

SF Commentary 98 **50th** Anniversary Edition

April 2019 84 pages



Cover: Elaine Cochrane: 'Purple Prose': embroidery.

# SF COMMENTARY 98 \* 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION, PART 1

April 2019

84 pages

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:** Randy Byers: 'Rockaway Sunset' (p. 3); Gary Mason (p. 4); Christopher Priest (p. 8); Gary Hoff (p. 10); Elaine Cochrane (p. 10); Richard Wilhelm (p. 20); Andrew Darlington (pp. 24-9); Kathy Sauber, University of Washington (pp. 30).

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Photo: Randy Byers: 'Rockaway Sunset'.

# Carousel Days

## Alex Skovron

And one evening, constellating the dots  
from the top deck of Civil Engineering  
my gaze skimmed beyond Delta Orionis  
and I suddenly detected a tiny shifting

of the sky's slant, an opening that said—  
look hard enough into us drizzling stars  
and you will discover more of yourself  
than if you drank from an endless chalice

of the choicest rum. And I forgot about  
the fragrant maiden, eighteen, next to me  
(I myself only just barely twenty), forgot  
the spring night's rooftop seminar, transit

of the morning star, all the lecture notes  
folded in my bag, the poems fattening  
my little black book with the bright red  
spine, and I stared like some ridiculously

transported thing, a boy who'd disturbed  
for a mere moment and twisted some key,  
glimpsing a doorway to a language meant  
(he was certain) for him alone. And each

waking minute in carousel days to come  
he would search to regain it, to translate  
what, upon that starstruck roof, had stung  
his soul. He is there still, translating it yet.

*Weekend Australian,*  
9–10 December 2017

## Dedications

For reasons made clear in the following pages, this issue is dedicated to the memory of Philip K. Dick.

For reasons equally obvious to my friends, this issue is also dedicated to Elaine Cochrane, who has had to put up with its production for 41 of the last 50 years.

This issue would not exist as a print magazine without the generous financial support of an anonymous donor, whose message is simply: 'Dear, Dear Bruce. Pub your 'ish, Joe Phan.' Thank you, Joe Phan.

# The 50th Anniversary Edition

## I must be talking to my friends

### What's a few decades between friends?

Recently I was stopped in my tracks by a remark made over the dinner table by **Mariann McNamara**. Mariann, along with her late husband Peter McNamara, has been an indefatigable supporter of my magazines for many



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

years.

Me: 'I'm just about to publish the 50th Anniversary Issue of *SFC*.'

Mariann: 'I suppose you'll be closing down the magazine now.'

I was astonished. I have never thought of stopping publication of *SF Commentary*. Surely the 50th Anniversary Issue is only a stepping stone? Surely there will be a 60th Anniversary Issue in 2029 and a 70th Anniversary Issue in 2039?

What if Mariann's implied question was not 'Are you going to close the magazine now it is fifty years old?' but 'Why did you keep publishing for 50 years?'

My first answer: There is only one reason for doing anything (apart from stuff you must do to earn a living): for the pleasure of doing it. I do *amateur* publishing: publishing *for the love of it*. I've spent many thousands of dollars on my magazines over the last 50 years, and have rarely received more than a trickle of subscriptions, plus some generous donations. I still need to earn a living to keep it going.

Recently (18 November 2017), Melbourne's *Age* featured a cartoon by Michael Leunig. It shows one of Leunig's little humble travellers standing at the fork between two branching paths. The signpost points two directions. One direction: 'Who you are.' The other says,

'Who you should be.' According to conventional wisdom I should have been a successful editorial director or publishing manager, long retired, supported by a large superannuation nest egg.

Who am I, though? Here's my second answer to Mariann's implied question. I am, above all, a fanzine editor, with one long-suffering wife, Elaine (we had our fortieth wedding anniversary on 3 March), and no nest egg. I have kept publishing fanzines because I'm no good at anything else.

When I was in Grade 1 my teacher, **Miss Risk**, told me I was going to become a Great Writer. My career has gone downhill ever since. While I was at primary school I found that I could write fiction, but could not invent plots. I would re-use ideas from serials I heard on the ABC Children's Hour, or even from comics. A story I wrote in Form 6 (Year 12), printed in Bacchus Marsh High School's annual magazine, is a quite good commercial SF story. But the idea I used is completely unoriginal — and I knew it at the time.

So I was never going to become a writer of fiction. I was much better at writing opinion pieces. My favourite essay topic was not 'What I did on my holidays' but 'What I would *like to have done* on my holidays'.

At the age of twelve I became a fanatical listener to pop music and collector of Top 40 charts. At the age of twenty I discovered classical music. But I cannot play

music or sing. If I had been able to play Beethoven sonatas or sing like Roy Orbison, I would not have had time to publish fanzines.

In primary school I saw a film financed by a religious group. It was called *God of the Atom*. It demonstrated not only the catatrophic effects of exploding an atomic bomb over your average city, but also the principles of atomic fission and fusion. I wanted to be an atomic scientist, or an astronomer. One problem: I had no ability at mathematics, which I would have needed to become a scientist. If I had become a scientist I probably would not have published fanzines. (But Greg Benford did both!)

I spent four years at university training to become a teacher of history and English. Released into the school system, I discovered I was not much good at teaching, so I escaped after two years.

In 1971 I was offered a job in the Publications Branch of the Education Department of Victoria, where I was taught all the elements of book and magazine editing. Eventually I became a freelance editor and indexer: a poor source of income, but a satisfying way of making a living.

And I could take up my true calling — publishing fanzines.

Let **Gillian Polack** (Canberra fan, academic, and novelist) take up the story:

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## In search of 'personal journalism': Gillian Polack interviews Bruce Gillespie, 28 March 2010

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**Gillian Polack:** *Steam Engine Time* and *SF Commentary* and your other work have some very enthusiastic followers (me included). Can you give us some background on what you do to create a fanzine and who the readers are?

**BRG:** I always wanted to publish fanzines — magazines for science fiction fans about whatever one wants to write about, especially science fiction — ever since I heard about them in an article in *If* magazine in 1962. I bought my first fanzines in 1966, when **Merv Binns** sold copies of *Australian Science Fiction Review* (first series) on the front counter of McGill's Newsagency in the centre of Melbourne. I found here brilliant writing about science fiction, and much else. Editor **John Bangsund** was one of Australia's wittiest and most urbane writers. The two other members of the *ASFR* group were **John Foyster** and **Lee Harding**, who wrote brilliant reviews and review-articles. **George Turner** began writing for *ASFR* in 1967. This magazine was the model for the *SF Commentary*, which I began publishing in 1969, when for the first time I had the money to do so. *SFC* has never made money, and could never pay contributors, but contributions poured in. *ASFR* (first series) died during 1969, so *SF Commentary* became the main voice of Australian SF critical writing.

A fanzine is a kind of art object — not very pretty, but

immensely satisfying to create. The main currency of fanzines is not money, but letters of comment and other contributions from readers. Until the Internet age, fanzines were the main way of communicating among SF fans throughout the world. Australia's campaign to stage the 1975 World Convention in Melbourne was mainly conducted through our many fanzines.

My luck in the 1970s was in attracting some of the most important writers of the time, such as **Stanislaw Lem** and **Darko Suvin**, which meant that *SFC* gained three Hugo nominations in the 1970s, and then many Ditmar Awards over the years.

*SF Commentary* has had its ups and downs. In the 1980s I was nonplussed by the gigantic explosion in SF publishing. I could no longer 'cover the field' in the reviews pages. I solved this by dropping *SFC* for eight years, and starting *The Metaphysical Review* in 1984. It is a joky title for a magazine that covered all my interests other than science fiction: general literature, music, films, and fandom. I returned to *SFC* in 1989 for the twentieth anniversary issue. In 1999, at Aussiecon 3, two British fans (**Paul Kincaid** and **Maureen Kincaid Speller**) and I decided to start an international magazine concentrating on long articles about SF and fantasy. This was *Steam Engine Time*.

All copies of *Steam Engine Time*, and representative



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

copies of *SFC* and *TMR*, can be found in PDF format on the <http://efanzines.com> website. My most active readers are still spread throughout world fandom.

**GP:** I'm interested in which writers you think need just a bit more notice, both male and female. What is it about each writer that's so important?

**BRG:** My first major interest when I began *SF Commentary* was to bring attention to the work of **Philip K. Dick**, whose books I discovered in the early 1960s. I didn't grow up during the Golden Age of SF (1939–1954), so had to discover Golden Age writers (Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein, etc) later. My personal discoveries were the group of writers who were breaking out of the limitations of the field. I found Philip Dick's work was very readable, combining adventurous speculation about the future with relentless scepticism about what is taken for granted in science and society. Others were **Cordwainer Smith** (Paul Linebarger, who died in the mid sixties), **Thomas Disch**, and **Brian Aldiss**. They were restless spirits, trying to break the bounds of traditional science fiction. Disch and Aldiss were taken up by the New Wave in science fiction, by editor **Michael Moorcock** in the English magazine *New Worlds*. In America, **Terry Carr** began publishing his version of New Wave writers in the Ace Specials: **Ursula K. Le Guin**, **Joanna Russ**, **R. A. Lafferty**, and many others. What impressed me was that these writers were trying to write science fiction that was also literature: they had very high standards; they wanted to burst out from the field. In 1970, the work of the Polish writer **Stanislaw Lem** became available in English for the first time. Again, his standards were very high, and some of his books, such as *Solaris*, have become classics of European literature.

**GP:** What do you look for in a good piece of fiction?

**BRG:** The best kind of science fiction is a realistic or

poetic piece of fiction set in the future (or alternate present, alternate past, etc), in the same way that a good historical novel is a realistic or poetic novel that happens to be set in the past. When **George Turner** began writing his critical pieces in 1967, he demanded that science fiction break out of its old moulds and merge with literature. He said that science fiction should be as well written as the best of any other kind of fiction. That process never quite happened, because many people in literature still have a deep antipathy to scientific or futuristic speculation. Also, I feel that the field abandoned its commitment to the future. Much that is today called 'sci-fi' is backward-looking fantasy fiction about a never-never past that tries to recreate the works of Tolkien rather than conducting any analysis of ideas.

**GP:** What do you look for in a good piece of non-fiction? Who are some of the non-fiction writers we should be reading?

**BRG:** When we began writing about science fiction in the sixties, we tried to write personal essays about our favourite writers, or attempted to kick the backside of our fellow readers and demand that they read better fiction and improve their own standards. In 1973, the first academic magazines began to take over 'science fiction criticism'. Unfortunately, they adopted the sterile language of the regular critical literary magazines, converting discussion about science fiction into a dry discussion of signs, not wonders.

In *SF Commentary* and my other magazines, and in the other major fanzines, we tried to maintain what I call 'personal criticism' or 'personal journalism', in which the individual writer pits his or her aesthetic muscles against the books being discussed. We tried to avoid academic language if possible, but of course we could not 'peer-review' articles. To answer your question, non-fiction writers about science fiction should write as well as they can, and try to alert others to the best in the field. The last year or so [2009–10] has been very exciting, with the publication of new books about science fiction by fine writers such as **Paul Kincaid**, **Joanna Russ**, **Michael Bishop**, **Christopher Priest**, **Helen Merrick**, **Damien Broderick**, and many others (see *Steam Engine Time* 12, February 2010).

Only a few major serious fanzines remain, but the field still has regular magazines like *The New York Review of Science Fiction* that nicely balance personal criticism and academic criticism. Also, America has several conventions meant for readers: **Potlatch** and **Readercon**.

