my contender for ‘best SF film’ of recent years. Its reflections on intelligence and sentience were one thing; but I saw a whole lot of very clever references in the film: from the house AI’s opening ‘Welcome to The Residence’, which immediately made me think of *Forbidden Planet*, with the seemingly damaged boss as Morbius and his AI creation very much an Altira figure, and the protagonist the Leslie Nielsen figure intruding into this world to educate the AI about the outside world and human life. The tree in the house’s atrium immediately suggested the tree in Hunding’s Hut in Wagner’s *Die Walküre*, a tale of forbidden relationships and coercive control; but the real stunner for me was the room revealed towards the end of the film, with the earlier versions of the AI robots locked up in cupboards, recollecting the final room the folk tale (and Bartok opera) *Duke Bluebeard’s Castle*. I wrote more on these subjects in an online review for LibraryThing, cross-posted to my reviews blog: http://deepwatersreading.wordpress.com/2015/07/01/ex_machina-written-and-directed-by-alex-garland-2015/

Grand Budapest Hotel hit all my buttons. I was most tickled because I recognised many of the places where it was filmed — in the south-east corner of the former East Germany, mainly in the town of Görlitz, which these days is on the German–Polish border. The hotel interior was actually a former Art Nouveau department store in the centre of Görlitz itself. (I can provide pictures ...) The model of the exterior, on the other hand, is quite reminiscent of the massive hotels built on the northern side of the Semmering Pass in Austria. The scenery in the area is not as Alpine as the artwork suggests, even though the range of hills along the German–Czech border is known as ‘Saxon Switzerland’ (when Alpine tourism first started, it seems that any vaguely hilly area produced publicity comparing the region favourably to Switzerland ...). Other scenes were filmed in Dresden. I was last there in 2011, but only had limited time with the camera in the town, which was a shame. It’s on the list for a re-visit. I found the former East Germany now so much cleaned up that it is almost unrecognisable; when I first visited in 1996, there was still a palpable air of this being a former Communist country.

You also mentioned re-watching *The Third Man*, which I too re-watched recently. Vienna is very recognisable, even now; *The Third Man* is one of those films where the location is one of the characters. However, Orson Welles’ ‘cuckoo clock’ speech is almost completely incorrect when it comes to the Swiss.

I’ve actually watched quite a bit of TV in the past few months: two BBC dramatisations stood out for me. One was a three-part production of Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*, whereas the other was a stunning dramatisation of John Le Carré’s *The Night Manager*. This last stood out for me for two things in particular — first, the luminous photography, and second, Hugh Laurie’s stunning portrayal of an utterly amoral international arms dealer, who is by turns charming, witty, and quite the most dangerous person to get on the wrong side of. There are a few things that I’m uncertain of and which I’d like to check against

my reading of the novel; and indeed, the novel was written in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War while the TV series is set against the background of the Arab Spring. Given that both Le Carré and his sons were directly involved with the production, though, those changes are completely seamless; my reservation really centres on the character and back story of the ‘good’ guy, who I think has more hinterland than the TV production suggests.

Your comments about Peter Sculthorpe caused me to think about different countries’ composers. There are a number of composers whose work is little known outside their own country but highly regarded in their own. Just thinking about them, I get these come to mind:

- UK: Granville Bantock, Alexander Mackenzie, George Lloyd, Edmund Rubbra, E.J. Moeran, Charles Hubert Parry
- Ireland: Hamilton Harty, Charles Villiers Stanford
- Holland: Cornelis Doppler
- Germany: Max Reger, Karl Amadeus Hartmann
- Austria: Ernst Krenek
- Czech Republic: Frantisek Benda, Andrzej Panufnik, Josef Suk
- Slovakia: Vitezslav Novak
- Sweden: Wilhelm Stenhammar
- Italy: Arrigo Boito, Ferruccio Busoni
- Romania: Georges Enescu
- USA: Robert Harris, Ned Rorem

And that’s without going into the really obscure ones!

Sculthorpe used to be a stalwart of the BBC Radio 3 schedules back in the 1970s, but I haven’t heard much of his output recently. I have one of Malcolm Williamson’s compositions on vinyl — the Organ Symphony — but that’s about as far as my knowledge of Australian music goes.

Colin Steele’s piece on books, collecting and libraries was thought-provoking. I started out in my working life wanting to be a librarian; the Thatcher government put a stop to that. I started buying books really because of my involvement with fandom; there were certain authors whose works I felt I ought to support because I knew them or had met them and wanted to keep them in beer money. Then it became a matter of wanting to support the genre with sales to persuade publishers to continue to publish new titles. Then the library service got so cut back that books that I wanted, or needed for research and expansion of my knowledge base, had to be found rather than borrowed. And now I have something like 5500 books in a one-bedroomed flat. Fortunately, it’s a large Victorian house converted to flats, with high ceilings and large rooms. The books actually fit better into this flat than they did into the two-bedroom cottage I used to live in. But I still need more bookcases — I reckon I have room for something like another three.

SFC 92:

Ray Sinclair-Wood’s article was very comprehensive and interesting. Poetry, beyond the core ‘classics’, isn’t something I engage with very much (with a few honourable exceptions), so much of this was very new to me. I was amused by the reference to the *Apollo 11* astronauts being told about the Chinese legend of the Jade Rabbit; of

course, this was the rabbit that the Chinese lunar rover *Yutu* was named for. That Laurence Goldstein then referenced the play and film *Harvey* (which I incidentally acquired and re-watched for the first time in years a few weeks ago) I found coincidental but also a little distressing. The Western mind-set seems to be determined to disconnect itself from its own mythology and legends; I see this a lot here in the UK, where folk tales and local legends that I was brought up on are now almost completely unknown to the modern generation. I'm not advocating a return to superstition; but a sense of our history as a culture is being lost. Ironically, there are those on the political Right here in the UK who continually harp on about immigrants not 'respecting our culture', when they have little or no idea themselves as to what that culture actually consists of.

Having said that, I have some Walt Whitman that's getting towards the top of the TBR pile, so perhaps there's some hope for me yet.

Mark Plummer mentions *Deutschland '83*, which I also watched and enjoyed. The interesting thing for me was that here was a Cold War drama whose writing was, probably for the first time, informed by knowledge of everyday life on both sides of the Wall. And it was interesting to see the German perspective; most of the Cold War drama and fiction available to us, even from those who were intimately involved in events, is from a specifically Anglo-American perspective. I remember when I first went to the former East Germany in 1996 (so some five years after reunification), a lot of places outside the big cities still looked very neglected, but the cities — particularly Dresden, where I was staying — seemed quite buzzing (though nothing to what they are like now). But every so often, you'd come across a citizen who was going around with a rather dazed look on his or her face as though he or she could not make sense of what was happening. After all, like good Germans they'd been told for 40 years that they should 'help build Socialism in one State', and they had diligently done that; then the rug had been pulled out from under their feet, and worse still, all the political discourse was saying that everything that they'd done and believed for those last 40 years was suddenly worthless. You'd look dazed, too.

The 'organs of the State', as shown in *Deutschland '83*, were shown as fairly ordinary types, even if their ideology and actions looked highly suspect to us. (I was particularly amused by one Party apparatchik resembling Alec Guinness' portrayal of Le Carré's George Smiley — I wonder if that was a deliberate bit of casting?) Of course, the drama in *Deutschland '83* relating to the GDR citizens concentrated on the undercover world and acts of dissidence, because that's where the drama lay; but there were also ordinary characters, even if their roles were unremarkable or their stories before they came into the drama were unremarkable. I recollect hearing that after reunification there were a lot of people in the former GDR who considered themselves to be really radical types, heavily engaged in the dissident movements, and they would sit in Berlin cafés after the fall of the Wall, telling their friends that they really ought to go and look at their files, dreading what they'd find in them, but determined to face up to these awful revelations, only to

find (much to their disappointment) that when they looked, their Stasi file either said 'Mostly harmless' or didn't actually exist. Of course, there was State oppression; but a lot of people liked to allow that to make them seem more dangerous than they really were. I've seen a lot of those types in my travels around Europe; cool dudes who like to look really out there, but who I looked at and thought (to quote Douglas Adams) 'I get weirder things than you free with my breakfast cereal'.

Gerald Murnane talks about a model railway being the impetus for an alternate universe. This is fairly common — many enthusiasts look for a rationale for the layout they've built in gaps in the railway map, either never filled or projected to be filled but that no-one ever quite got around to building. Even in a crowded country like the UK, there are a lot of railways that didn't get built, or didn't get finished; and these are fertile ground for people wanting a setting for their layouts. Others engage in larger-scale world-building, as have I. In my case, as my layout is vaguely 'somewhere in central Europe', I have christened it Ruritania, after the setting of Anthony Hope's Victorian swashbuckling novel *The Prisoner of Zenda*. There is a thriving debate as to where Ruritania might actually be, as the novel does give fairly precise directions as to how to get there: the protagonist travels through Dresden, and then, once over the border, Zenda is 10 miles on and the capital of Ruritania, Strelsau, is some 50 miles beyond that. The trouble is, if you cross the nearest border to Dresden, directly to the south, you end up in Prague; and that's not Strelsau, partly because (I think) Prague is name-checked in the novel, and partly because everyone speaks German and all the place and personal names are German. However, if you journey to the east from Dresden, to a town called Zittau, and cross the border there into what is now the Czech Republic, in 10 miles you come to the city of Liberec (Reichenberg in German), and 50 miles beyond that, albeit now in a little corner of Polish Silesia, is the medieval town of Klodzko, previously known as Glatz — but exactly in the right place to be Hope's Strelsau. So this is the location that I have chosen for my layout, bending history slightly so that the Elphbergs, the royal family in the novel, intervened on the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa's side in the Siege of Breslau during the Seven Years' War in 1757, and led to Austria retaining a chunk of Silesia, which becomes the semi-autonomous Ruritania in my private universe.

Having discussed *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and the town it was filmed in, Görlitz, it is interesting to note that Görlitz is only about 20 miles north of Zittau, where I (and others) consider that the hero of *The Prisoner of Zenda* crossed the border ... is it any wonder that the film so pushed my buttons?

On the other hand, I've only ever seen the first of the *Hunger Games* franchise, and it seemed to me to be more American Death Cult malarky. I've had no urge to see the others or to embrace other Death Cult offerings, especially zombie apocalypse films, TV series, or novels.

I'm a bit intrigued by Patrick McGuire's assertion (via Wikipedia) that *Men into Space* was shown by the BBC 'in the ... time slot that soon thereafter was to be occupied

by *Doctor Who*. I can remember the first episode of *Doctor Who*, although I was only six at the time. Even at that age, I was fascinated by space flight, so I'm sure I would remember a series about future space exploration; and I don't. That suggests to me that the BBC may well have broadcast the series at about the time it was shown in the US, in 1959–60, or shortly afterwards. So if the BBC showed it in (say) 1960–61, then I probably would not remember it. It certainly wasn't shown immediately before the first run of *Doctor Who* because I'm certain I would have seen and remembered it. After all, I recollect Gerry Anderson's early series *Supercar*, which was broadcast between 1961 and 1962, and that's about the boundary of my memory for TV shows. I wouldn't claim that there was anything special about the Saturday early tea-time slot, other than the fact that it immediately followed the main Saturday sports broadcast, *Grandstand*, and in particular the classified football results, essential viewing for anyone wanting to see how many draws they'd got on their football pools coupon. The cadence of the announcer reading out the results, and the exoticism of some of the Scottish team names (Heart of Midlothian, Queen of the South, Brechin City, Cowdenbeath, and Forfar — especially if the score of a particular match was 'Forfar, 4!') were as much a part of British growing up with TV in the 1960s as any other program. A bit like the secular mantra that was — and still is — Radio 4's rendition of the Shipping Forecast (the weather for seafarers).

Patrick also discusses the correct Russian forms of the terms for 'science fiction' and 'science fantasy'. I was under the impression that the Russians used the catch-all word *fantastika* for all forms of our favourite literature (so much so that John Clute imported the word to the UK and used it exclusively for quite some time). Or was that a specifically Soviet term that fell out of use in post-Soviet times?

Ray Wood commented on being sent a book from Sweden with an invoice. This was certainly also standard retail practice in Austria up until fairly recently — electronic transactions and plastic cards took quite some time to take off in Central Europe, and into the early 2000s one could find that credit cards were not accepted across large swathes of the Continent, mainly because of Germany's preference for hard cash and the traditional strength of the Deutschmark. The Euro changed all that, plus the increasing ubiquity of ATMs. For a while, using a card in even quite sophisticated retailers could be a bit hit-and-miss, as card systems were not necessarily compatible with UK-issued cards; one could come across all manner of variations, such as PIN EPOS terminals before the UK had them, or 'swipe-and-sign'; and even if they seemed to work with your card, there would be a sometimes embarrassingly protracted wait whilst the system hand shook with the mainframe and interrogated other systems to establish whether your card had validity in that country or with that bank. This made overseas book-buying trips even more of an adventure. Then, UK card systems were updated to chip-and-PIN, and for a while, instead of being behind Continental systems, they were in advance of them, so there were still compatibility problems. Ah, the Good Old Days ...

Martin Morse Wooster's comments about his local

radio station seeming not to like much classical music written after 1900 reminds me that the BBC's classical station, Radio 3, used to have a similar policy (or so it was said) that boiled down, roughly, to 'No Bartok before Breakfast'.

And on that note, I declare myself fully up to speed with *SFC*! Since I discovered eFanzines and mastered the art of downloading (and, more importantly, printing off copies when I'm the last person left in the office!), I've become a bit more energised with fanzine fandom than I've been for a very long time. Hopefully, by the time you get around to *SFC* 93, I'll have a job where I can again set the printer running in the quiet of the late afternoon when everyone else has either gone home or has been tied up in meetings. Many thanks indeed for continuing to put *SFC* out into the world, and long may you continue!

(11 November 2016)

[*brg* Those who've followed Robert's letters so far will be pleased to know that he did get a job in November 2016.*]

***SFC* 93:**

Here's the story of how I got involved in fandom, rather than how I started reading SF.

Having read as much SF as my local library could supply, in 1975 I went away to college in Newcastle upon Tyne. Casting around for something to do in the evenings apart from coursework, I saw a reference in a local arts magazine to talk, to be given by Bob Shaw, entitled 'Science Fiction and the Glass Bushel'. This was organised by the North East Science Fiction Group, or 'NESFiG'. I'd read some of Bob's books, so I was interested in going along.

Little did I know that NESFiG was an offshoot of the infamous North-Eastern fan group, the Gannets, created to exploit some local arts event-funding dodge; or that Bob would be talking about his illustrious past in Northern Ireland fandom and his fanzine writing exploits. Once at the meeting, I mingled and was given fanzines (*Goblin's Grotto* by Ian Williams, and Rob Jackson's *Maya*:8).

I started attending Gannet pub meetings and also further NESFiG meetings, which usually involved visiting authors such as Chris Priest, Greg Benford, Robert Sheckley, or Tom Disch (and usually followed by a group excursion to a curry house). I organised the Newcastle Polytechnic SF Society, made contact with the Newcastle University SF Society, and generally tried to make fandom my Way Of Life. Being on student money, this wasn't easy, and there was a lot I missed out on.

(Interestingly, I found that one of the other students on my course had worked as a library assistant at home in Harrow when the branch librarian was one Malcolm Edwards, later to become SF Supremo at Gollancz and even later Managing Director at Orion, and quite a Big Wheel in UK publishing. Malcolm was invited to a NESFiG meeting once to talk about the trade, and in the curry house afterwards, this chap and Malcolm were having a good catch-up session on all the latest gossip from Harrow, when we became aware of a very heated discussion at the other end of the table. 'What's going



on down there?’ Malcolm asked, only to be told, ‘Oh, it’s all right, we’re just discussing who built the Ringworld’ among a babble of argumentative statements like ‘What about the dead bandersnatch in the swimming pool?’ ‘Well, what about the dead bandersnatch in the swimming pool?’

‘My’ SF Society, having access to Student Union resources, organised some film nights, some visiting authors of our own, and we ran an instant fanzine for our members called *Xeroxorex* (so named because we had a photocopier usage allowance that we took full advantage of). I put together one ‘traditional’ fanzine, the *Xeroxorex Holiday Special*, which (a) I had to actually sell, and (b) was fairly awful, but at least I got some kudos points from the Student Union staff for using an unloved Gestetner machine in the corner of the SU admin office.

I was also at that time attending fanzine-collating parties at Rob Jackson’s flat (which wasn’t all that far away from my digs) and occasionally getting invited to more fannish parties.

I’d tried to get us into the 1976 Eastercon, Mancon, but I did not receive a reply to the letter I sent, so none of us ever registered. However, I did find out about Faancon, a gathering for fannish fans, which was going to be held in Derby, near my home, in February 1977; and as I’d just changed digs, it was an ideal occasion to get home and get some stuff picked up. It also meant that I met fannish fans who’d just been names on a page at that stage, in particular Dave Langford, Ian Maule, Mike and Pat Meara, and others. I didn’t get to go to a proper convention — Skycon, the 1978 Eastercon held at the Heathrow Hotel — until I was actually working. Becoming acquainted with further Eastercons,

Novacons in Birmingham, the fannish Silicons in Newcastle, and the 1979 Worldcon in Brighton also helped. But I found that I didn’t have enough money coming in to get to all the conventions and all the parties I wanted to; and the fanzines I was receiving seemed mainly to concentrate on reporting back on the parties I wasn’t getting to. Eventually, I dropped out of responding to these zines, and in the fullness of time I dropped off their circulation lists.

Having gotten a little back into convention-going as time and funds permitted, I’ve found it normally now provides a good excuse to visit some faraway places with strange-sounding names, like Nottingham and (since I’ve moved to Leicester) Birmingham. This has some amusing side effects, such as Ian Watson having a conversation with me and my other half at a Novacon in the belief that we were neofans, just because he hadn’t seen us at the preceding few conventions.

And most of the fans of my generation communicate via Facebook these days. The future we used to have has turned out rather different.

In the meantime, I’ve done a lot of stuff which I wouldn’t really have thought of doing if I hadn’t been a fan — become a trade union activist and (later) national committee member, met interesting people both in, out, and sort of tangentially attached to fandom; and become a professionally published author, albeit in a totally unrelated field. All the way through this, my time in fandom gave me confidence and background information, which came in especially useful when I ended up on the union’s Editorial Board, or was working my way through the publication process and had to meet with my editor to discuss next steps and prospects. I count my time in fandom as being one of the formative experiences of my life, even though I went and did something else. And for that, I’m grateful.

(21 May 2017)

The job is going really well, thanks. I’ve finally found an employer who values experience over paper qualifications, and in particular likes my style of documentation (another advantage of a fannish background — a willingness to write about anything at the drop of a hat!). I thought the last job was a keeper, but the company’s venture capitalist owners had different ideas; but this company is still run by the founders, they’ve only ever grown the company organically, on the back of increased sales of their fairly unique (if niche) product, and that means that there are no shareholders or business partners who need to be kept happy before everything else. They also believe in keeping at the cutting edge of the technology (if only because our clients, who are all in the higher education sector, are also at the cutting edge, albeit because the IT industry gives them generous discounts to get the latest kit) and therefore funding employee training — yes, even for someone at my delicate time of life!

(22 May 2017)

Poetry, creativity, and the Moon: Skovron, Wood, and McGuire

On the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Moon Landing

20 July 1994

by Alex Skovron

The dark rises to meet us silently,
We meet the silence, we commemorate:
Silence is silver on this jubilee.

Darkness brought terror and tranquillity,
And the moon continued to wait.
The dark rises to meet us. Silently

We watched the windmills of infinity,
We saw the universe painted on a plate —
Silence is silver. On this jubilee

The world is still a broken pledge, and we
Circle our difficult planet — beyond our gate
The dark rises; to meet us, silently,

Has been its purpose since antiquity.
Forgive me if I do not celebrate:
Silence is silver on this jubilee.

We ride our little rock, relentlessly
The pebble dances on its string of fate.
The dark rises to meet us silently.
Silence is silver on this jubilee.

ALEX SKOVRON Caulfield North VIC 3161

Wonderful essay by Ray Sinclair-Wood in *SF Commentary* 92. 'Poems of the Space Race' made me think of how the Moon has inspired some of my own poetry, including a few poems touching on the *Apollo 11* event. So I couldn't resist sending you the attached villanelle. You won't find it in any of my books (or not, perhaps, until my *Collected Poems* is one day published), and its one appearance in print was in *Famous Reporter* (No. 14, December 1996). The poem was written in 1994 against the backdrop of what was happening in Rwanda and Bosnia, though I see its tone as philosophical rather than bitter.