My favourite writers in *SF Commentary*'s heyday included **Stanislaw Lem**, **George Turner**, **Barry Gillam**, **Richard Delap**, and many others. Three of those people have died, and Barry Gillam only writes about film these days. In the early 1980s **Yvonne Rousseau** stepped in to become a major contributor. New writers keep sending me material; for instance, **Gillian Polack** and **Ray Wood**. Canberra SF reviewer **Colin Steele** has sent me copies of his reviews since 1979. **Damien Broderick**, Australia's senior SF writer, has an article in the fortieth anniversary *SF Commentary*, which is only a year late! Caring people still nurture the field

— **Gillian Polack** and **Bruce Gillespie**, 28 March 2010



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Found in the editorial for SFC 69/70 in 1992 (a mere 27 years ago):

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## Bruce Gillespie and Brian Aldiss, 1992: Thanks for the thank-you note

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Occasionally I go to parties. Introduced to someone interesting, I'm asked what I do for a living. 'I'm a book editor. Nothing glamorous. Secondary textbooks.' The other person's face settles into stony unexcitement. If it seems that the other person might be sympathetic, I say, 'But my *real* job is publishing magazines about science fiction.' This propels the other person in search of a drink.

Sometimes the other person sees the point of what I'm talking about. The unspoken question is not: 'But why do you waste your time editing secondary textbooks?' but 'But why do you publish fanzines if they don't earn money?'

We fanzine editors know and give the standard answers: self-expression; communication with interesting people across the world; showing what we can really do in the hope of gaining professional writing work; angling for review copies of SF books.

But after twenty-two years? [fifty years]

After twenty-two years, there is no hope that the print run will grow until the magazine supports itself and me.

The print run for this issue is much the same as that for No. 1, January 1969.

After twenty-two years, there seems little hope that any subsidiary activities will make money to support the magazine and me. *SF Commentary Reprint: First Year 1969* needed to sell 200 copies to get back the money and time invested in it. Eighty copies are left.

After twenty-two years, there is no hope that anybody will offer me the editorship of a prestigious journal because they liked what they saw in *SFC*. Besides, I don't live in America.

After twenty-two years, there is no hope that someone will send me money to write lit. crit. for overseas magazines. The academics took over in the 1970s, and I don't have a Ph.D. or even a Master's.

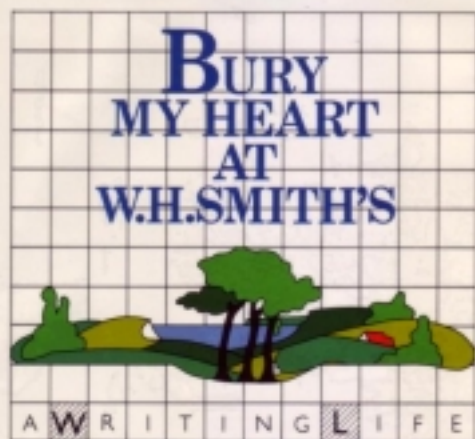
After twenty-two years, there is no hope of winning a Hugo Award, although those three Hugo nominations in the 1970s are fondly remembered. These days, it would take a print run of at least 500 copies to score a Hugo nomination, let alone a win.

After twenty-two years, *SF Commentary* and *The Metaphysical Review* no longer run on hope. But they don't run on automatic, either.

The fuel for these magazines is pleasure — or rather, the Great Minor Pleasures of Life. Looked at objectively, none of these pleasures would compensate me for the time and money poured into these magazines. Taken separately, they make up the stuff of life, or certainly the stuff of fanzine editing.

The collected *SFC/TMR/Gillespie* Ditmar Awards are nudging each other off the shelf. Year after year, everybody complains about the Ditmars and the way they are awarded, but nobody minds getting one. Two recent awards (in 1989 and 1990) for Best Fan Writer gave me particular satisfaction.

And after twenty-two years, what greater reward could there be than the following thank-you note? :



**BRIAN  
ALDISS**

**THE AVERNUS EDITION**  
6 extra chapters — 250 signed copies,  
each with its own unique Aldiss souvenir

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### BRIAN ALDISS

Occasionally — the miracle. A reviewer who has read all one's books!

*Forgotten Life* won a very favourable review from Australia, from Bruce Gillespie, writing in the *Melbourne Age*. Bruce stands as an exemplar of a science fiction aficionado. Ever since 1969, he has poured his lifeblood into his amateur magazine, *SF Commentary* — amateur in the best sense, for it printed perceptive criticism of science fiction

Bruce Gillespie (l.) and Brian Aldiss (r.), Stonehenge, January 1974, just before the storm hit. (Photo: Christopher Priest.)



novels, stories, and trends, such as one rarely finds elsewhere. For a while, Bruce liked nothing he read, and denounced the whole mode. He disliked my *Helliconia* novels, and said so.

As well as criticism, *SF Commentary* carries the story of all Bruce's personal troubles. Along with the latest adulation of Stanislaw Lem went the story of Bruce's failures with girls or — a recent event — the death of his father. Bruce visited England once, and stayed with Chris Priest, who was disturbed to find that his Australian guest ate poached eggs with his fingers. We three drove down to Stonehenge one sunny day, before Stonehenge was railed off from the public.

In 1969, when *SF Commentary* began, Mike Moorcock's *New Worlds* was still thriving, and Gillespie and his merry men, John Foyster and the others, set upon it eagerly and understood it (even when they did not like its contents) in a way given to no other group of readers. Their comments remain fresh. Their comments remain fresh. I was praised for some of the original *Barefoot in the Head* stories in Issue 1 and damned for another in Issue 2. I also, I'm proud to say, had an article in Issue 2. Of course, no one got paid for their work. We never expected it in the SF field of yore. I have written thousands of words on such terms, for many fanzines which have proved far more ephemeral than Gillespie's publications.

Perhaps one day some omniscient omnivore will examine the relationship between published and

privately printed activity in the SF field, and show the literature for what it is — a tremendous populist movement of the century. He will surely have to reckon with the prickly intellects of Bruce Gillespie's *SF Commentary*.

— Brian Aldiss, *Bury My Heart at W. H. Smith's: A Writing Life*, pp. 185–6

Yes, it's pleasant to be thanked for my life's work. John Bangsund has done it several times, especially in his wonderful *This Isn't SF Commentary* 26 (copies still available from me if anybody's interested). George Turner wrote about *SF Commentary* in *In the Heart or in the Head*, which he dedicated to me. (Perhaps that's why I've never felt worthy to review it.) I found myself on the dedication page of Damien Broderick's *Transmitters*, which at one stage was going to be based on the more agonised bits of my life story.

These mirror glints keep me going, as do all the remarkable letters I receive.

But Brian Aldiss's thank-you note is a high point of my career — not 'career' in the usual sense (I'm still waiting for it to begin), but the inner career, the unseen pattern of steps one travels to some unknown destination.

Like John Ford, Brian has chosen to print the legend rather than the strict fact. He seems inaccurate to refer only to *SF Commentary*, leaving out any mention of *The Metaphysical Review*. But this is one of those mistakes that is more truthful than the truth. For many people *SF Commentary* is Bruce Gillespie's magazine, and always has been. Should I bow to the truth of the legend? Should I abandon *TMR*, now that I've revived *SFC*?

But Brian remembers why I abandoned *SFC* for eight years. I thought I should continue to cover the field, but by 1981 I was so disgusted with nearly everything I read in SF and fantasy that I was willing to ditch a magazine with 'SF' in the title. By 1989, the problem no longer existed. The field has grown so huge that I could cheerfully abandon hope of covering it. Now I feel free to pick the ripe apples off the rotten pile and ignore the rest. The ripe apples have piled up. Hence the revival of *SFC*.

Brian remembers the excitement of the early days of *SF Commentary*, which coincided with the great days of *New Worlds*. Combined with the excitement sparked in America by *Dangerous Visions* and the *Ace Specials*, the pages of *New Worlds* promised a bright, shiny, vigorous, and rigorous new science fiction. By 1975, it was plain that the readers had let down the writers, and the New Wave became the Permanent Wave. But many of the most enjoyable books from 1969 to 1975 are still in print, and some of us retain a *New Worlds*-based image of how good science fiction could be.

I didn't ever eat poached eggs with my fingers, but my American-English pilgrimage of 1973–74 is spiked with Gillespie solecisms much worse than that. The legend endures; I'm glad no one can remember the facts.

Chris Priest, Brian, and I did go to Stonehenge together. It was the last day of my five-month journey. The vital difference between Brian and me is that I remember



the howling storm that greeted us at Stonehenge and drove us away from the place, while Brian remembers that it was a 'sunny day'. We are both right. It was the *only* sunny day of my month's stay in England, but the Druids plonked a storm on us during our half-hour at Stonehenge.

Brian Aldiss's optimism glows through every page of *Bury My Heart at W. H. Smith's* (Hodder & Stoughton; 221 pp.). It's not an autobiography. In a recent letter Brian said he probably would never write one. Instead, it's a combination of a long thank-you note to many friends and a recruiting document for the life of a writer. It's full of amusing and amazing stories, and introduces us to many of those English literary identities the rest of us will never meet.

My only beef against *Bury My Heart* is that in it Brian does not devote space to John Bangsund, John Foyster, and Lee Harding, the true heroes of Australian fanzine publishing. Why me? The disciple merely followed the masters. But *Bury My Heart at W. H. Smith's* is a compact volume, and much obviously had to be left out. Volume II soon?

— Bruce Gillespie, 6 November 1990; *SF Commentary* 69/70, January 1991

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#### BRIAN ALDISS

Oxford OX1 5DL, England

Thanks for your warm reception of *Bury My Heart at W. H. Smith's*. I don't think you need reproach yourself too much, though of course I recognize self-reproach as a long-continuing feature of the Gillespie character. It was mine too, haunting me like an old importuning beggar for many a year, until I shucked it off — as I've shucked off many another attribute I could no longer live with. My

theory is — and I'm about to expound an elaborate version of it to a group of Oxford psychiatrists — that the psyche renews itself every seven years, much as the physical anatomy does. We are not the continuity commonly supposed. This is in part recognized, as for instance in the way we clearly see childhood, teenage, and old age as separate components of a life. I can look back and see where here — and here — I underwent a definite psychic or spiritual change.

In *Bury My Heart*, only shortage of space and time precluded my mentioning *Metaphysical Review* and a thousand other things; judgement was hardly involved. I dragged my heels over the book, and finally had to foreclose swiftly. I didn't write about my trip to Australia in 1978 for the same reason. I enjoyed that trip greatly.

An autobiography? I could never write it; it would be too incredibly sad. Why should I burden others — my family for instance, in which I set such happy store — with the misery I underwent for countless years? Life's a triumph of hope and biological happiness over adversity, from which most people suffer in their most vulnerable years. We're so courageous in our sorrows, so outrageous in our pleasures. (28 August 1990)

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Many years ago, Brian, you said in a reference I can no longer find (and therefore must paraphrase) that incidents from one's life are much too valuable to be wasted on autobiography. It sounds as if you are sticking to your guns. Many well-known writers of your own nation and generation have recently produced autobiographies: do they ignore the pain, exorcise it by examining it for the first time, or simply write a special brand of fiction?

— *SF Commentary* 71/72, April 1992

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## The early years: Yesterday's heroes

If you read the above items in reverse order (Gillian's interview first) you'll notice that I had regained in 2010 much of the enthusiasm that I had lost in 1992 when exchanging letters with Brian Aldiss. I still haven't answered the implied second part of Mariann McNamara's question: **Is publishing *SF Commentary* as exciting as it was fifty years ago?** Does enthusiasm still kick in when needed? Is publishing a fanzine still one of the good drugs?

Not that today's magazine, largely confined to the internet, can offer the hobby delights that galvanised me during the first ten years of production. When I think of *SF Commentary* during those years I remember the starbursts of excitement.

*SFCs* 1 and 2 would never have been printed and posted had it not been for the most magnanimous gesture in

Australian fan history. I had typed 66 stencils on the most unsuitable typewriter ever (a little Olivetti portable). For my first teacher posting, I was sent to Ararat Technical School, 130 miles west of Melbourne. I had no duplicator and (for the time being) no money to buy one. In Ferntree Gully, on the other side of Melbourne, the **ASFR team**, Lee Harding, John Foyster, and John Bangsund, along with Leigh Edmonds, not only duplicated a 66-page fanzine but collated it, and put 300 copies into envelopes and posted them! They did the same for Number 2. In one afternoon (Queen's Birthday weekend 1969) John Bangsund taught me how to use a duplicator, and I duplicated and collated *SFC* 3 in his garage at Ferntree Gully. A few weeks later I was able to buy a duplicator in Ararat. Ron Graham, a Sydney businessman who was also a fan, gave me the money to buy my own typewriter, and *SFC* resumed its rocky, but very



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



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

productive, first year of publication. (Then there was the night in 1969 when **Stephen Campbell** and I printed and collated all the copies of *SF Commentary* 5 on the duplicator at Ararat Technical School ...)

One day in May or June 1969 I staggered down the main street of Ararat, having just received my first letter of comment from **Philip K. Dick**, my favourite SF writer. After telling me that I had completely misunderstood his work (in my long essays in *SFCs* 1 and 2), he said he has asked **Larry Ashmead** at Doubleday to send me copies of the latest Philip Dick novels, *Ubik*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, and *A Maze of Death*. They arrived a few weeks later.



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

Each traded fanzine I received was a source of excitement. Not only did I receive the last issues of **Richard Bergeron's** *Warhoon* but I also received many of the last great issues of **Pete Weston's** *Speculation*, many many issues of **Dick Geis's** *Science Fiction Review*, which became *Richard E. Geis*, which after four issues became *The Alien Critic*, which returned to being *Science Fiction Review*. A small fanzine from **Bill Bowers**, the first issue of *Out-worlds*, gave me the structure of the column I began to call 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'.

Australian fanzines flooded in. Throughout the 1970s **John Bangsund**, my mentor (and the mentor of every Australian fanzine publisher of the period), continued to publish *Scythrop* and many other fanzines, even after he had closed *Australian Science Fiction Review*.

My greatest supporters included **Franz Rottensteiner**, who sent me his and Lem's articles, **John Foyster**, who guest-edited six issues of *SF Commentary*, and **George Turner**. He was the first person to offer reviews for my proposed new magazine. Except for the year he disappeared from sight (September 1969–September 1970), he sent me an endless stream of articles and reviews until the 1990s.

As a group, overseas readers appreciated the new magazine even more than local fans. (It has ever been thus.) **Cy Chauvin** and **Dave Gorman** were two American readers who published fanzines in tribute to *SFC*. I heard from newish British fan **Malcolm Edwards**, a recently graduated librarian, who was publishing his first fanzine (*Quicksilver*, which included the first piece of **Stanislaw Lem's** fiction translated into English): Malcolm became editor of the BSFA's *Vector* magazine and traded it for my magazines, then became editor of *Foundation* magazine and arranged a trade for that. Malcolm kept ascending to dizzy heights in the book trade while I remained a lowly book editor in Melbourne, but he's been of endless help to me over the years, especially in his position as head of Gollancz fiction.

At Easter 1968 I attended my first science fiction convention, the **Melbourne SF Conference** as it was called.

About 70 people attended the convention, held in the old Melbourne SF Clubrooms, the top floor of McGill's Newsagency's old store room. I knew no one except the people who had unwittingly adopted me, the *Australian Science Fiction Review* crew, such as **John Bangsund**, **Lee Harding**, **John Foyster**, **Tony Thomas**, and a few others. They were too busy at the convention to worry about a shy newcomer, but I did make friends with a few people who have disappeared from my life, such as **Tom Newlyn** and **Alf van der Poorten** from Sydney, and a bloke named **David Penman**, representing the Melbourne Grammar Schools Science Fiction Society. (Many years later, he became famous as **Jim Penman**, owner of Jim's various house improvements franchises, such as Jim's Mowing, Jim's Roof Cleaning, etc.) For a year or two, David wrote book reviews for *SFC*.

A year later, Easter 1969, the first issue of *SF Commentary* had been printed and posted by the *ASFR* crew. It had been sent to everybody on the *ASFR* mailing list. As I walked up the steep stairs to the convention being held in the Melbourne Science Fiction Club rooms, **Bernie Bernhouse** called out from the top of the stairs; 'Here's Bruce Gillespie! Great fanzine, Bruce!' And everybody wanted to meet me.

Fandom centred around fanzines in those days, as well as conventions. Specifically, Melbourne fandom centred around the *ASFR* ethos: because of the work of John Bangsund and his writers, we had spread the word throughout the world that Australians were astute critics as well as friendly people. And now another critical magazine had emerged — mine. At 1969, I started talking to such luminaries as **Dick Jensen**, **Wynne Whiteford**, **David Boutland** (**David Rome**), and **Damien Broderick**. I had met them before, as I had **George Turner**, but I had been too shy to talk to them.

I doubt if I've changed much since those early days, but Australian fandom certainly has. During the 1970s we maintained the image of being both serious and fannish. When we bid for and won the right to hold **Aussiecon**, the World Convention in Melbourne in 1975, we invited the best and brightest authors and critics. We broke all precedent by asking to be our guests of honour **Ursula K. Le Guin** (who had become famous only since publishing *The Left Hand of Darkness* in 1969) and **Mike Glicksohn** and **Susan Wood**, publishers of the successful Canadian fanzine *Energumen*. Not for us the usual rule that Worldcon guests of honour had to be have been famous for at least thirty years. Leading the local team of panelists was **George Turner**.

In the 1980s, there were many fine fannish writers and publishers, such as **Marc Ortlieb**, **Leigh Edmonds**, **Irwin Hirsh**, and **Perry Middlemiss**, but on the whole the main emphasis was on socialising, not writing or publishing. Fandom fractured, and most of the fractions left me out. One great exception were the people from the **Melbourne University SF Association**. In 1972, I met **Charles Taylor** for the first time ('I believe you are a fan of Philip K. Dick' were his first words to me), and through him met **Elaine Cochrane**. In 2019 Elaine and I still meet with the same group of people every Friday. They are no longer students, but have had successful careers, and are now retired. Charles, Elaine, and I are the three who cannot afford to retire.

Yet I remember the 1970s and 1980s as the time of forming many of my greatest friendships, based on publishing *SF Commentary*.

**Stephen Campbell** was a student at Ararat High School during 1969, the first year I was attempting to become a teacher at Ararat Technical School. He seemed to be the only person in town interested in science fiction. He said little, but he read all the great science fiction I lent him. He already wanted to become an artist, and he drew some covers for *SFC*. And he helped print and collate several issues of the magazine itself. He disappeared from my view for years at a time, did become a professional artist, but then disappeared again, only to be discovered in the oceanside country town of Warrnambool. I put him in touch with another comics/art fan, **David Russell**, one of my greatest supporters since the 1980s.

**John Foyster**, who died in 2003, not only guest-edited six issues of *SF Commentary* during its early years, but also made it possible for me to publish articles by **Stanislaw Lem** and **Franz Rotteinstainer**. He also kick-started many of the SF/fannish organisations that are celebrating 50 years of continuous activity at the moment, especially the **Aussiecon** bid and the **Nova Mob**.

**Franz Rotteinstainer** was a fan who lived in Austria. I knew him as a formidable champion of European science fiction. He provided material to John Foyster that otherwise would have been difficult to source. Although Franz was only a few years older than me, he had become the English-language agent for Poland's most famous science fiction writer, **Stanislaw Lem**. Franz began to translate Lem's articles and send them to **John Foyster**, both for *ASFR* and his own fanzines. John published a ferocious little fanzine, *exploding madonna*, which became *The Journal of Omphalistic Epistemology* (**JOE**), which he sent to 16 people, including me. John was a teacher and also doing his PhD in mathematics. He handed some of Lem's articles to me for *SF Commentary*, and allowed me to reprint the entire run of *exploding madonna*/**JOE** as *SF Commentary* 19. Stanislaw Lem became famous for pooh-pooing the quality of the whole of English-language SF, but he also provided a valuable analysis of science fiction as an enterprise. One of his articles, analysing *The Left Hand of Darkness*, led to both Lem and **Ursula Le Guin** appearing in *SF Commentary*. Ursula continued writing to me until the early 1990s. One of Lem's articles, '**SF: A Hopeless Case — With Exceptions**', inspired the ire of most of my readers, including **George Turner**, **John Foyster**, and **Philip Jose Farmer**. Lem admitted only one exception to his scorn for English-language SF: **Philip K. Dick**. The article became the centrepiece of *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* (Norstrilia Press, 1975).

At my second convention, Easter 1969, I met **Carey Handfield**, who arrived from Eltham with his friend (and ambitious writer) **David Grigg**. Carey was a bit of a mystery man ... and still can be ... but he made himself invaluable to many fans, especially those planning the bid to hold the world covention in Melbourne in 1975. In early 1975 he said to me: 'I have an idea that will raise money to help publish *SF Commentary*. Why don't we form a partnership to publish critical books about SF, just like



Advent and Mirage Press in America? Why don't we call it Norstrilia Press.' The name derived from the planet (Old North Australia = Norstrilia) described in some of the works of **Cordwainer Smith**, the great American writer who had died in 1965.

The first five years of *SF Commentary* produced enough material for **Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd**. Carey devised a method of raising seed funds from various fans (very like the crowd-funding schemes found on today's internet), I edited the book, and it went to the printer. It nearly did not reach us before Aussiecon, but that's an epic story you can find later in this issue. Today people still ask for copies, although it sold out many years ago.

**Rob Gerrand**, who had become Assistant Editor of *ASFR* late in its life, became the third partner in Norstrilia Press, bringing some funds with him. Immediately the

direction of the Press changed. **Lee Harding** proposed a book of short stories and essays based on the experience of the Writers Workshop conducted by **Ursula Le Guin** during the week before Aussiecon. Ursula was enthusiastic about *The Altered I* (and provided its title). She sent us a wonderful introduction and a new short story. After our edition appeared, we sold it to an overseas publisher, Berkeley Books. This helped fund the third book we published. And so on. You might be delighted to know that a few months ago, **Rob** and **Maggie**, **Carey** and **Jo**, and **Elaine** and I had dinner together, 44 years after the formation of the press, and 34 years after it had been dissolved.

('The Story of Norstrilia Press' can be found later in this issue.)

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## The early years: Straight talk about science fiction

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I've talked about some of the people who helped the magazine during its early years — but so far have said nothing about the magazine's ethos and viewpoint.