By the way, Suzanne Falkiner (mentioned in Ray's essay in connection with Randolph Stow) was a colleague in Sydney in the late 1970s, when I was editing *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Australia* for Horwitz. About midway through the project I engaged Suzanne as editorial assistant. Her area of special interest was literature, and she proved a very capable researcher and editor. The next (and I think the last) time we crossed paths was at the NSW Premier's Awards dinner in Sydney in 1989.

(2 August 2016)

RAY WOOD PO Box 188, Quorn SA 5433

Thanks for *SFC* 92, and for publishing my article 'Poems of the Space Race'.

I have a query you may be able to help me with. I

scarcely watch any TV at all any more (and especially can't bear watching any TV programs illustrated with commercials), and am completely unfamiliar with any TV SF series that've been shown for many years now. Could you advise me of any truly excellent SF series that I might buy on DVD and watch?

[*brg* You ask the hard questions. I've watched very few SF series, either on free-to-air TV or on DVD/Blu-ray. Rather, I've watched some programs that have a science-fictiony gimmick at the heart of them, but are actually crime series. My favourite has been *Forever*, which lasted only one season, and the half-season I've watched so far of *Person of Interest*. I'll leave your question open for advice from people who watch SF TV series.*]

Just climbed The Dutchman's Stern on a bleak cold foggy day (sun and no clouds were forecast), and had to saw up a tree fallen across the path, and clear a heap of cassinia bushes so hikers wouldn't have to wade through a creek bed any more. I suppose it's good exercise for a now 80-year-old. (I plan to spend my 100th birthday on top of The Dutchman's Stern.)

On another recent climb up The Dutchman's Stern on what was supposed to be a clear and sunny day, half-way up I got rained and hailed on. No rain gear to protect me, of course, but I kept on going and getting wet, until forks of lightning began striking the bush around me, so I got off the mountain rapidly then. The hailstones were the weirdest I've ever seen. They were doughnut-shaped, with a small break in the doughnut

ring—every hailstone shaped like that.

The Dutchman's Stern gets its name from looking like the stern of an eighteenth-century Dutch East Indiaman sailing ship (they had no aftercastle : the stern past the mainmast rose up in a single curved line to a very high stern).

(27 July 2016)

I always like that you use genuine old-fashioned postage stamps. I collect them, not for myself but for our Town Library, which saves them for local collectors.

Your article, 'Revelations : My Life, Science Fiction, and Fanzines' fascinated me about the old ways of putting your fanzines into print. I didn't even know the word 'fanzine' or anything about the world of fanzines until getting on the Eidolist for a while, oh, maybe 10 years ago. But for almost my whole life I've been involved in producing such publications for a variety of causes.

When I was nine I was one of those children who put out neighbourhood newspapers. Mine I produced by using six sheets of carbon paper, so my entire print run was only seven copies. I had one of those toy printing sets, where you had a forme and rubber type you arranged in it, and an ink pad you inked it from. I did my headlines with it separately on each issue, but handwrote the articles pressing hard through those six carbons.

[*brg* Your early effort sounds like my first effort, at the age of 11, at primary school. My friend David and I did four copies, by using typed-on carbon paper. No copy still exists.*]

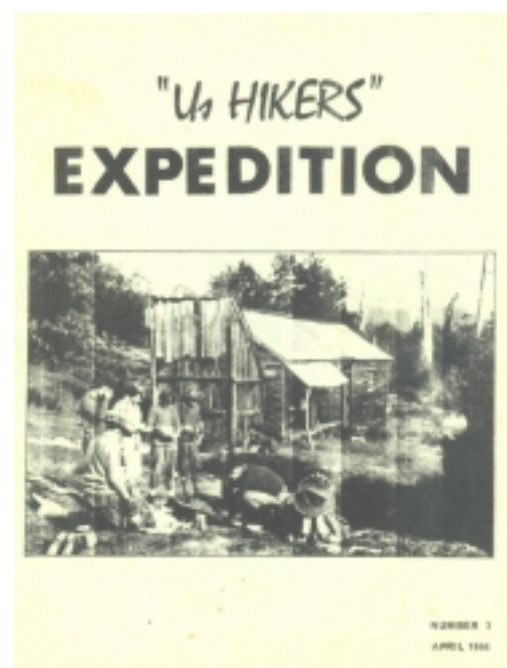
I put out newsletters/magazines of all sorts for all kinds of organisations over the years. I remember the early spirit copiers, followed by Gestetner and Roneo machines, then the early photocopiers, and then early computers.

I couldn't even begin to count the number of hours I've stood turning the handle of manual Gestetners, usually doing it on near-sleepless nights until times like 3 or 4 a.m., because my life was so busy. For example, for nearly six years I put one out weekly for every spring and summer for a big sports association.

But what I remember most is the Gestetner. I learned to do all kinds of fancy tricks on their wax stencils, and especially the stencils designed for drawing on them. And as I'm a hoarder, I still have the old Gestetner gadgets I used for drawing on those stencils. So I've scanned photos of some of them for your amusement — I presume you also in early years used such gadgetry.

In 1965 I even bought a long-carriage typewriter so I could insert Gestetner stencils in it side-on. I had the type switched too, to a Pica type, a little smaller than the usual typewriter type. It was a magnificent Remington that weighed about two tons. Cost me a fortune, too. Here in Quorn the local cricket club holds an annual auction to raise money, and about 10 years ago I rather sadly submitted that Remington for sale at it, since I hadn't used it for many years. It was bought by someone for the huge sum of \$2.

The top photo is of a soft zipped Gestetner bag of styli and a signature sheet for doing your signature on a wax





stencil. The second photo is of a few of the great heap of Gestetner shading and border plates that I still possess. You inserted one of these behind the wax sheet, and rubbed the sheet firmly with the curious curved right-hand stylus in the bag.

I often drew freehand artwork on wax stencils using gadgets like those. It was very easy to press just a fraction too hard, and tear the whole wax sheet.

You could also replicate photographs on stencils, and I've scanned a cover from a magazine I put out for many years called *Expedition* to show you such a photo. The magazine was devoted to bushwalking, cave-exploring, and rock-climbing.

[*brg* Noel Kerr was a Melbourne fan and printer who used to scan drawings and photos electronically onto special carbon stencils for most Melbourne people who were publishing fanzines during the 1960s and 1970s. I would cut up those stencils and paste the individual illustrations onto holes in the regular typewritten stencil. With any luck, the surgical work would hold while running off 300 pages or so.*]

What interests me most about the business of preparing stencils for such duplicators is that it represents one of those skills that you painfully acquired with an immense investment in time, but skills that are so utterly useless these days.

Another such skill that I spent half a lifetime acquiring just as painfully was the old chemical darkroom photography. You learned to perform amazingly complex darkroom processes that took many hours to go through, but that today take less than a second to click with your computer's mouse.

For example, to do a tone dropout, aka a high-contrast photo, I'd use Kodak Ortholithographic paper, and make a positive from the original negative onto it, then make a negative of that positive, then a second positive from that second negative, then a third positive and third negative — and you'd keep on going until all the intermediate tones were gone, and all that was left was pure black and white. Each step required you to process each negative and then each positive through the usual chemical baths. (See photo above.) Now I can do all of that with a few mouse clicks in a few seconds.

I was once a member of a group of enthusiasts that processed Ektachrome using all of 20 chemical baths.

There used to be a big Kodak building on North Terrace in Adelaide, where were experts in offices that you'd haunt to painfully acquire all kinds of arcane skills.

Before you could buy glossy papers for your photos you had to put the gloss on them yourself. I don't know how many times I visited their resident expert in my efforts to master *that* particular skill!

But come 1990 and digital photography, and all those skills became redundant. I did hastily sell my 5 inch by 4 inch View Camera, and the giant floor-standing Durst Laborator Enlarger that I used to print from its negatives when digital appeared. What a beautiful camera that was! Took me around 10 minutes to set it up to take a single photo with it. I had to carry all the equipment for it in a big H-Frame rucksack. But I still have bags full of six 35-mm cameras and all their prime lenses and filters and so forth. All that I no longer use.

How many other such skills have people acquired throughout their lives that have now vanished forever? My mind is crammed with such redundancies! And I suppose yours is too.

(19 December 2016)

Do you remember the brand of long-carriage typewriter you had? I still have my first typewriter, a rather hefty West German Olympia portable that I bought in the early 1950s. Works perfectly, too, but needs a new ribbon, and when I priced typewriter ribbons on the Net recently, I found they cost around \$100 nowadays. High price for nostalgia!

I did often put stencils in side-on. Chief reason was so I could prepare smaller booklets by typing two pages on the stencil and folding the papers afterwards. Is that what's called 'digest-size'? (Words are slipping out of my mind permanently with increasing speed as I get older.)

(20 December 2016)

PATRICK MCGUIRE
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SFC 92 arrived safely on Saturday 30 July. By now I have a considerable percentage of it read, but Real Life may slow me down in getting a loc written. On the other hand, in the past sometimes I have resorted to loccing as a refuge from Real Life, so we'll see how long it takes. But a loc will be along eventually.

On that same Saturday, in the evening there was a flash flood in the small historic district of Ellicott City, the next town north of here. (Since I live near the southern edge of Columbia, it's about 10 miles (16 km) north of me.) For some reason I heard nothing about it on Sunday (I did catch at least some news broadcasts, although fewer than normal), but it was all over both the Baltimore and the national news on Monday morning. Some of the national news made it sound as if the whole town had been flooded out. In actuality, while the first settlers had built along the Patapsco River because in those days (late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) water transport was important, the vast majority of the town is on much higher ground and was unaffected. Two people did get killed and several buildings had to be condemned, while many more were damaged. I was actually out in what must have been the southern edge of the downpour that caused the flooding, coming back

from Saturday evening mass, but I suffered no consequences beyond a few scary moments on the road with little visibility. (Had I waited until Sunday to go to mass, I doubtless would have learned sooner about the flood.) Since Ellicott City has been around much longer than Columbia, it has shown up in a few SF novels either written long ago or with historical settings in an alternate history.

(5 August 2016)

Various real-world hassles have slowed me down in getting anything done on this loc to *SFC 92*, but I decided at least to start on it today (23 September). I think that, as I did last loc, I had better just include up front a general expression of sympathy and well-wishing for all the loccers who mention serious health problems or other misfortunes. The greying of fandom strikes us all, and some of us much more than others.