Put at its simplest, the viewpoint of many of the writers in *SF Commentary* reflected the aspirations of the Simon-and-Garkunkel-and-Bob-Dylan generation. A generation of clever people born just before or after World War II poured out of university courses armed with the weapons of the post-war Literary Criticism. We had done our degrees or Master's or even PhDs about writers such as Conrad, Eliot, Frost, Faulkner, Woolf, or Shakespeare. Our peers in the music industry applied their critical perceptions to popular music, not classical music. The result was *Rolling Stone* and *Creem* journalism, and the dazzling but ever-so-slightly incomprehensible lyrics of Paul Simon, Bob Dylan, John Lennon, and Mick Jagger. In the science fiction field, a whole new generation of 'New Wave' writers appeared, supplemented by earlier writers who sniffed the air of a new freedom of expression.

We aspiring critics asked ourselves: 'Why should we waste our efforts on classic literary authors, whose works have already been picked over, when almost nobody has written about our favourite SF writers? The best of them are writing as well as any of the standard writers. Let us plunge into their work.' In USA and Canada, more than a thousand science fiction courses had been established by 1970. In Australia, friends of mine — aspiring doctoral candidates — were told to go away when they said they wanted to write about the works of Ursula Le Guin. In 1967, after I finished my Arts degree, I decided to apply everything I had learned at university to an analysis of the work of Philip K. Dick. I didn't want to earn a postgraduate degree; I wanted to appear in *Australian Science Fiction Review*.

You could hardly say that **George Turner** was from our generation. He had, after all, sent letters to the American SF magazines before World War II. However,

he understood what was needed: the examination of the repertoire of SF writing, holding it up to the light of comparison with the Best and the Brightest.

**John Foyster** came from a science/maths background, not literature, but he had read everything, and he also encouraged science fiction readers to take a good hard look at the literary qualities of their favourite writers. What united such writers (including **Barry Gilliam** from New York) was the desire to write as clearly as possible, to get rid of the verbal persiflage that surrounded the average university thesis. As Harry Warner Jr put it, we wrote 'straight talk about science fiction'.

However, as Brian Aldiss put it, 'cheerfulness keeps breaking in'. Seriousness of purpose eventually had to be matched by tales of fandom at play. As soon as I started producing *SF Commentary*, I realised that I would need to include news about the science fiction scene in Australia. We had our news-zines, especially *Norstrilian News*, begun by John Foyster, but they were mainly intended for local fans. *SFC* was also aimed at international readers.

**Tony Thomas** was one of those people I value most, People Who Take the Trouble. From 1968 to the early 1970s he taped, then transcriptions panel discussions from conventions. The authors' panel from the Melbourne SF Conference of 1968 appeared in *SFC* 3. It contains lots of analytical talk about science fiction, but the tone is informal and irreverent.

My editorials loosened up. They became pages of my diary, my life in monthly episodes. I began to include such articles as **David Grigg's** tale of his interstate motor-bike ride. In 1972, I produced my first issue entirely devoted to 'personal journalism'. **Leigh Edmonds**, **Bill Wright**, **Harry Warner Jr**, and I each wrote a long article about 'My 1971'.

What has been consistent about the writing published during 50 years of *SF Commentary*? Disagreement. George Turner, my main contributor for more than 20 years,

liked nothing better than a good verbal fight.

Here are some items from my **Proposal for a Best of SF Commentary**, which I submitted to Liverpool University Press in the year 2000. (My proposal was accepted by a staff member who did nothing about publishing the accepted volume.)

Take the discussion about **Samuel Delany's *Nova*** (Gollancz, 1969):

- No. 13 (July 1970, pp. 9–10. John Gibson: Review of Samuel Delany's *Nova*  
No. 14 (Aug. 1970), pp. 7–10. Barry Gillam: 'A Tune Beyond Us, Yet Ourselves: The *Nova* Notes'  
No. 17 (Nov. 1970), pp. 7–9. LETTER: Franz Rottensteiner on Delany's *Nova*  
No. 17, pp. 31–42. George Turner: 'Back to the Cactus': Reviews of the new novels of 1969/1970: Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Philip Dick's *Ubik*, Joanna Russ's *And Chaos Died*, Ron Goulart's *After Things Fell Apart*, Michael Moorcock's *The Black Corridor*, Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Samuel Delany's *Nova*, Avram Davidson's *The Phoenix and the Mirror*, Michael Moorcock's (ed.) *Best of New Worlds 5* and Aldiss and Harrison's *Year's Best SF No. 3*  
No. 19 (Jan.–Feb.–Mar. 1971), pp. 40–9. Samuel Delany: 'On Criticism'.

**Barry Gillam** from New York was one of my most consistent and valued contributors in the 1970s. Also, he showed me over New York when I visited in 1973. Like George Turner he wasn't afraid to take up contrary positions. In this case, most of the other contributors poured contempt on *Nova*, but Barry wrote a brilliant essay in praise of it. Meanwhile, **John Foyster** had been in constant contact with **Samuel Delany**; hence the inclusion in *SFC* of his major essay 'On Criticism' (reprinted from John's tiny fanzine *exploding madonna*).

**Stanislaw Lem's** articles were difficult to read for me and most of my readers because of being translated from Polish into German, then into English. **Franz Rottensteiner** provided most of the translations, but my old friend **Werner Koopmann** translated the Lem article from 1973 that caused affront throughout the SF world:

- No. 35/36/37 (July–Sep. 1973), pp. 7–36. Stanislaw Lem: 'Science Fiction: A Hopeless Case: With Exceptions': includes long discussion of work of Philip K. Dick  
No. 38 (Sep. 1974), pp. 10–33. George Turner: 'SL: A Hopeless Case: With No Exceptions': reply to Lem  
No. 41/42 (Feb. 1975), pp. 90–3. LETTER: Stanislaw Lem to his critics  
No. 38 (Sep. 1974), pp. 37–45. George Turner: 'Yes, But Who Said What?: A Reconsideration of *Solaris* and Its Problems'.

Because of the difficulty of re-gaining the rights to Lem's material, *The Best of SF Commentary* will probably be never published. However, if you can find a copy of Norstrilia Press's **Philip K. Dick: *Electric Shepherd***, you can read Lem's original article.

Take another argument begun by **Stanislaw Lem**:

- No. 24 (Nov. 1971), pp. 17–24. Stanislaw Lem: 'Lost Opportunities': Reviews of M. K. Joseph's *The Hole in the Zero* and Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*  
No. 25 (Dec. 1971), pp. 8–10. LETTER: George Turner on Lem/*Left Hand*  
No. 26 (Apr. 1972), pp. 90–3. Ursula Le Guin on Lem/*Left Hand*.

**Ursula Le Guin's** reply to Lem's adverse analysis of the structure of *The Left Hand of Darkness* is one of the greatest articles I've published. Pamela Sargent reprinted it as a very long footnote to the introduction to the original edition of her anthology *Women of Wonder*.

The most accurate way of demonstrating the highlights of the early years of *SF Commentary* is to list the rest of the contents of the proposed **Best of SF Commentary**.

## The (rest of) The Best of SF Commentary: Proposed contents (articles and letters from 1969 to 1977)

- No. 1 (Jan. 1969), pp. 36–52. Bruce Gillespie: 'Mad Mad Worlds: Seven Novels of Philip K. Dick: Part 1'  
No. 2 (Mar. 1969), pp. 44–7. Bruce Gillespie: 'Mad Mad Worlds: Seven Novels of Philip K. Dick: Part 2'  
No. 9 (Feb. 1970), pp. 11–26. Bruce Gillespie: 'Philip K. Dick: The Real Thing'  
(The above three articles appear in Bruce Gillespie (ed.), **Philip K. Dick: *Electric Shepherd*** (1975))  
No. 1, pp. 19–23. Damien Broderick: 'The Anti-Bodhisattva: Kurt Vonnegut's *Sirens of Titan* and Cat's Cradle'  
No. 7 (Nov. 69), pp. 14–16. John Gibson: 'The Button-Pushers on Level 7'  
No. 7, pp. 17–25. Bruce Gillespie: 'Laugh Along with Sigmund Aldiss'  
No. 9, pp. 34–44. Stanislaw Lem: 'Introduction to a Structural Analysis of Science Fiction'  
No. 10 (Mar.–Apr. 1970), pp. 6–9. John Foyster: 'Frogs and Snails and Puppy-Dogs' Tails: The Science Fiction Writer'  
No. 10, pp. 24–7. John Foyster: 'Portrait of a Man Unknown: The Science Fiction Critic'  
No. 10, pp. 14–23. John Foyster: 'H. Bruce Franklin's *Future Imperfect*'  
No. 11 (May 1970), pp. 12–18. George Turner: 'Golden Age — Paper Age: or Where Did All the Classics Go?' (tribute to H. G. Wells)  
No. 12 (June 1970), pp. 11–17. Bruce Gillespie: Review of Carr & Wollheim (eds.): *World's Best Science Fiction 1969*  
No. 13 (July 1970), pp. 2–4. LETTER: G. K. Saunders  
No. 14 (Aug. 1970), pp. 5–6. LETTER: Stanislaw Lem  
No. 16 (Oct. 70), pp. 7–9. Barry Gillam: Review of John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*  
No. 16, pp. 22–4. Barry Gillam: Review of George Romero's *The Night of the Living Dead*  
No. 16, pp. 19–22. Marvin Zeman: Review of Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville*  
No. 19 (Jan.–Feb.–Mar. 1971), pp. 55–60. Franz Rottensteiner: 'Mr Budrys and the Active Life': Algis Budrys' criticism



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

- No. 19, pp. 72–85. Franz Rottensteiner: 'Chewing Gum for the Vulgar': general survey of the fiction of Robert Heinlein
- No. 19, pp. 86–8. George Turner: 'An Approach to Science Fiction'
- No. 19, pp. 94–6. Stanislaw Lem: 'The Ten Commandments': critique of Harlan Ellison's *Paingod* collection
- No. 19, pp. 113–17. George Turner: 'Sturgeon's Sadism'
- No. 19, pp. 117–30. Stanislaw Lem: 'Robots in Science Fiction'
- No. 20 (Apr. 1971), pp. 5–9. Bruce Gillespie: Report on Australian New Year's Convention 1971
- No. 20, pp. 33–8. Stanislaw Lem: 'Unitas Oppositorum: The Prose of Jorge Luis Borges'
- No. 21 (May 1971), pp. 11–16. Franz Rottensteiner: 'A Symposium of Innocence': Review of George Hay (ed.): *The Disappearing Future: A Symposium of Speculation*
- No. 22 (July 1971), pp. 2–10, 40–9. Stanislaw Lem: 'Sex in Science Fiction'
- No. 24 (Nov. 1971), pp. 42–4. LETTER: Phyrne Bacon on Lem/'Sex'
- No. 25 (Dec. 1971), pp. 19–26. LETTER: Philip José Farmer on Lem/'Sex'
- No. 29 (Aug. 1972), pp. 10–12. LETTER: Stanislaw Lem to Farmer
- No. 22, pp. 19–26. Barry Gillam: Review of George Lucas's *THX 1138*
- No. 23 (Sep. 1971), pp. 14–17. Barry Gillam: Review of James Sallis's *A Few Last Words*
- No. 23, pp. 39–43. Barry Gillam: 'The Science of Nigromancy: L. Sprague de Camp'
- No. 24, pp. 3–11. Bruce Gillespie: 'Where We're Arriving': Wilson Tucker's *The Year of the Quiet Sun*
- No. 26 (Apr. 1972), pp. 90–3. LETTER: Wilson Tucker on Gillespie/*Quiet Sun*
- No. 24, pp. 25–34. Bruce Gillespie: 'Steps into the Heart of Nowhere: Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*'
- No. 26, pp. 28–9. LETTER: Stanislaw Lem on Gillespie/*Solaris*
- No. 25, pp. 37–42. Bruce Gillespie and Sandra Miesel: 'Whoops! There Goes Another Galaxy': opposed reviews on Poul Anderson's *Tau Zero* (6 pp.)
- No. 26, pp. 6–12. Bruce Gillespie: 'No Autographs After

- Midnight': 1972 New Year's Convention, Adelaide
- No. 26, pp. 56–62. John Gibson: 'The Nightmare of Black London: Richard Jefferies' *After London*'
- No. 26, pp. 67–88. Bruce Gillespie: 'The SF Novels of Brian W. Aldiss: Part 1: The Great Adventures'
- No. 28 (July 1972). 'Leigh Edmonds' 1971' (pp. 2–16). 'Bill Wright's 1971' (17–20); 'Harry Warner Jr's 1971' (pp. 21–36); 'Bruce Gillespie's 1971' (pp. 37–50)
- No. 29 (Aug. 1972), pp. 19–24. Barry Gillam: 'Clockwork Kubrick': on Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*
- No. 29, pp. 13–18. John Foyster reviews William Atheling Jr's (James Blish's) *The Issue at Hand*
- No. 29, pp. 25–42, 48. Bruce Gillespie: 'The SF Novels of Brian W. Aldiss: Part 2: Poor Little Warriors'
- No. 31 (Dec. 1972), pp. 9–26. Philip K. Dick: 'The Android and the Human' (including introductory letter)
- No. 31, pp. 27–39. Bruce Gillespie: 'Ivan Illich in Melbourne'
- No. 35/36/37 (July–Sep. 1973), pp. 49–56. Gerald Murnane and Barry Gillam: 'Fiction, Truths and Billy Pilgrim': *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Murnane on Kurt Vonnegut's novel; Gillam on George Roy Hill's film
- No. 38 (Sep. 1974), pp. 4–9: J. G. Ballard's *Crash*: reviews by Lee Harding and George Turner
- No. 39 (Nov. 1973), pp. 4–6. George Turner: 'Traps': Gene Wolfe's *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*
- No. 39, pp. 10–18. George Turner: 'Letters to the Editor': Review of *New Dimensions 1*, ed. Robert Silverberg
- No. 40 (May 1974), pp. 33–45. Richard Delap: Review of *Again, Dangerous Visions*, ed. Harlan Ellison
- No. 41/42 (Feb. 1975), pp. 31–46. Bruce Gillespie: 'Something Marvellous that No one Else Had Discovered: On Gerald Murnane's *Tamarisk Row*'
- No. 44/45 (Dec. 1975), pp. 87–9. LETTER: Gerald Murnane on Gillespie/*Tamarisk*
- No. 41/42, pp. 47–54. Gerald Murnane: 'Other Eyes, Other Universes': Speech at Melbourne Eastercon 1973
- No. 41/42, pp. 61–4. George Turner: Review of Thomas Disch's *334*
- No. 41/42, pp. 65–74. George Turner: 'Paradigm and Pattern: Form and Meaning in *The Dispossessed*'
- No. 41/42, pp. 75–9. Peter Nicholls: 'Teaching Children the Value of Death': Ursula Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore*
- No. 43 (Aug. 1975) (pp. 3–63): THE TUCKER ISSUE: Contributions by Bruce Gillespie, Ed Connor, Paul Walker interviews Bob Tucker, Lesleigh Luttrell, Hank Luttrell, Denny Lien
- No. 44/45, pp. 4–12. Bruce Gillespie: 'My 1975'
- No. 44/45, pp. 15–19. Bruce Gillespie: review of Christopher Priest's *Fugue for a Darkening Island* and Gerald Murnane: review of Priest's *Inverted World*
- No. 48/49/50 (Oct.–Dec. 1976), pp. 22–3. LETTER: Christopher Priest on Gillespie/Murnane on Priest
- No. 44/45, pp. 24–8. Angus Taylor: 'The Politics of Space, Time and Entropy: Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*'
- No. 44/45, pp. 29–32. George Turner: 'The Remembrance of Things Present': on Gene Wolfe's *Peace*
- No. 44/45, pp. 39–58. Owen Webster: 'John Wyndham as a Novelist of Ideas'
- No. 44/45, pp. 66–70. Bruce Gillespie: Review of Franz Rottensteiner (ed.): *View from Another Shore*
- No. 44/45, pp. 70–4. Bruce Gillespie: Review of Strugatsky Brothers' *Hard to be a God*
- No. 46 (May 1976), pp. 15–20, 33. Reba Estra: 'Tomorrow for Non-believers: A Study of Books for Young People by Robert A. Heinlein'
- No. 48/49/50, pp. 32–8. Sneja Gunew: 'To Light a Candle



is to Cast a Shadow: *The Earthsea Trilogy* and *The Left Hand of Darkness*  
 No. 48/49/50, pp. 39–46. Peter Nicholls and George Turner: 'Plumbers of the Cosmos: The Aussiecon Debate'  
 No. 48/49/50, pp. 72–4. Bruce Gillespie: Review of Thomas Disch's *Getting into Death*  
 No. 48/49/50, pp. 83–5. Van Ikin: Review of Joanna Russ's

*The Female Man* (2 pp.)  
 No. 52 (July 1977), pp. 3–7. Andrew Whitmore: 'The Novels of D. G. Compton'

And that's the end of the *first* decade of *SF Commentary*. Yes, I do need to scan these issues. But I don't have time at the moment.

## The early years: Hand-made magazines

The cover of *SF Commentary* 1 was one of the worst covers ever attached to a 300-copy genzine sent all around the world. At the start of 1969 I had no idea how to illustrate any part of my proposed fanzine.

Today's 'fanzine publishers', the **Sticky Institute** crowd who know nothing about SF fanzines such as *Ooopsla!*, *Hyphen*, and *Le Zombie*, call their fanzines 'hand-made magazines'. Which they are. Their editors scorn the use of computers. They have returned to the delights of typing and photocopying the pages, and pasting or stitching them together. They call their annual celebrations The Festival of the Photocopier. They know nothing of the limitations of working with an ink duplicator.

Few people in our fandom remember the limitations of producing fanzines with a duplicator. The last time I produced a fanzine with stencils and duplicator was nearly 30 years ago. I won't attempt to describe the process, since you can probably find it described on Wikipedia.

Once I had access to the right kind of typewriter (which was not until No 5) I could produce a reasonably

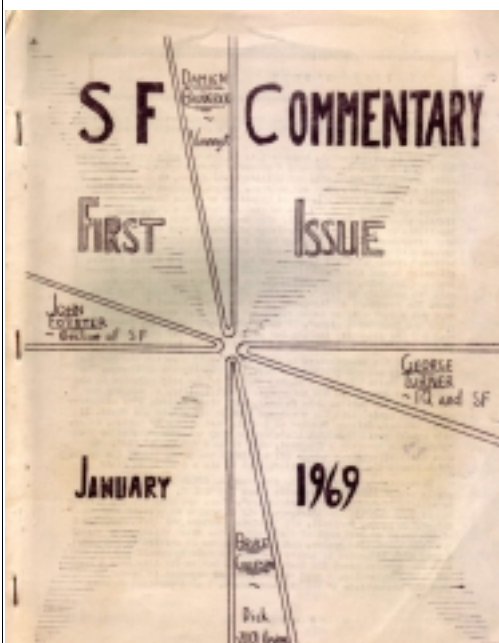
good-looking page of text. But I was stuck up at Ararat, 130 miles west of Melbourne, and I had little idea of how to produce an attractive cover. **John Bangsund** drew covers for me for Nos 2 and 3. **Stephen Campbell** gave me a piece of art. I was told about **Noel Kerr**'s electrostencilling service. Noel was a professional printer who produced very good-looking fanzines at home in Carnegie. His electrostencil machine would take a photograph of the artwork and carve the image into a carbon stencil, which would fit on my machine. Luckily for me, Stephen in Ararat and **Dimitrii Razuvaev** in Melbourne produced a series of covers that didn't look too bad, but would have looked a lot better if I had been able to afford offset printing. I had no idea where I could find multiple sources of cover art, so produced some issues (Nos 8 and 10) without any. I had no way of including interior artwork. I also did not realise that if I wanted artwork from the top fan artists, I had to ask.

1971 was my miracle year. I moved from teaching to the Publications Branch at the Education Department. I was living back with my parents in a northern suburb of Melbourne. I could attend fan meetings, especially the weekly meetings at the Degraes Tavern in Melbourne. And I could wander out to Noel Kerr's place. John Bangsund taught me how to use Letraset for banner headings, and how to copy interior illustrations onto electrostencil, then cut them out and paste them into regular stencils.

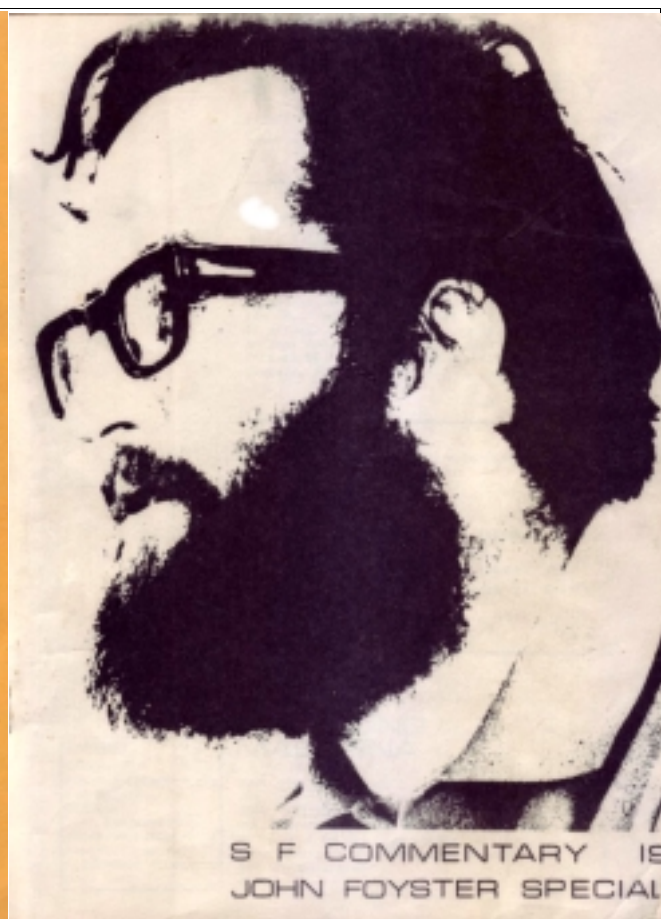
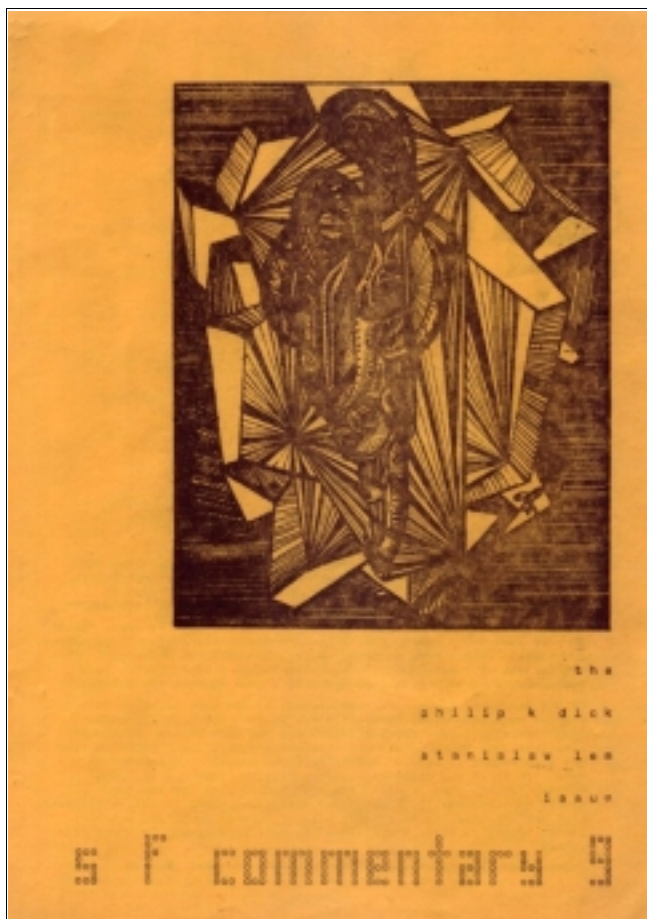
My first fanzine that looked as good as I wanted it to was *SF Commentary* 19, my first gigantic fanzine, which reprinted all of **John Foyster**'s fanzines *exploding madonna* and *The Journal of Omphalistic Epistemology*. **Lee Harding** took the photo of John Foyster on the cover; **John Bangsund** designed the cover; and **Dimitrii Razuvaev** designed two interior pages.