I decided to delete from this loc a longish paragraph denouncing Donald Trump, since the election will be a dead issue by the time this loc sees print. It was obvious to me from the beginning that Trump suffered from character defects so massive as to make his purported policy positions irrelevant, and to make even Hillary Clinton the lesser evil of the two. (One of your regular loccers can attest that this has been my position since the primaries were in progress.) As a person of generally conservative views, I will not easily forgive either the Republican core electorate, who failed to see through Trump during the primaries, or the large proportion of the Republican establishment who supported him until a few weeks before the election. A significant number of prominent Republicans continue to support him as I write, which does no credit to their moral integrity or their insight into character, whichever is faulty.

My brain seems not to be wired for any great appreciation of poetry, but I do have a few words to say about the introductory portion of Ray Sinclair-Wood's 'Poems of the Space Race'. Ray correctly states that the US public, and indeed the world public, was shocked by the launch of *Sputnik*. For Ray's purpose, which is to lead into a discussion of space-themed poetry, the question of what the Eisenhower administration knew behind closed doors is irrelevant. However, the point is of general historical interest, and it may also suggest some sfnal alternate history scenarios in which the space race was damped down, or at least worked out very differently.

Since the late 1970s or so, it has been tolerably clear to historians that the Eisenhower administration had quite a bit of information about the Soviet program before the *Sputnik* launch. If a vague memory serves, I first became aware of this from Bainbridge's *The Spaceflight Revolution*, but I have more recently seen the same points made in, for instance, biographies of Eisenhower and TV documentaries about the early space race. The problem of Eisenhower and advisers was that they utterly failed to foresee the propaganda effect on the public of a Soviet artificial satellite. They perceived merely a slight and temporary lead by the Soviets in heavy launch capability, more than counterbalanced by the US lead in strategic bombers. The Army group that included von Braun would have been capable of launching a satellite earlier than it in fact did (with *Explorer 1*), but it was

forbidden to try in favour of the *Vanguard* all-civilian project. If Eisenhower had intuited what the reaction to *Sputnik* would be (and had known that *Vanguard* would be a spectacular failure), he could have authorised *Explorer* earlier. Moreover, even without revealing intelligence sources, Eisenhower could have dropped hints to modify public expectations, hints such as how it would be a mistake to underestimate the Soviets, and how their system allowed them to concentrate resources to realise narrowly specified objectives even given the overall weakness of their command economy. This might have permitted a more measured development of the US manned space program, as opposed to the expensive stunt of the Moon program undertaken by the Kennedy administration to recover US national prestige. Instead, the program could have started with a manned space station, the way that God, Robert A. Heinlein, and Arthur C. Clarke had intended. Probably the Soviets would have matched the space station, and a decade or two later than happened on our timeline the two superpowers might have gotten into a Moon race, but it probably would have cost less as a percentage of GNP than did the real one, and it might have led to more lasting results in space exploration. Of course, as always, who knows what really would have happened? One can also imagine that if less had been spent on the space race, more might have been spent on weapons, with even more danger than in the real world of World War III.

Next, I am surprised and a bit perplexed by Ray's statement, 'In a single day *Sputnik* made SF respectable, because we were now living in what up until then had been a science-fictional world.' In histories of Anglophone SF, this change is near-universally attributed to the atomic bomb in 1945, not to *Sputnik* in 1957. In fact, as I understand it, *Sputnik* and the whole space race did much less for SF sales than the publisher-optimists of the time had hoped. Instead, the surge came in popular science and, oddly enough, in reforming the American primary and secondary school curriculum — to the benefit of people of my generation, although the good effects of the reform wore off in the schools over the next few decades. (Heinlein satirises American high-school education in *Have Spacesuit, Will Travel*, published just after *Sputnik* but before the curriculum reforms had had time to take effect. The sorry picture he paints of the curriculum bears almost no resemblance to what my own fairly typical Midwestern suburban high school was like in the mid 1960s.)

Soviet SF, on the other hand, showed a drastic upsurge after *Sputnik*, probably because the first satellite was homegrown, unlike the first atomic bomb, and because the launch happened at the time when Soviet publishing had started to recover from the effects of Stalinism. (In the early 1930s, Stalinism had come close to wiping out Soviet SF. It took several years to get properly going again even after Stalin's death in 1953.)

This loc is proceeding so slowly that I am now back from Capclave (held 7–9 October 2016). As usual, it was an enjoyable small con concentrating mostly on written SF/F, with heavy participation from relatively local authors, plus a few from farther afield, such as GoH Tim Powers. I think I may have seen Powers at a previous con, probably a Worldcon, but I certainly got more exposure

to him here than ever before. He makes a very good panel participant (and interview subject). It became clear that I really should reread him, since it turned out that I barely remembered those works of his that I had read. Then there are all the ones I have never yet tried. At, I think, his GoH interview, Powers mentioned the 1832 death in a duel of the brilliant young mathematician Evariste Galois as the sort of thing he could build a secret history around. Afterward I informed him that there was already a Soviet SF story dealing with this topic, although in a very different way from what Powers would have done. On looking it up, I find that there is even an English translation: Andrei Balabukha, 'Appendix,' in *World's Spring*, ed. Vladimir Gakov (Macmillan/Collier Macmillan, 1981). The original was published in 1968. Alas, what I do remember of the Powers works that I have read is largely the obvious-to-me historical errors in some of his novels. This is in a sense unfair, since the erroneous bits represent only a small percentage of the historical details in the works, almost all of which look right, but a glaring enough error (such as portraying St Isaac's on Red Square as a functioning Orthodox church under Stalin rather than as the museum it has been since 1920-something) can throw me out of an entire novel.

When packing for the con, I hauled out a piece of luggage I had not used since the last Capclave and discovered that I had never unpacked from it the last clean shirt. After a year, it came out very wrinkled, but I ran it through the drier along with a load of wet laundry and that refreshed it. I believe I mentioned in a previous loc that months after the con I had found my missing portable alarm clock in a different piece that I had believed to be completely unpacked. As I write, I have not finished unpacking from the just finished Capclave, but I am trying to be very careful that this time nothing remains in the luggage except a few items that I use only on trips and deliberately leave in the bags.

One panel discussion (with audience input) at Capclave included the question of how does an author make a character who has annoying features nonetheless sympathetic to the reader. I didn't get called on when I raised my hand. My suggestion would have been to study how Prince Andrey and Pierre Bezukhov had been treated in the recent BBC miniseries (written by Andrew Davies and directed by Tom Harper) and to compare that with the much better job that Tolstoy had done in the first place (and whose lead had been followed by at least some of the previous screen adaptations). One could thus identify what Tolstoy had done right. I had belatedly viewed the miniseries on DVD just before the con. As is so often true of British television, the makers had been desperate to make everything edgy. In the process they had pretty much killed my sympathy for the two leading male characters, despite remaining largely faithful to the original plot. I think part of the problem was that they show what Andrey and Pierre have done and are doing, but not how their actions look from inside their heads. I am tempted to elaborate, but to shed substantial light on the topic I would really have to re-read the novel and (since one cannot portray thoughts in the same way on the screen as on the page) to re-view some of the previous more satisfactory screen treatments. Favorable reviews had prompted me to seek out the Davies/Harper minis-

eries. I was disappointed that it did not seem to me to have deserved the praise it received. On the other hand, it was engaging enough that I kept watching to the end.

Before turning to the lettercol, I will pause to keep my string going: in this loc too I will throw in a few language-related comments. The *War and Peace* miniseries did preserve one tidbit from the novel, namely that the way one challenged a person to a duel in the early 1800s in Russia was to say baldly, 'I challenge you!' At least according to a great number of historical novels, in England one said something much more subtle, along the lines of, 'Sir, name your friends!' (Meaning your seconds, who will settle the time and place for the duel.) Since the Russian for 'to challenge' literally means 'to call out,' this unadorned approach ends up reminding me of a wild-West invitation to a showdown: 'Tex, I'm a-callin' you out!'

There are a number of instances where we now call something by a name that implies a fairly modern invention and where the term has replaced the name in use before that invention existed. The most familiar might be 'counterclockwise' (or Britspeak 'anticlockwise'), which, as fantasy readers know, before clocks used to be 'widdershins'. Others such terms are 'paper airplane', which before airplanes were called 'paper darts', and the children's game 'telephone', where an oral message is conveyed around a circle until it comes back amusingly distorted. The game, as I discovered relatively recently, before telephones was called 'Russian whispers' or 'Chinese whispers'. If memory serves, I found 'paper dart' in an Anthony Trollope novel from about the 1860s. Very recently, I saw then same term in a novel published in 2013 but set in 1953, Jill Paton Walsh's *The Late Scholar*. As a young child, I was folding paper airplanes by the mid 1950s, and I don't recall ever hearing them termed anything but paper airplanes. Perhaps the older term survived longer in Britain than the US. For all I know, perhaps 'paper dart' survives in some parts of the world to this day.

Colour words are also interesting. Seemingly, no one needed a word for the colour 'orange' before oranges showed up on the European market. I suppose it was just 'yellowish red'. Newton evidently hauled out the word 'indigo', mostly because he wanted seven colours for the spectrum to parallel the seven notes of a musical scale (before the 'do' note repeats an octave higher). Everyday Russian already had separate words for light blue and dark blue, so they used both when naming the spectrum, without needing to resort to obscure imported dyes. (The Russian word for dark blue has the same Indo-European etymology as 'cyan'. The word for light blue, oddly enough, means 'pigeon-coloured', but by now it has become as basic a colour as orange has in both Russian and English.) Having two basic words for 'blue' seemed odd to me, until eventually I realised that English has separate words for light red (which we call 'pink') and dark red. 'Pink' started out as, and remains, the name of a flower. At some point it became an everyday colour-word, not something reserved for special contexts, like 'teal' or 'beige'. The word 'brown' derives from the animal 'bear' (cf 'bruin'). Bears have been around for a long time. However, in Spanish, what is probably the most common word for 'brown' means 'coffee-col-

oured', and the Russian word, 'cinnamon-coloured'. Very peculiar.

And so to the lettercol. Steve Stiles was at Capclave, where I was able to congratulate him in person for his Hugo win. (If Steve, who has no reason to recognise me, reads this, I was the guy in the con suite sitting with Martin Wooster who congratulated him immediately after Martin did.) I hope the win consoled Steve for the *SFC* cover snafu.