Looking back through the first decade's *SFCs*, I find that local artists kept me well stocked with cover and interior artwork. Unfortunately, **Dimitrii Razuvaev**, who should have become one of Australia's finest book designers, disappeared from sight. Nobody has any idea what happened to him.

Luckily, in 1972 Lee Harding met a very smart and brilliant artist and **Irene Pagram**, who was not a fan but who saw the point of fanzine artwork. Over the next ten years she provided many of my favourite covers and interior illustrations. She developed her own spectacular style, not based on anything else you might find on fanzine covers at the time. My own favourite is the double cover she gave me for the Stanislaw Lem issue of *SF*



Above: The worst first issue cover ever?



Above (L.) Dimitrii Razuvaev's cover for *SFC* 9; (r.) John Bangsund's design for *SFC* 19 cover; photo by Lee Harding.  
Below: Two of Stephen Campbell's covers from the very early days of *SFC*: (L.) *SFC* 6 (Sep. 1969) and *SFC* 12 (June 1970).





*Commentary* (No. 35/36/37), July–Sep. 1973. The front page is illustrated here. When George Turner and John Foyster wielded their axe on Lem’s arguments in *SFC* 38 (Sep. 1974), Irene provided a complementary cover.

In 1969 you might have received from me a fanzine, *SF Commentary* 1, that looked less like a magazine than a poorly executed school project. Why would you read this rag, let alone send a letter of comment?

I’ve been asking myself this question for the last 50 years. Perhaps some of the love and hope that went into the issue rubbed off onto each issue. How else to explain the fact that *SFC* 1 elicited a letter of comment from **Philip K. Dick** — and quite a few of well-known major fan writers? From the very beginning, the letter column became the centre of the magazine. Some early issues consisted of nothing but the reviews section and a huge

letter column (which, emulating John Bangsund and Edmund Wilson, I called ‘Invisible Whistling Bunyips’). Nobody liked the layout, of course, but correspondents were too busy raising cudgels to each other to worry about the look of the thing. **John Brunner** took several pages to upbraid **Jack Wodhams** for an off-the-cuff remark made during the 1969 Authors’ Panel (*SFC* 3). By the middle of 1973, the letters column occupied half of the gigantic *SFC* 36/36/37. When I began combining my diary entries (including convention reports) with ferocious barneys (often replying to Stanislaw Lem or Franz Rottensteiner), I would find myself in the middle of a storm effect that has little to do with the force or quality of the new articles or review being published. If I had time and available space, I would include in this issue a compendium of some of the best letters from those early years, but I don’t.

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## SFC: The following 40 years ...

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Here is where I attempt to summarise the story of the other 40 years of *SF Commentary* and my other magazines.

In 1977 I became deluded by visions of grandeur — or least visions of not remaining poverty stricken forever. Foolish man. I entertained an idea of going commercial, and earning a living, however meagre, from the magazine. **Bruce Barnes** lent me a substantial amount of money, which would kicked-started me. I was earning a pittance as Assistant Editor of *The Secondary Teacher*, the magazine of the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association. When I was writing reviews for *The Melbourne Times*, I had met the production team there. Suzie was typesetting the whole newspaper, every week, on an IBM Selectric Composer, the forerunner of computer typesetting. She let me sit in her office for a few weekends to type *SFCs* 76 and 77 (in real fonts, with real leading and justification). I pasted down the pages, obtained some fabulous artwork from **Irene Pagram** and **Stephen Campbell** (who had resurfaced in Melbourne after disappearing for years), then printed 1000 copies of each of these issues! I still can’t believe I did anything so stupid, but I was still very young (30 in 1977).

I sent out the copies to as many fannish addresses as I could find. I expected to be flooded with new subscriptions. Watch out, **Dick Geis**, **Charlie Brown**, and **Andy Porter**! (They are the only fanzine editors who have ever made a living from publishing fanzines.) But what I had sent people was a *fanzine*. You don’t pay for fanzines with mere cash! You pay with letters of comment and traded fanzines.

In March 1978 Elaine and I got together, and exactly a year later were married. I wrote about these glorious events in *SFC* at the time. I was determined to keep going with the magazine itself, but became frustrated because I could no longer keep up with the vast flood of SF books that were being published. (This was the *Star Wars* effect.) In 1975 I could say I had read all of the major SF anthologies and magazines, and most of the novels that were eligible for the Hugo Award. By 1980, I had heard

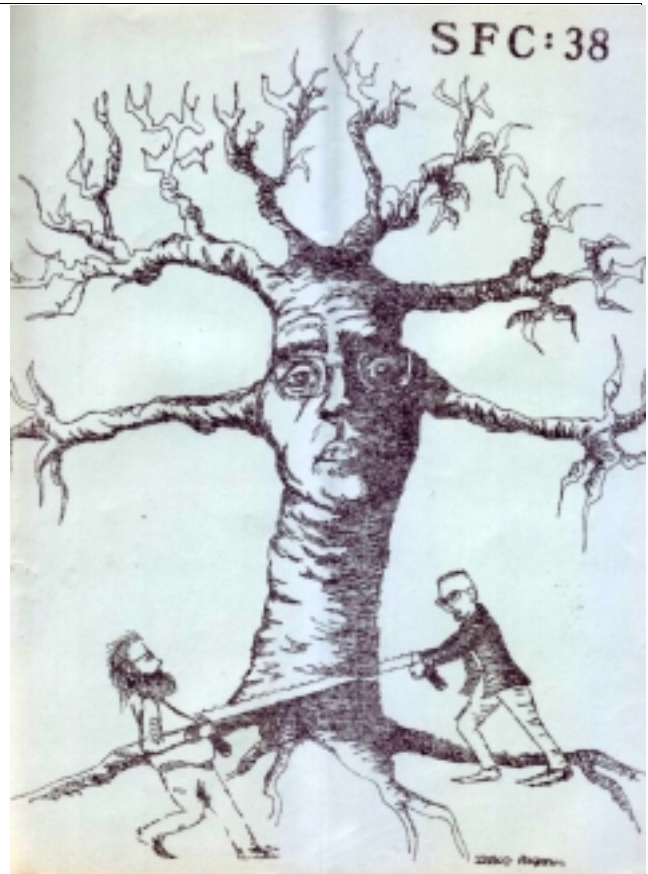
of almost none of the books or stories on the Hugo nomination list.

At the same time, **Norstrilia Press** had purchased its own IBM Selectric Composer, and I became its typesetter. I typeset all the later Norstrilia Press books, and also quite many for Hyland House and Cory & Collins. I’ve never been busier, but I also managed to typeset *SFCs* 80 to 86. Things fell apart financially from 1982 to 1984, so I produced nothing but fanzines for ANZAPA.

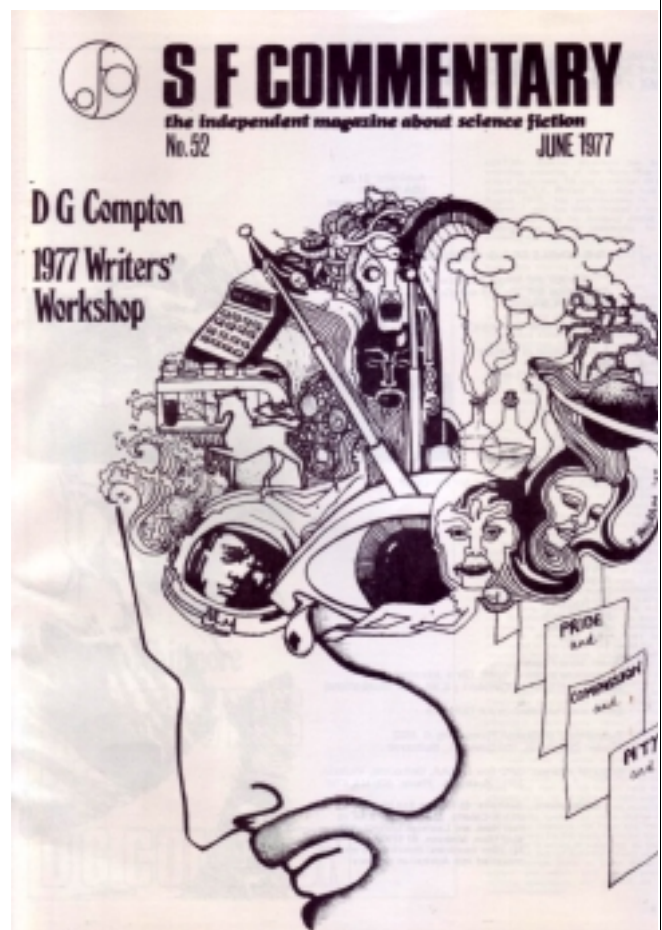
In 1984, I decided to produce a personal fanzine, *The Metaphysical Review*. I bought my first Roneo duplicator from John Bangsund, to replace the Gestetner, and set off on what seemed a new direction. It wasn’t, of course. A Gillespie fanzine is always a Gillespie fanzine, no matter what the title. People who had missed receiving *SF Commentary* began to send me articles about science fiction. I also produced a fannish issue, **Don Ashby**’s account of life at the Magic Pudding Club (*TMR* 4) and the special Music Issue, which includes my article about Roy Orbison and Robert Day’s long article about the symphonies of Dmitri Shostakovich. **Yvonne Rousseau**, who had become my major contributor of brilliant analytic essays about science fiction, wrote a long account of the Garden Party we held at our place in Collingwood in 1992 — without having been at the party. She was living in Adelaide, and based her account entirely on telephone conversations.

*SF Commentary* returned in 1989 for the **Twentieth Anniversary Issue**, with nearly seven years between issues. By now, real computer typesetting was raising its hoary head. I was using the Ventura program to edit and typeset books at **Macmillan Publishers** in South Melbourne, and applying the same methods to my magazines. **Charles Taylor** helped me produce the first two typeset issues. **Race Mathews**, former MSFC member and politician for thirty years, was involuntarily retired at the 1993 Victorian state election. He gathered a group of olde-time SF fans (of which Elaine and I were among the youngest) to watch movies. **Dick Jenssen**, who had dis-





Some of the many *SFC* covers by Irene Pagram. Above (l.) Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*: *SFC* 35/36/37; and (r.) John Foyster's and George Turner's replies to Lem: *SFC* 38. Below (l.) *SFC* 47 (Aug. 1976): Irene's depiction of the Gillespie household, ruled by my cat Flodnap; and (r.) *SFC* 52 (June 1977): illustration for Andrew Whitmore's article about the novels of D. G. Compton.



appeared from fandom in 1971, was among the group. He had retired from his job as head of the Meteorology Department at Melbourne University, and was looking for a way to exercise his computer skills. What better way than to create computer graphics for fanzines like mine and **Bill Wright's**, hungry for cover art? Dick bought new programs and computers. With the help of my friends at my printer, **Copyplace**, I could offer colour covers for the first time. In the mid 1990s *SF Commentary* took the form it has today.

Since I could now reproduce line art and photos much better than I'd been able to with the duplicator, I began to receive contributions from some of the best of the overseas fan artists, especially **Steve Stiles**, **Brad Foster**, **Sheryl Birkhead**, **Amy Harlib**, and **Teddy Harvia** (David Thayer), colour art from Melbourne artist **Carol Kewley**, and a stream of artwork from **David Russell** (from Warrnambool) and **Stephen Campbell** (there's that man again; now from Warrnambool). **Elaine Cochrane** and **Dick Jenssen** have produced some spectacular covers based on the fractals images generated by Dick's DJFractals software.

If I haven't mentioned your name somewhere in this issue, it's not for lack of trying. Please forgive me.

For instance, I seem not to have mentioned **Bill Wright** nearly enough, although he has been a great help to all my efforts over the years. He organised the **Bring Bruce Bayside Fund** in 2004, which enabled me to visit my American friends for the second time.

I haven't mentioned **Giampaolo Cossato**, my Italian correspondent for 50 years. When he was living in London in 1969, he arranged to send me the issues of *New Worlds* (the *Bug Jack Barron* issues) that were banned in Australia. Since then he has kept sending me letters and subscriptions.

**John Litchen** is mentioned in this issue from time to time, but it's hard to thank him enough for his friendship over the years. I have never added up the sheer amount of text and photos he has sent me to *SFC*, *Steam Engine Time*, *\*brg\*/Scratch Pad*, and *Treasure*. He has published several books based on the material he has sent to my magazines, and I'm sure he has much still to write about.

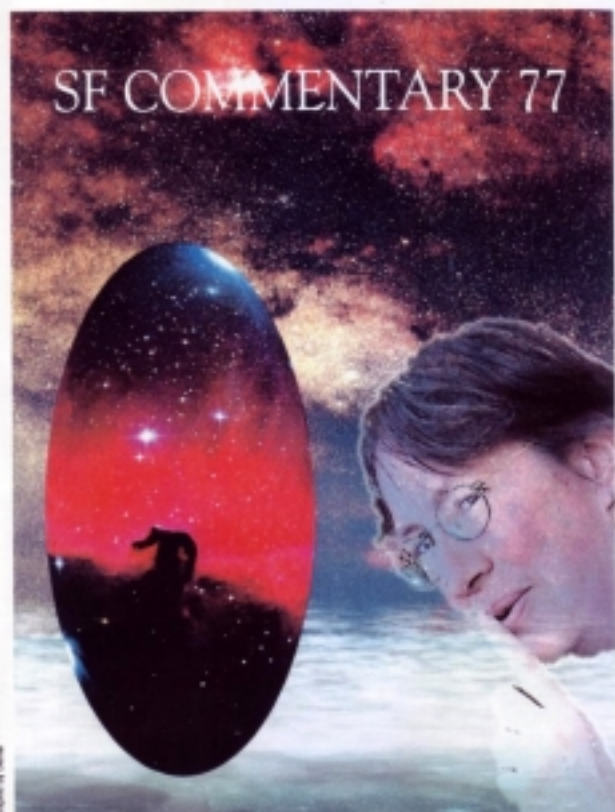
Two people, as well as my wife Elaine, have saved me from bankruptcy at important times in my life, and neither would want to be mentioned. But forever thank you.

— **Bruce Gillespie**, 23 February 2019

A very small selection of covers by Dick Jenssen (Ditmar):

Left: Cover of *SF Commentary* 81: 'Binary exploration'.

Right: Cover graphic for the *SF Commentary* 77.





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# Absent, not lost:

Tributes to Kate Wilhelm, Steve Sneyd, Randy Byers, Milt Stevens, Fred Patten, June Moffatt, Derek Kew, and Mervyn Barrett

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**In this early part of this following article, Gordon Van Gelder gives us some idea of the path of his career in publishing. Since leaving the editorship of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, Gordon has been a senior editor at Tor Books.**

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Gordon Van Gelder

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## Kate Wilhelm: An appreciation

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A slightly different version of this essay appeared in the September 2001 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*.

As if it's a violation of client/lawyer confidentiality, people generally consider it bad form for editors to write appreciations of the writers they edit. State secrets might be revealed, mistakes made; working relationships can get damaged.

However, since Kate Wilhelm's photograph has appeared under the definition of professionalism in my book — and has been fixed there for more than a decade — I made an exception. In fact, I'd been hankering to run a special Kate Wilhelm issue and to write a piece about Kate from the time I first interviewed for the job of editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* in 1996.

Since I worked at Bluejay Books and then at St Martin's Press before *F&SF*, I've been in a unique position of reading all the reviews for Kate's books, of hearing many people's thoughts on the woman and her works — so I think I've got an inkling of just how much her work has meant to people.

I've taken the phone calls from writers who say they owe it all to Kate. I've lunched with editors who complained that the new Kate Wilhelm novel isn't in their favourite series (and by the way, this one editor doesn't *really* see herself in Barbara Holloway's relationship with her father). I've had top-rank writers ask me *sotto voce* what strings we need to pull to get SFWA to name her a

Grand Master. I've had several writers quote me verbatim the words Kate used when she touched on the key element in their writing while critiquing their work. And I've shared moments with other professionals when they've put aside any suave façades and admitted that one story of Kate's or another brought us to tears.

I like to think this gives me some authority in calling Kate Wilhelm well loved.



Kate Wilhelm in the 1970s. (Photo: Richard Wilhelm.)

1 A book dealer once told Kate that several of her books were too scarce to qualify as 'rare'.



Let me start by confessing that I have not read every work of Ms Wilhelm's. My hunt for her elusive<sup>1</sup> third novel, *The Nevermore Affair*, only recently bore fruit. Other books have sat patiently on the shelf, abiding. There is a strong sense in Kate's work that things have their proper times and places; it does not do to rush, so I do not rush. I went decades without rereading *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*, the fourteen-year-old kid who found it at a garage sale in Norwood, New Jersey, expected that it would be better on the next reading, but I feared that some djinn of my youth might fly away when this particular bottle was unstopped.

The proper time finally came when I assembled an anthology of repopulation stories and yes, it turned out to be better than I remembered.

The stories I have read — two dozen novels out of three, perhaps eighty of a hundred stories — say a lot about Kate Wilhelm. Her women are not afraid of being smart, not afraid of being themselves, but often they find life kaleidoscoping uncontrollably around them. Her men are strong enough to show their love. Heroes rarely need to use force; villains tend to be people who aren't honest with themselves. Human behaviour and the physical world both pose mysteries worth solving. One need not span the globe to find good stories. Kate's characters generally prefer to dig their fingers into the soil they call home, and they like the feel of dirt and hard work. Good food should be savoured, life need not be led in quiet desperation, at the highest level of heaven awaits a fresh pot of coffee.

Perhaps you'd like a cup now?

Katie G. Meredith was born in Toledo in 1928 and, to her credit, I've never seen her make an attempt to hide this date. She and her brothers and sister grew up in Kentucky. She married fairly young, had two sons before her first marriage fell apart. Here's her author bio from 1962, when her first novel, was published:

Kate Wilhelm wrote this novel between the hours of 9 P.M. and midnight, when her two children were in bed. Cleveland born, [sic] she has spent most of her life in Kentucky. She has been an insurance underwriter, long-distance telephone operator and professional model. Her interests include astronomy, spelunking, hypnotism, lapidary work and fishing. At present she lives in Milford, Pennsylvania, where she is at work on her second novel.

The accompanying photo shows a dark-haired woman with startlingly clear eyes looking off-camera with a gaze that might be termed visionary and a trace of a smile on her lips to make Mona Lisa jealous.

You'll note the author bio mentions that she lived in Milford at the time. As many readers of this magazine already know, her home there was a big Victorian house called the Anchorage with her second husband, a writer and critic by the name of Damon Knight.

The reason so many readers are aware of this fact is because Kate and Damon hosted many many writing workshops there. I can't recall for certain if they met at a workshop, but as far as the history of science fiction is

concerned, they might as well have. By way of writing groups in Milford, Clarion, and eventually in Eugene, Oregon (their home since the mid 1970s), Kate and Damon consistently surrounded themselves with vibrant literary communities — they practically raised contemporary American science fiction.

The Milford days in particular have attained a status approaching myth: the players include most of SF's leading lights (Judith Merrill, Virginia Kidd, Ted Sturgeon, etcetera and etcetera). The stories and anecdotes, such as the group-mind incident (recounted by Damon in *The Futurians*) that inspired *More Than Human* loom larger than life. I had the privilege of viewing a short film that Ed Emsh made in Milford entitled *The Monster from Back Issues*. The spoof starred Damon, Algis Budrys, and Ted Cogswell, among others. Viewing it at David Hartwell's house with Emily Pohl-Weary (Judy and Fred's granddaughter) gave me the extra sense of watching an old film of the collective science fiction family. Thanks to Susan Emshwiller, it's now online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=waiA6ZNfEi8>.

A few more words about the writing workshops are in order here. In *A Pocketful of Stars* Kate wrote about her first workshop experience: she turned in an ambitious story and had it shredded. The man sitting next to her turned in some trivial fluff and got gentle, kid-glove critiques. After the workshop drubbing, Kate went down to the nearby stream and threw rocks at the water as hard as she could, until she realised her fellow workshopers treated her story firmly because they respected her and felt the story had potential. I recount this incident every time I'm in a workshop and almost every time I speak with someone who has been in a workshop. In fifty years, the anecdote may well be a twentieth-century tale of Hera's entry to Olympus.

Since that first workshop, Kate has hosted hundreds. She and Damon helped Robin Wilson found the Clarion workshops and for more than twenty years they taught the final two weeks. I saw Kate in action once, almost thirty years ago, and marvelled at her ability to analyse a story and gently but firmly bring out the weaknesses in a constructive manner. It is no wonder that writers can quote her decades later. It is no wonder that the roster of writers she helped foster includes such luminaries as Kim Stanley Robinson, George Alec Effinger, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Robert Crais, Nicola Griffith, Lucius Shepard, and dozens more. In the year 2000 (around the time I first wrote this piece), all four winners of the Nebula Award for fiction were former students of Kate's.

But a great teacher is not necessarily a great writer and it's rare to find both skills in one person. Kate is a lifelong student of the craft of fiction, which probably helps explain the path of her career. She began selling stories to the SF magazines in the mid 1950s and, as the accompanying bibliography shows, was selling rather steadily to a variety of sf magazines. Her first novel, *More Bitter Than Death*, was a mystery. Clayton Rawson, her editor, said that if she stuck to one genre, Kate would become a bestseller ... but Kate told me, 'I couldn't do it.' Those many interests in her bio notes (which, in truth, only scratched the surface) would take her in too many directions.