Like Mark Plummer (and like you, Bruce), I read a fair amount of mystery fiction, in my case usually in fits and starts. None of my recent reading overlapped Mark's list of authors, although I have read a good chunk of Ruth Rendell's work in the past. Mark, of course, refers to the genre by the modern British term 'crime fiction' rather than the American 'mystery fiction'. As far as I can tell, this terminology split is a residuum of a movement of the early 1950s to broaden the genre. This included, for instance, explicitly recognising that the genre covers belletristic psychological studies of crime and criminals, even when there is no mystery about who committed the crime. In some ways, this terminology split seems comparable to the way some people consistently refer to 'speculative fiction' rather than science fiction, and attempt to combine science fiction, fantasy, slipstream, and who knows what else into one big supergenre. As is well known, I question the utility, at least for most purposes, of this expansionism. Even within 'crime fiction', pretty well-defined subgenres have emerged, as readers react against the attempt to expand boundaries beyond utility. Similarly, I use subgenre at least as a guideline for what I read in science fiction and its near neighbours. Not that I won't read outside of my favoured subgenres if I have been convinced that a given work merits it. I almost surprise myself when I reflect on how much fantasy and science fantasy I end up reading, considering my often-stated preference for straight science fiction.

Mark mentions the small pool of Scandinavian actors. I used to notice the analogous thing in Soviet movies, although there I think it was an artifact of the studio system rather than of the Soviet actor pool at large. Most of the films worth watching were from the major studios such as Mosfilm and Lenfilm, and each of them seemed to have a small actor stable, so that the same people showed up in movie after movie. I have noticed less of that in post-Soviet Russian-language films (now including some worthwhile films made outside the Russian Federation). I imagine things are more fluid, but alternatively I may simply have watched fewer such films.

Randy Byers: Unlike, I suppose, most of my generation, including many *SFC* loccers, I never got very heavily into rock music. On the classical front, I remember, as a teenager in the 1960s, taking one or more Richard Strauss LPs of his tone poems out from my town's small public library as part of my explorations in classical music, and listening to Strauss over and over. I believe I liked him better then than I do now. While I currently don't actually dislike Strauss, my preferences seem to have moved backward in time. Handel and Haydn are my go-to guys, although I do try less famous composers periodically, and am listening to a Hoffmeister CD as I write this. I never did develop a taste for opera, and Saturday afternoon (opera time on both of the broadcast

classical radio stations I can receive) drives me to CDs for my background music.

Hugo nominations: It took me three tries to get through *The Three-Body Problem*, but in the end I sort of liked it. I took the first sequel out of the library once, but did not get very far, partly because I had competing things to read and to do at the time. I really should have another go at some point. I did not enjoy *Ancillary Justice* enough to read its sequels, although I liked the Banks call-out by Leckie when I saw it in Randy's loc.

Early Cherryh works: It's really not that unusual for a writer's work early in their career to be more original than what follows. (It is often also grimmer.) Writers today do indeed continue to contrive to get their less market-orientated work published, although nowadays they may have to resort to pseudonyms (H. N. Turteltaub), small presses, or self-publishing to do it. I think the proportion of such work in each author's output is partly a question of how much an economic hit a given writer is willing or able to accept, since such works usually sell less well. Randy contends that often the protagonists of Norton, Cherryh, and Leckie survive in part by 'turning into aliens themselves'. I know that is true of Cherryh; I would have to think more about Norton and Leckie. But assuming it is true, and if it is more generally a disproportionate trend among women writers, it might have to do with the fact that young women often face the prospect of marrying and moving far from home, into a culture alien to some degree and sometimes extremely so, such as when a girl marries and moves overseas. As an extreme example, I remember a documentary that dealt in part with a young American woman who had married a Japanese man in college and moved back with him to a traditional Japanese family farm. It was a very different way of life, and she said she did not think she could have coped with the transition if she had not been so young at the time. I believe biology or cultural conditioning has predisposed American males to look less favourably upon this degree of adaptability when applied to males. Sometimes I have trouble sympathising with Cherryh male protagonists who have completely 'gone native'. Also related might be all the SF romances, both the traditionally published ones and even more so the self-published ebooks, about Earth women who marry offworld humans, or (commonly and implausibly enough, alas) very humanoid aliens, and move off to their husbands' homeworlds. Even Bujold's Cordelia Vorkosigan fits here to some extent, although she does not go completely native, and instead helps to alter Barrayan culture. (And she is from Beta Colony, not Earth itself.)

Bruce regrets not being able to get *Ancillary Justice* from the Melbourne SF Club library. I don't believe I have ever heard him mention the public library. Is it inadequate or had to get to without a car? (The Internet tells me that there is some sort of library branch in Bruce's postal code.)

Murray Moore tells Bruce that he can safely ignore Dave Freer because Freer is published by Baen. As I think my loc had made clear, the Dave Freer work (a clerical mystery) that I discussed was not issued by Baen, but rather self-published by the author. (And I did say that I liked the mystery more than I generally do Freer's SF/F.)

Nor do I think that, in any case, Baen's line of offerings is so narrow that one could with reason automatically turn up one's nose at everything it issues. On the other hand, Baen is certainly not known for publishing 'literary' SF, which seems to be the sort that, at least lately, Bruce most enjoys. On the third hand, in his response to Douglas Barbour's loc, Bruce commends himself to me by having bailed out of Kim Stanley Robinson's *2312* and *Aurora*, so even Bruce's tastes are not as predictable as all that. I finished *2312* only because I was reading it for my local SF book club, and I skimmed *Aurora* rather than bailing out entirely only because of the discussion in SF circles as to how plausible a case Robinson had made for the impossibility of generation starships and perhaps interstellar travel in general. (Later: I now gather that Freer has, online, picked some dubious associates and gotten into unwise feuds. But there is no close correlation between admirable personality and literary worth.)

As best I recall, I have not already expounded to *SFC* my theory that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for an author with a graduate degree in English (such as Robinson) to write a decent science-fiction novel. The English-department MA or PhD holder has been conditioned to value aspects of writing that are of secondary importance in SF, and to downplay or disregard aspects that are important to SF. (To some extent, it may be a question of self-selection for compatibility with the English lit curriculum rather than conditioning.) My built-in exceptions to this rule are (1) writers who picked up such a degree after having established themselves as SF writers, such as Jack Williamson and James Gunn, and (2) writers whose English degree is in medieval literature, a corpus more in sympathy with sfinal values. The only specific author in category (2) that I can think of at the moment is Charles Gannon, but several insightful SF scholars and editors with medieval-lit degrees would qualify as having a genuine sympathy with traditional SF, including the late David Hartwell. I suspect there also exist a small number of individual ad-hoc exceptions. As best I recall, even a few of Robinson's own earlier novels struck me favourably. (This proposed rule holds only for science fiction, not also for fantasy.)

Like Steve Jeffery, I saw the first two *Hunger Games* films and then bailed out. I liked the first one a great deal (apart from a little hand-waving, it was SF rather than fantasy, and it was plot driven rather than being pure spectacle), but I enjoyed the second one less (partly because the newly revealed details of the portrayed world seemed less plausible). Moreover, I knew from the novels that the series had strong downer elements in its ending, so at that point I stopped with the films. I liked the first *Divergent* novel, but I thought the novel series went rapidly downhill after that. I did watch the first *Divergent* film. The novel conveys a strong sense of place. Although the film is still nominally set in Chicago, we don't see much sense of place preserved.

When I reread it after a lapse of time, my own loc in *SFC* 92 struck me as too unremittingly negative. I hope I have done at least slightly better this time around. I do congratulate myself on one sentence in my published loc, written in the context of Bujold's work: 'If publishers do not add value to books, among other things by catch-

ing continuity errors, then authors, especially ones who already possess an established readership, might as well just self-publish and retain more of the proceeds for themselves.' Since I wrote that, Bujold has self-published as ebooks two fantasy novelettes or novellas, 'Penric's Demon' and 'Penric and the Shaman'. I had been discussing the Vorkosigan books, so it is true that the self-publishing could not be taken as a move by Bujold against Baen, who had not been her fantasy publisher. Despite being published at a per-word cost comparable to that of the ebook versions of new hardcover books, the Penric stories seem to be selling well. 'Demon' also appeared as an audiobook from Audible. I keep hoping the second will as well (so I can borrow the CD from the library), since I am almost never willing to pay hardcover prices for fiction. But Bujold has many fans to whom price is no object. I would not be surprised if the author writes one or two more Penric stories and then places them all with a traditional publisher as a single fix-up novel, but I could have a long wait for that.

In my loc, I also mentioned Randall Garrett's story 'A Spaceship Named McGuire'. After far longer than it should have taken me, it finally sank in that the title was a play on *A Streetcar Named Desire*. That seems to have been no more than a stray bit of humour, since I can see no parallels with *Streetcar* within the story.

Jeff Hamill approvingly quotes Hari Kunzru on the 'Anglo-Saxon Potters and Weasleys' versus the 'effete Norman-French Malfoys and Voldemorts'. Although my own loc speaks favourably of the Kunzru introduction, Kunzru falls pretty wide of the mark here, as even my own incomplete reading of Potter books makes clear. Rowling depicts the Weasleys (red hair, large family) as somewhat stereotypical ethnic Irish, and thus Celts rather than Anglo-Saxons. (Except in the Continental sense where 'Anglo-Saxon' means 'Anglophone', under which Britons of 'Norman-French' ancestry also qualify.) The Weasleys even root for Ireland over England in a magical competition in one book. True, the family live in the UK and are British citizens (Mister Weasley works for the UK Ministry of Magic), but their ancestors likely came over in the mid nineteenth century at the earliest, whereas the 'Norman French' have been in England since 1066.

Jeff mentions the two Russian *Inhabited Island* films. I have seen them, although it was soon after they came out, and hence a while ago. I was not particularly impressed by the production values, and I thought the actor playing Maxim was hideously miscast. The two-parter was, however, reasonably faithful to the novel, and I remember being struck at how easily what in the original had been a veiled denunciation of Soviet totalitarianism now translated into a veiled denunciation of Putin's ever-growing authoritarianism. The films did pretty well at the box office in Russia, but have not attracted much attention abroad. I wonder if such a film could be made today. Putin so far seems to be leaving pretty much alone books, liberal newspapers, and the Moscow Echo radio station (although the latter includes many pro-Putin commentators as well as the more liberal ones). However, he has clamped down heavily on television as the medium with the most impact on the masses, and I think also on cinema. He has also been squeezing the Internet,

but so far has not erected in cyberspace a Great Wall like China's.

I hope Lloyd Penney arrived at a settlement for his firing, and that he is now working again. As to shortwave, now that I have gotten used to downloading podcasts via the library's broadband, I am not sure I would go back to shortwave listening even if useful programs like Radio Canada's went back on the air.

I too remember reading Jack Wodhams' stories in *Analog*. It's good to hear from him again, although less good to learn of his illness. I just looked up his year of birth. He's had a long run of it so far. If, as seems likely for the First World, the home where Jack is now living has some sort of Internet connection (and perhaps even Internet-linked computers available to all residents?), I don't think he would find it hard to transition from a stand-alone computer to handling email on the Internet. Even basic Web browsing is fairly simple. There are lots of complications beyond that point, but Jack need not get into them. The Internet might broaden access to the world now that his mobility is restricted. When I first got onto the Internet, I was much younger than Jack, but already in my fifties; it's not entirely a game for the young.

Bruce says he has never been to Perth or Tasmania. Well, I have managed Tasmania! (during my 1999 trip to the Worldcon). On the other hand, I've never been to Perth or, unlike Bruce, even Canberra, and I suspect Bruce has spent more time in California than I have. Perth was pretty far from anything else, and I deliberately neglected Sydney and Canberra during my Australian travels because I thought my best chance of someday getting a business trip to Australia would be to one or the other of those two cities (whereupon I could extend my stay by taking vacation time). Alas, shortly after my return from the Worldcon the bottom pretty well fell out of my office's travel budget. Now that I'm retired, maybe one of these years I'll visit on my own dime, although I don't seem to feel as much wanderlust as I did when younger.

Milt Stevens and the declining representation of written SF at conventions: as I noted above, Capclave in the Washington, DC suburbs is devoted primarily to written SF/F, although it does have some other activities going on. The other local convention, Balticon, is more multitasked, and also much larger, but it is easy there to spend the entire con on programming related to written SF/F. (I didn't attend Balticon this year, since it moved to downtown Baltimore, probably more conveniently for out-of-towners arriving by train or plane, but less so for people from the local suburbs, who would have few alternatives to driving in and paying exorbitantly for city-center parking.) Despite the fairly satisfactory local situation, I do seem to notice a much larger media

component in con fliers for conventions held on the US East Coast outside of the large metro areas. The organisers seem to think they need that extra media draw (or they are basically media people anyhow, to whom written SF is the add-on).

(28 October 2016)

I hope your New Year's went well. In my childhood, fireworks for New Year's were not a thing, at least in the North. (The climate may have been a factor, although Moscow had official New Year's fireworks the year I spent in the USSR back when. The launch point was within walking distance of where I was living, and the next day it looked odd to see spent firework rocket remains lying on the snow.) I recall my mother mentioning fireworks at Christmas the year she spent in Florida as a child in the late 1920s, and it later occurred to me that she might have been misremembering New Year's as Christmas. I never ran into December-January fireworks, as far as I recall, after my parents retired to Florida, but they lived in a place mostly inhabited by retirees from the North, and some even from Canada. But from somewhere a minority of people around here (Maryland is historically the upper South, but is now considered 'Mid-Atlantic' for most purposes) have picked up the fireworks habit, and we too have the bangs in the night. (I believe I saw that there were official fireworks in downtown Baltimore, too.)

I don't know if you are familiar with Willis Conover. He was about the first story of a fan making good in the mundane world. He had been a Lovecraft correspondent and fanzine editor who later (starting in the 1950s) hosted a jazz program on the Voice of America that was enormously popular behind the Iron Curtain. (VOA did not broadcast to the US, so he was much less famous at home, but every so often there were news stories about his fame abroad, and Harry Warner mentioned his fan-nish past in *All Our Yesterdays*.) Anyway, there is a broadcast subchannel whose specialty is old game shows. When channel-flipping a couple of days ago, I came upon an episode in progress of *I've Got a Secret*, a popular prime-time B&W game show from days of yore (this episode probably from the 1950s, possibly the early '60s). From the questions being asked, I concluded that the fellow with the secret had to be Conover, and sure enough it was. That was, as far as I recall, the first time I had seen him on TV. I looked him up the Wikipedia, and he died in a D. suburb in 1996. Thus he overlapped with my time in this area for a fairly long period (which I had not realised). I believe he must have given up SF fandom by then, since I never saw mention of him at a local con.

(3 January 2017)

Fanzine dipped in a bathtub

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Many thank for the copy of *SFC* 92, which arrived here a

couple of days ago. So far I haven't had a chance to do much apart from the obligatory a quick ego-scan (at first I wondered if I had omitted to loc the last issue as I didn't see anything by me in 'A Garland of Letters ...' and then realised I had been promoted again), looking at photos of cute kittens and delving into the letters columns. Remiss, I know, but I plead the excuse of a rare family get together, or as much of the extended family (now spanning four generations with my great nephew Loki) as could be hastily assembled in one place on the dubious promise of burnt and half-cooked meat for a Saturday barbecue. (My notion of a barbecue was overturned in Texas, where a whole haunch of meat was cooked and smoked over mesquite for most of the day in something the size of Thomas the Tank Engine's boiler, rather than half a dozen sausages and burgers being idly turned on a small grill.)

However, for those not enamoured of charred sausage, there was chilli, some nice cheese, grapes melon, and a nice and aptly named bowl of Eton mess — when the latter could be pried away from Loki in his hunt to steal all the pieces of marshmallow.

I look forward to sitting down properly to read Michael Bishop's essay on Shepard's *Dragon Griaule* stories, as I have developed an alarming tendency to nod off and drop whatever I'm reading on the bus journey home from work.

I'm wincing at a now-glaring typo of misattribution in my own loc when discussing *Black Death*. Tim McInnery, not Tim Illingworth, played Hod, the leader of the pagan village. Or maybe I was thinking of the Ian Sorenson Eastercon remake. Oops.

(1 August 2016)

I like Ditmar's back cover illustration, which is quite a strange effect, as I can't quite make out what that island/garden is supposed to be, but the reflections of that and the ship in the water are impressive and must have given the CPU a bit of a work out when generating this image.

I just found the Fantasy Masterworks edition of Lucius Shepard's *Dragon Griaule* stories on Amazon, so have added them to the wish list, along with Jo Walton's *What Makes This Book So Great*.

I'm in total agreement with Randy over Mark Plummer's fanwriting and locs, which can often veer between painstakingly detailed research into obscure hidden corners of fannish (or music) trivia and wildly surreal flights of fancy.

I have a few more Frank Zappa albums CDs than you do, but they barely skim FZ's collected output. *Hot Rats* and *Apostrophe* are old favourites, though I probably need to pull *Zoot Allures* and *You Are What You Is* from the shelves for a few more listens. I also have a CD of Zappa's extended guitar solos, though I've never quite understood how someone who can spend five or ten minutes nagging at the same phrase can dismiss jazz as 'just noodling about' when to me he appears to be doing the same thing — not so much noodling aimlessly, but, rather like Coltrane, attempting to get a particular phrase in his head out through his fingers. Then again, you never quite know how much to take someone who veers between the intimidatingly eclectic and outra-

geously scatological and silly at the drop of an F#m7 at face value.

Speaking of Mark, he remarks that it's quite a while since we saw each other in person. It's been years since Vikki and I went to a proper convention, or any sort of fannish gathering apart from our local monthly pubmeet in fact. I seems to have been dropped off the invitation list for the Clarke Award for previous judges — perhaps understandably so, or there would be room on the list for anyone else, including the nominees. I think we gave up on Eastercon about the time it started featuring bondage workshops and tea parties for teddy bears and we realised that fandom had gone somewhere we didn't really want to follow or have any interest in. We migrated to the NewCons until Northampton council bulldozed the Fish Market venue a few years ago and turned it into a shiny new bus station. (Vikki showed my a picture of it the other day. It looks very smart and pretty, but it's not somewhere you would want to hold an SF convention, convenient as it might be for travel.)

How come I missed Liz Hand's *Wylding Hall*? From Mark's description, this would appear to tick all the right boxes for a 70s folk rock and ghost story addict like me. And there's a new Cas Neary novel sometime this year (*Hard Light*)? I was impressed by both *Generation Loss* and *Available Dark*, so this is one to look forward to.

(2 August 2016)

Just found your new email address inside the front cover of *SFC 92*, so hopefully this will reach you, although I suspect my previous emails were sent to your pacific.net email.

That's a very even-handed review essay of Lucius Shepard's *Dragon Griaule* stories by Michael Bishop. I've only read the first two of these stories, with 'The Scalehunter's Beautiful Daughter' in Shepard's collection *The Ends of the Earth*. I appear to have two editions of the latter, from Arkham House (1991) and a UK edition from Millennium (1994). I wasn't even aware of the final novel, *Beautiful Blood*, until I read this review.

Some of the same glories and faults of Shepard's writing that Bishop describes are also evident in his vampire novel *The Golden*, which I remember chiefly for a stunning passage describing a vampire's sheer horror at being caught outside exposed to sunlight, in which everything we humans take delight in is turned on its head to become horrific, threatening, and deadly. I really ought to read this again.

Shepard's wartime ghost story 'Delta Sly Honey' has turned up as a radio play a couple of times on BBC Radio 4 and 4 Extra.

More bad news.

The latest *Ansible* (August 2016) brings the sad news that Joyce Katz had died. It's become rather depressing reading *Ansible's* obituary column each month. Sympathies and best wishes to Arnie and the rest of the Vegrants.

That's an interesting observation in Gerald Murnane's letter about world building, though I do wonder if the idea of it being a male preserve is true any more, if it even was in pre-internet times, with social media apparently brimming with sites which positively encourage and reinforce this sort of fantasy secondary world

building, from *Second Life* to *Minecraft*. (I'm guessing here, as I've never even opened the box for *Civilization*, or played any computer game more complicated than *Solitaire* or (briefly) *Lemmings*, never mind anything hosted online.) I was about to respond with a comment about the Brontës and Gondal, but Gerald beat me to it in the very next paragraph.

I can't quite make up my mind where Gerald's closing supposition that these alternate worlds are not so much invented but already exist somewhere out there waiting to be discovered (and that an online connection to a site like *Second Life* is thus a portal to a real alternative world) belongs more properly to the world of science fiction or of horror. It's a bit reminiscent of Padgett's 'Mimsy Were the Borogoves'.

Murray (Moore), yes, you probably did err on not picking up that copy of Lem's *A Perfect Vacuum* for \$10, assuming it was in reasonable nick.

A quick Google search at this point took me to 'The Borges Memorial Non-Lending Library of Imaginary Books' by Seth Gannon in the March 2016 *Paris Review* and *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* by Lydia Goehr (Oxford University Press, 1994) and probably explains just why it takes me most of a day to write a fanzine loc.

I have the same problem as Mark Plummer and Douglas Barbour in reading and listening to music at the same time. Interestingly, I can nearly always mentally tune out the telly, but I can be seriously distracted by music (even instrumental music) and the radio. It also works both ways — I can lose concentration on something I want to listen to if I get distracted by a magazine or newspaper article. I'm beginning to suspect there is only one route shared by all my external senses to my brain and that competing sense organs have to fight for it.

PS: you'll have noticed that my family (my niece mainly) have finally persuaded me to join to twenty-first century and start a Facebook account. I was getting seriously out of touch. At this rate I might even get a mobile phone before the end of the 2020s. We'll see.

(8 August 2016)

What I wanted to do was first to apologise because I couldn't find a note that I had previously acknowledged or thanked you for *SFC* 93 (unless I did it via Facebook) or responded.

You're not being singled out here. I have outstanding responses stacked up for Taral, John Purcell's *Askew*, Rob Lichtman's *Trap Door*, and others.

I initially put off responding immediately to *SFC* because there were two or three titles in Colin Steele's reviews listing in this issue that overlapped with the pile of books I wanted to read after Christmas and I didn't want to open myself to any spoilers.

And then the needle on the work-life balance swung right over into the red on my return to work at beginning of the year, and a combination of long hours, tiredness, and stress during the first half of January gifted me with a bout of what appears to be sinusitis over the last two weeks, with a sore and tender lump on to the right side of my nose, the production of prodigious daily quantities

of mucus (yuk) and the feeling that my teeth are packed too tightly together and ache constantly. Not a happy place.

And then I dropped *SFC* in the bath. Well only a bit. And apart from a tiny bit of wrinkling on the upper left hand corner you wouldn't really notice. Unfortunately the copy of *Triptich*, a book-length critical study of the Manic Street Preachers' *The Holy Bible* that I found in a charity shop at the start of the year, didn't escape so lightly when I nodded off while reading it in the bath. It's a shame; it was quite a nice-looking book, and after spending the best part of a week sitting on the living-room radiator, the first 90 pages have a definite 'corrugated' feel to them.

I did enjoy the two pieces by you and James Allen on life, SF, and fanzines, and especially your history of the development of formative Australian SF fanzines, such as *ASFR*, that influenced and inspired *SFC*. Yes, that inaugural cover for *SFC* 1 isn't likely to trouble the Ditmars, but I suspect I've got one or two other fanzines in my collection that could compete with it. You're very limited with what you can do with a stylus and wax stencil unless you happen to be Atom. I've only tried this once (I can't remember who it was for — possibly John Berry) but the results weren't impressive.

I had the opportunity to spend an afternoon in the Philadelphia Museum of Art when I was working there (Philadelphia, not the museum) and remember spending a long time standing in from of Marcel Duchamp's glass-cased *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Batchelors, Even*.

Dick Jenssen's impressive cover to *SFC* 93 is a neat companion to John Litchen's long and fascinating article on Mars in this issue. Very long, and at 22 pages perhaps a bit too long to read in one sitting. Having said that (and to defend myself from offstage cries of 'pussy-foot' and 'wimp') I should point out what time I have for fanzine reading is largely limited to the bus journey to and from work (during which I seem to have developed a worrying tendency to fall asleep at the end of the day), or the bath (ditto) or the half hour in bed before turning out the light and settling down to sleep. (And then waking in the early to find the radio is still on and broadcasting something weird on the World Service at 2 a.m.: I really out to check out the BBC's World Service podcast site more often.)

Anyway, once the first Prophecy deadline of the year was out the way, I had an opportunity to settle down with *SFC* and have an uninterrupted run at John's article. I was almost at the end of this and thinking 'but he still hasn't mentioned Baxter, Bear, or any of Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars books' when I noticed the footnote at the end that said 'Part 2 of this article will follow in *SFC* 94 or 95'.

By the way, is there a formatting or printing glitch in the last line of column one on page 26 for the sentence that starts 'with *A Princess of Mars* (), were published'?

It's curious that Clarke, in *The Sands of Mars*, envisioned digitised books and music but doesn't extend this level of technology to his writer character Gibson, who still has to lug a manual typewriter around and rely on faxing hard copy for transmission. Perhaps Clarke thought that it would need huge and powerful computers only available back on Earth to carry out the digitizing

and encoding into electronic format, but surely it would need just as much computing power to play them back. Curious. It's equally curious how sf writers completely overestimate the level of future development in some areas (energy, transport) and completely underestimate that of others (computing and information storage).

I'm currently reading John Baxter's *Science Fiction in the Cinema* (1970, third reprinting 1979), which I cherry picked out of a bag of books donated for inclusion in the

monthly s/h book sale at our local church hall. Good fun, and a neat companion to some of the old black-and-white SF B-movies that the Quest channel is currently showing on weekends as an alternative to ITV4's almost constant rotation of Peter Jackson's three Hobbit films since the start of the year. Once was more than enough. I can't see why anyone would need to see the same film every few days.

(6 February 2017)

The origins of creativity

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I felt a strange wave of dysphoria as I wrote today's date: 21 January 2017. (Of course, it could have been the trouble I'm having with my neck.) It was the shock of seeing myself write it. Do you remember when dates of 20— seemed impossibly far in the future? And now it's as if I'm standing on a slipping, bowing board over a debris-filled stream, and it is flashing past below me too quickly for me to have a good glimpse of anything. Besides, I have to keep at least half my attention on not falling in.



I made this letterhead, as you can see, in 1981, to provide a medium for my sisters and me (I have more sisters, but they were not involved) to write our poetry and fiction on copies mailed to each other for critiquing. I was all game but they never sent anything, so I kept the paper, and every once in a very blue moon I put it at the heading of a letter to a friend. The name occurs because we needed a name and they didn't like my first suggestion, 'Innana's Lips'.

1981 is now so long ago that I remember it only as half-lit fragments, though I know it was an important year for me in many ways (some of which I wrote about in my letter of comment to Lloyd Penney in *Treasure* 4 — the physical excitement of living in old Toronto). It was the first blossoming of my foray into fiction writing, put on hold for many years, then taken up again in 2005. I even wrote three drafts of a novel I have never showed any-

body. (There is another completed draft of a novel in the bowels of my computer — the first was pecked out on my portable Smith Corona — but I have a habit of judging them not salvageable, or leaving them to rust.) But writing it! What a joy that was. I drew sketches of all my characters and dove into their lives and adventures. If it reads like an ey-rolling first attempt at a fantasy novel-writing, it was a brilliant way to spend a years.

I want to humbly offer you this donation. I know it nowhere near covers costs, and might piss off Elaine, but it isn't meant to cajole you into sending me more paper copies, but to thank you for sending what you have sent. I am delighted and grateful, and will survive when the flow ceases.

(21 January 2017)

[*brg* Thanks for the donation, Casey, but things have changed. See my notice at the beginning of this issue about the changeover to non-paper copies of SFC.*]

SFC 93:

More lively art front and back. I feel as though I am falling into Elaine's 'Colony' on a quantum level. Nice to see that Ditmar's 'Mars Attacks' ties in with the writing inside.

Again, lots of interest in this zine. I very much enjoyed the talk you delivered to the Book Collectors Society on SF and fandom. Quick notes:

I liked your definition of SF. Neatly done.

I'm stunned that *Last and First Men* could ever have been published as non-fiction. True, not much of a plot, but jeez ...

I agree that most SF movies (and TV) seem to actually be horror these days. Hence my no longer watching them except under severe compulsion: (a) it's related to *Dr Who* or (b) the kids want to watch it, and then I still draw a (slightly wobbly) line. How do you like the past season (2016) of *Sherlock*? I found the wrap-up very odd.

I loved the description of your childhood revelation that led to you reading science fiction.

I discovered Enid Blyton as an adult. I have only (I think) read three of her books. The first, *Five Children and It*, and the most recent, *The Enchanted Castle*, were delightful.

[*brg* But they are not by Enid Blyton! *Five Children and It* was by E. Nesbit. I've never heard of *The Enchanted Castle*.*]

The middle one, something like *The Castle of Adventure*, seemed formulaic, and read as though she were asleep while writing it. Though likely I was.

Les Misérables, on the other hand, I read at the age of 13 and fell head over heels in love, to the extent of doing an unassigned essay on it in English, to my teacher's astonishment. Although I had read other 'grownup' books at that stage, they were mostly things like *The Devil's Advocate* by Taylor Caldwell and *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier. Hugo lit a flame in me, and for the next few years I devoured other novels about the poor and dispossessed, then branched off into truly depressing things like *Iron in the Soul*, *The Plague*, and *The Bell Jar*, till at a certain point I had to back away for sanity's sake and fell onto the cushion of Ursula Le Guin.

My first 'zine' was a class newspaper in Grade Five. I invented it, named it, did the investigative journalism for it, wrote it, illustrated it, wrote it out in longhand, watched while the secretary mimeographed it (though I would have done that, too, if they'd let me), and probably read more of it more often than anyone else. Although my teacher and my mother encouraged me, everyone else was baffled at my interest in such a dreary enterprise, and it stuttered to a halt fairly shortly. I can still remember that front page, though, with a very convincing 'photograph' accompanying the lead story and its beautifully laid out header and columns ...

If only you were much younger, you would enjoy the Dav Pilkey 'Captain Underpants' novels, in which Grade Four students George Beard and Harold Hutchins (do I really remember their last names??) put out a zine and got into all sorts of trouble. Unless you disapprove of potty humour, of course.

We had a fun panel this year at VCon on 'Women in Vancouver Fanzine Fandom'. At my instigation; there was resistance because fanzine panels don't get much attendance at VCon anymore, and to be honest women never figured hugely in fanzine fandom here, except of course for Susan Wood; and Fran Skene produced a zine for a good while and still participates in A Women's Apa. (I originally suggested a panel on fanzines, period, but that was vetoed until I came up with the Women spin.) We did have a tiny audience, but a lively one, and to my surprise we had to backfill nearly every term, even though these were SF fans. It had not truly hit me before how perfectly fanzine fandom has dropped off the common radar.

Speaking of VCon, we are apparently going the relaxacon route this year. The latest cohort must be burning out, and no one has stepped forward to take over, so rather than cancel entirely they are regrouping. It has been a long long time since we had a relaxacon. It seems our readers' theatre (my readers' theatre), The Pallahaxi Players, won't have a chance to perform, and most of the panels will be cancelled, so it will be sitting around talking. Hope that goes over okay. In the old days we were the only game in town, but now there are lots of little specialty cons. Ah, well. It is what it is.

I still have one unpublished zine stored away on pristine Gestetner stencils. But I won't go into the still raw story of how my Gestetner was given away without my knowledge. It was a thing of beauty and I miss it to this day. Not that I published many zines, and those I did

went to a very small circle. But I was in charge of the Gestetner room for several years at a collective I once belonged to, and that room was my comfort in a sometimes fractious political world. When I was able to get my own Gestetner (which almost none of the above-mentioned audience had ever heard of) I was on Cloud Nine.

I wonder if you would consider re-releasing *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* as a PDF or proper ebook. I bet you could make a little penny if you put it on Smashwords for a dollar or two. Or a free download for those many PKD fans who can't get the book. Like say Howard Cherniack, who has said to me countless times that he has a pantheon of two in SF, Arthur C. Clarke and Philip K. Dick.

I say again, those books you can't track down may very well be available through bookfinder.com. I have seldom been disappointed, except sometimes by the price, if they are academic and rare. It's worth a shot when your local bookstore can't fill the bill.

[*brg* I've explained a few times why it would be very difficult to reprint or re-publish *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd*. So, in summary: the roadblock is the long article by Stanislaw Lem, 'SF: A Hopeless Case: With Exceptions' (the exception being Philip K. Dick). Translated by Werner Koopmann, it was offered for free to *SF Commentary* in 1973 by Franz Rottensteiner, then Lem's agent. As a fanzine contribution, it was re-published in *Electric Shepherd* (supposed to be the first in a series of critical books 'The Best of SF Commentary'), also for free. However, it was then sold by Franz to Harcourt for *Microworlds*, the collection of Lem's critical essays. Both Werner and I received payment for our contributions to the translation of the article. So to do a new edition of *Electric Shepherd*, I would need to re-buy rights to the article from Lem's current agent and/or Harcourt, which could cost a small fortune. And that article is the centrepiece of the first edition of *Electric Shepherd*, and would have to appear in any second edition or reprint of the first edition. So I guess there will never be a new edition of *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* (ed. Bruce Gillespie, Norstrilia Press, 1975), although it has long since sold out, and single copies have been sighted for as much as \$2000 on secondhand book sites.*]

Also enjoyed Jocko's fanzine article and John Litchen's substantial Mars books article, as well as the cornucopia of reviews, nicely categorised and wonderfully (geographically, etc.) diverse, by Colin Steele.

In John's article especially I had to shield my eyes after a while. I like to know enough to decide if I am interested but don't want too much plot detail. I was prompted to dig out Clarke's *The Sands of Mars* (at my bedside as we speak) and Heinlein's *Double Star*.

I did wonder if John really thinks Pohl's and Watson's Mars books were head and shoulders above writers like Le Guin, Wilhelm, Delany, and so on, who were writing at the time and put a lot into their characters and settings.

[*brg* But they didn't write novels about Mars, as far as I recall.*]



Casey and Crow 1983. Claude Perrault 1983 coloured pencil over black and flesh coloured paint (Dave Kyzenko owns it.)

The images throughout the zine are mostly great. I really enjoy poring over cover art, more than regular art, for some reason. I think it is the added element of design that comes with covers that really appeals to me, like a huge diversity of frames for all those pictures, and I like pondering why this cover works more for me than that one even if they have the same image, and so on. I wonder, though, if you would consider not using a book cover if you can only get a low-res image. When you stretch these out to fill a quarter page they get very fuzzy. I'm sure you could find other cover images that would be sharper and just as comely.



PS: I am attaching a couple of photos, because it's fun. And one of a painting of me in the 1980s.

(24 March 2017)

Thoughts of Mr Penney

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SFC 91:

The Stiles cover is great. Not his usual style, and good colour added in. I wonder that many artists might have difficulty creating an science-fictional piece of art with a mind to the future, given how dystopian a present we have. I prefer something more utopian myself, but that doesn't seem fashionable these days.

I wouldn't worry about missing a schedule. We're happy when an issue does arrive, whenever that might be. I understand your financial situation perfectly. I have been out of work since October 2015, and I have had few interviews. The resumés continue to stream out. Yvonne retires in less than two years, so I have to find something to sustain us both. I have some freelance editorial work, but mostly, anything I bring in these days comes from doing voicework.

I have read very little of Lovecraft's work; I am not into horror or dark fantasy. (And it's the weekend of the

World Horror Convention in Las Vegas! Horrors!) I can't help but feel that his books are more of an exploration of his own psyche than any attempt to describe and explore dark alien lands, amateur psychologist that I am

Yvonne and I see very few movies, but one I am glad to have seen, even if it was only on DVD, was *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. Fresh and original, indeed: every head concierge in a different coloured suit, and Bill Murray was a fresh surprise in this one, too. Ralph Fiennes got his nose back (post-Harry Potter), and he was perfect.

Being Canadian, seeing Leonard Cohen have the career he's had is more of a curiosity all the time. A long-honoured poet, to be sure, but his gravelly monotone has won him more awards than I, or he, can figure out how. He's beaten out younger and clearer voices for major national awards, and no one is more mystified by all this than he is.

Television: I have not seen the later seasons of *Poirot*; I saw much of the earlier seasons on public television stations in Toronto and Buffalo, New York, but it wouldn't surprise me if the later seasons are now too expensive to show. David Suchet, IMHO, has cemented

himself as *the* Poirot, no slight intended to Peter Ustinov. *Sherlock*, on the other hand — I am sure it is shown on local television somewhere, possibly on a channel I'd need to pay a premium price for. I am not inclined to do so. (I'd happily watch all the Jeremy Brett Sherlock Holmes episodes, again and again.) However, our own favourite show, *The Murdoch Mysteries*, has just been announced for a tenth season, and we eagerly await it. Production on it has already started, and some of us are quite convinced that it will be the last season. We very much enjoyed Ian McKellen in *Mr Holmes*, and I particularly liked the subterfuge of Watson telling the masses that they lived at 221B Baker Street, while Holmes and Watson actually lived across the road.

I am finding I am one of many who has not seen any of *Game of Thrones*. Like so much today, it just doesn't attract me, and even if it did, I simply wouldn't have the time for it. Still, like a lot of today's modern pop culture, one needn't see it to know something about it. Why isn't George R. R. Martin on Twitter anymore? Because he killed all 120 characters

It is Sunday. The World Fantasy Awards are given out, and I believe the Nebulas are, too. This used to be important news for me; not so much now. Still, the awards trudge on, the Hugos are once again spun by messy Puppies, and my fandom has lost its lustre. We carry on with newer interests to keep ourselves busy. After five years of saving, and not being able to go to the London Worldcon a couple of years ago, we now have enough money saved to go on what we expect to be our last overseas trip, to England the last two weeks of August. We will see some of the sights of London, go to Watford to see the Harry Potter exhibits, and then up to Lincoln to spend the August bank holiday weekend at The Asylum, the biggest steampunk event in the world, with 3000 to 4000 fellow steampunks, and then fly off home.
(15 May 2016)

SFC 92:

When I was in England last month, we went to see the Greenwich Observatory, and beside it is a column dedicated to Captain James Cook. When I lived on Vancouver Island in the late 1970s, Cook's presence was everywhere, with Cook Street being one of the main streets in downtown Victoria. And of course, there's lots of Cook's presence in Australia. This man got around probably more than any other English explorer.

I have never owned a cat, not having the facilities or the money to do so, but I seem to have luck with everyone else's cats. I will tell you one day about ChatChat and Momcat, cats who will live forever in memory. I also seem to have the knack of having a cat on my lap by the end of the evening when we are visiting.

We all now know that Joyce Katz passed away. More and more, 2016 has been a deadly year. Perhaps it's no worse than any other year, but it sure seems like it.

Murray Moore reported that he is now the Secretary of the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association (CSFFA) and a member of the board of directors, and

now, I can report that I have been appointed to the same CSFFA board of directors, and will assume the position of historian. Wish me luck on this one.

I am pleased that Patrick McGuire is enjoying *The Murdoch Mysteries*. It is shot in the east end of Toronto, and in locations across southern Ontario. Some years ago Yvonne had a walk-on role in two of the episodes. As I said above, this is a deadly year, and some of the people who died, who I did not know personally, played a role in the sequence of my life.

I'm still hunting for the elusive job. I am so tired of hunting. Perhaps soon. In the meantime, we've tried to have as good a time with as little money as possible. In the meantime, I write some locs, and try to catch up with a huge pile of them.

(28 September 2016)

I have noticed that more and more, science fiction is being marketed and aimed at children, the same way the space industry is. Both are something for the kids to enjoy, as far as I see it. Why are they not being marketed to adults? Perhaps these days, they are not being seen as adult interests. Maybe they're just dreams, and unrealistic ones at that. Yet dreams have helped realise the world we have. Maybe such dreams are only for corporations to make money from, and our imagination is being bred out of us. We are being slowly but surely trained to be mere consumers, imagination free and just a cog in the economic engine. I so hope I am wrong.

Fandom has been part of my life for most of my life, but here, it looks like it is starting to fade. It might just be me, but if there is a network any more, my connections to it are fraying. We don't go to Worldcons any more, as they are simply too expensive. We've left conrunning after 30 years, and now, we are more into steampunk and being steampunk vendors. Maybe that's just a natural progression. In the long run, we've got to enjoy ourselves, and where we do that is losing what importance it may have had.

My life in fanzines has also been changing, too. I can now say that I have been in the local of fanzines for 35 years, yet have never really been a part of any fanzine community. I have always been on the outside looking in, no matter where I've been. Again, it might just be me, but no matter what I've done, response is often tepid, and a few times, unfriendly. Would it matter much if I did not respond to fanzines the way I have? Believe me, I appreciate the efforts to keep this oldest of fan activities going. I am trying to do my part in that, too.

While I have enjoyed a lot of the novels about Mars listed here, my favorite was Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Mars' trilogy, with the added fourth book. It seemed about as logical as it could get, given the illogic of the average human being, and given the possibility of huge water reserves on Mars just under its surface. I would have enjoyed another book or two in that series.

This is probably the strangest loc I have ever written, composed mostly around 2 a.m. local time.

(9 January 2017)

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS continues in SF COMMENTARY 95.

SF COMMENTARY 94

June 2017

64 pages

**COLIN STEELE
BRUCE GILLESPIE
LEIGH EDMONDS
ROBERT DAY**

**JENNIFER BRYCE
RANDY BYERS
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