Having come to the early work late, I have to admit

that I haven't found it as engaging as the joys to come. I was struck by John Campbell's comments to Kate in a 1957 letter:

You have an easy, pleasing and readable style, one that would, moreover, be a marked change in science fiction. However, your stories have rather hazy, gentle motivating forces behind them — which, while that too is somewhat different in science fiction, is not quite so desirable a difference.

Ah, I thought when I encountered this letter in the first volume of Campbell's letters. Here at once is what she brought to the field initially, and perhaps a reason why the early work doesn't compel me.

With history to show, it's easy to say now that Kate's work didn't blossom until the mid 1960s, when the New Wave opened up the SF field to more experimentation. In particular, an anthology series known as *Orbit*, edited by none other than Damon Knight, gave her a place to experiment. (I think the fact that many of Kate's stories feature scientists with experiments gone wrong — or right — reflects her own interest in testing out new approaches to storytelling.) Kate went on to publish a score of stories in *Orbit*, including masterpieces like 'The Infinity Box', 'The Encounter', and the original novella of 'Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang', firmly establishing herself as a top-flight writer. Her novels in this period moved away from the more conventional SF elements and began exploring new psychological territory — books like *Margaret and I* (pity that John Campbell never got to experience the motivating forces in this one) and *Fault Lines* moved wherever the story took them, regardless of genre conventions.

'The problem with labels', wrote Kate in 1975, introducing *The Infinity Box*, 'is that they all too quickly become eroded; they cannot cope with borderline cases.' The borderline cases tend to be the ones that interest Kate, and the deception of appearances is a consistent theme in her books, especially the Barbara Holloway novels.

By the mid 1980s, when I first got to work with her, Kate had started writing the Constance and Charlie mysteries along with romantic comedies such as *Oh, Susannah!* and *Crazy Time*. In 1990, she blended chaos theory with the legal thriller in *Death Qualified* and had her biggest commercial success to date. (State secrets revealed? Here's one: during the negotiations for *Death Qualified*, Kate said the reason she'd parted ways with her previous publishers had always been because she wrote a book the editor simply didn't *get*. I ask you, what's not to get in a novel that's partly a whodunit, partly a courtroom thriller, partly a science fiction novel about chaos? Labels do indeed erode.)

Never one to repeat herself or write the same book over again, Kate surprised everyone when she found that Barbara Holloway, the lawyer heroine of *Death Qualified*, offered her the best way to tell another story. Here's how Kate described it in 1994:

I was convinced that I had finished with my

character Barbara Holloway when I completed the novel *Death Qualified*, and I was surprised when she kept coming to mind in various scenes for which I had no story. I wasn't even trying to imagine her in a real situation much less a novel again, but there she was, a presence in my mind. One image of her in particular was maddening in its persistence: she was standing on a cliff overlooking a small cove, speaking to the ocean. But I didn't know what she was saying.

Then, while on vacation, I met a young woman who began to talk about her problems with a younger brother who was mistreating her, hitting and slapping her. She had an answer for every suggestion I offered. She can't defend herself; he is much bigger than she is. She can't complain to her parents; they take his side and the attacks become more vicious. She can't leave; her brother and her father would make her mother suffer the consequences. Then she said her father had brutalized her mother for as long as she could remember, and her mother is stuck because she has no place to go, no one she can turn to, and she has no skills to earn a living by herself.

In four months, Kate wrote *The Best Defense*. That anger that sparked the book does not typify all of Kate's work, but I mention it because it represents the passion that goes into her fiction. People frequently dub Kate Wilhelm a feminist writer because her books often feature strong women characters and often deal with women's issues, but I've never seen Kate as writing to any particular *ism*. She writes about the things that are important to her; be the subject the over-medication of the mentally ill, a woman's right to choose, or something as 'simple' as the matter of love, she brings wisdom and passion to bear in depicting it.

There is also extraordinary intelligence at work in her fiction. One of Kate's mystery novels hinges on the use of the 'morning after' abortion drug, RU-486. Half a decade later, I was in an editorial meeting in which a mystery using the same plot element was being touted as the next big commercial thing, and I realised once again how often Kate grasps a new concept, turns it over and around, and holds its flaws up to light before most people have even recognised it for what it is. Small wonder her stories seem to be ahead of their time so frequently — twenty-five years before *Survivor* hit the TV screens, she practically predicted it in 'Ladies and Gentlemen, This Is Your Crisis.'

Before I get carried away and leave myself with nothing to say on panels, I'll restrain myself to a few more points:

- The role of family in Kate Wilhelm's work is an essay in itself (if not an entire book) — her portraits and studies of siblings, married couples, and children are assured and perceptive. One critic told me he saw Constance Leidl and Charlie Meiklejohn as stand-ins for Kate and Damon, but I find the resemblances superficial. It's definitely true, however, that family plays a big role in Kate's life as well

as in her fiction — in fact, she collaborated with her son Richard on one book, and he produced the cover for the Kate Wilhelm issue of *F&SF*.

- Another state secret: the last part of a story Kate usually writes is the title. People in the sales department at St Martin's didn't like the title *Death Qualified* and threatened to rename the book *The Butterfly Effect*. (These included some of the same people who felt that *The Silence of the Lambs* was a weak title.) Kate's working title for the novella in the 9/01 *F&SF* was 'What Color Were Leif Ericson's Underpants?'
- In high school, Kate took an employment aptitude test that told her she was meant to be an architect. Before you laugh, think of how prominent a role buildings play in novels such as *Smart House*, *The Good Children*, and *Cambio Bay*. If you ever get the feeling that you could find your way around one of the houses in Kate's books, that might be because she draws maps of the major locales for her books while she's working on them.
- At one point, I found myself hard-pressed to identify what literary traditions fostered her fiction — for someone who is so very widely read, Kate Wilhelm's work strikes me as being very independent. Then I sat on a panel at an SF convention in Ohio in which we discussed what (if anything) characterises Ohioan fiction. Maureen McHugh and the others (including Ron Sarti and Juanita Coulson) very eloquently summed up the characteristics of what

Maureen dubbed 'heartland' fiction — modest, independent, suburban fiction that's far more interested in average folks than in supermen. I cited Leigh Brackett and *The Long Tomorrow* as a prime example ... and I find that Kate Wilhelm's work fits in this tradition. Somewhat. Hers is not fiction that can be pigeonholed easily.

In that mordant way of his, Barry Malzberg said that he went through a period of reading lots of writers' biographies until he realised they all follow the same pattern: early struggles, followed by a big success, after which there's the long slow descent into despair and substance abuse. There's plenty of truth to this observation, but let's remember too that this romantic model sells books far better than does the story of someone who devotes herself to craft, who favours nurturing to self-destruction, whose drug of choice is caffeine, and who manages to spin out yarns year after year that amuse, enlighten, entertain, and entrance. Such writers might not get the obsessive fascination that belongs to those who live fast and die young, but every now and then, at times like this, we can try to tell writers like Kate Wilhelm just how grateful we are for all the joy they've given us. And now that Kate has left us, we can take a little consolation in thinking that maybe they got the message when it counted most.

© — Gordon Van Gelder, 2001, 2018

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## Bruce Gillespie, Dave Langford, Andrew Darlington: Tributes to Steve Sneyd

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### Bruce Gillespie, June 2018

Elaine has just heard from Pete Presford in Britain that the seemingly eternal Steve Sneyd has died at the age of 76 or 77. Publisher of the last hand-written fanzine *Data Dump*, writer of incredibly enthusiastic (and in recent years nearly illegible) handwritten letters of comment, his activity remained frenetic and informative, but perhaps only a shadow of work he has done in earlier days, long before we began swapping fanzines and letters. I hope somebody can write his biography. I had worried that I had not heard from him for at least six months, although Pete Presford reports that he spent only a couple of weeks in hospital before his death.

### Dave Langford, Ansible 328, July 2018

Steve Sneyd (1941–2018), UK SF poet, bibliographer,

and small-press publisher named as a Grand Master by the SF Poetry Association in 2015, died on 13 June aged 77. His Hilltop Press published much research into fanzine poems and brought such SF poets as Lilith Lorraine back into print; his crabbedly handwritten newsletter of genre poetry, *Data Dump* (222 issues 1991–2016) remains a valuable though hard-to-read resource. Steve was a long-time *Ansible* correspondent and a good friend. I am of course sad that a long-time, engagingly cranky, and much-loved correspondent has gone. I heard from him earlier this year, and before that had a postcard saying that he'd been feeling low on energy and reluctant to resume his monthly *Data Dump*, the handwritten newsletter about sf poetry. When he reached No. 200 in 2014 I included a scan in the online *Ansible* to convey the general feel and also Steve's justification for this mode of publication:

— Dave Langford <https://news.ansible.uk/a328.html#22>; <http://ansible.uk> | <http://news.ansible.uk>



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# Andrew Darlington and Steve Sneyd

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## From Mars to Marsden: The untold story: Interview with Steve Sneyd

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**In June 2018, Andrew Darlington wrote to his friends:**

**Steve Sneyd, 20 March 1941–13 June 2018**

**It is with great regret that Rita Sneyd has asked me to inform all his friends and readers that Steve passed away on Wednesday. He collapsed in Huddersfield and was taken to Calderdale Royal Hospital where he was diagnosed with emphysema. I visited him there and he seemed upbeat and in good spirits, talking about the necessity of getting his first mobile phone once he'd left hospital! Sadly, that was not to be. Rita says 'it was very sudden so there has to be a post mortem. We were assured it was very restful and he looked very peaceful.' A long-time friend, collaborator, and colleague since the turn of the sixties into the seventies, we shared many joint readings and adventures together. Without Steve Sneyd's unique and distinctive presence, the poetry world will be a weird place.**

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He is Britain's — and possibly the world's — most widely published poet. He's been featured regularly, week-by-week, month-by-month, year-by-year since the 1960s in more strange, obscure, and esoteric journals than even he can possibly remember. Now he's singlehandedly resurrecting the genre SF poem as a unique and distinctive verse-form. He is Steve Sneyd

Steve Sneyd can be a distracting interview.

He's the guy sitting at the end of the bar, with a Philip K. Dick paperback crammed conveniently into his corduroy jacket pocket and an obscure crossword-completing word on the tip of his tongue. Spinning looping, leisurely soliloquies that lengthen for about the time it

takes for a pint of best to settle, or for someone to get the next round in. As we talk he sketches zigzag castles and mythic faces on the beer-mat, scribbles sudden ideas in interacting hieroglyphs of longhand script into the dog-eared flyleaf of the paperback in his pocket, then hand-rolls a matchstick-thin cigarette infiltrating a fallout of tobacco strands across the table between us. He has quotes, phrases, lines, and useful expressions for future use in black biro on scraps of paper in every pocket.

As he tells Marge Simon, 'I'm endlessly writing such bits down on paper, always carry some, and a pen, or into notebooks — though the problem is the vast majority never develop any further, just silt up in vast accumulations of such scraps, though sometimes, years later even, one or another will resurface and a poem will come together out of that seed. Ideas can come from anywhere — flashbacks of memory, of places, people, events, items from the radio or books, curious facts or images, fragments of phrases, odd images springing to mind.'

And he talks. He talks about everything from the lost galaxy-spanning poetry of obscure American fantasist Lilith Lorraine, to an interminably convoluted comic routine about Bob Marley's arrival in heaven, to tales of legendary Beat poetry heroics in the back rooms of 1970's Yorkshire pubs, and about the prehistory of Pennine earthworks and tumuli. About everything — in fact, but Steve Sneyd himself.

'This whole thing has a sort of boot-strapping quality', he concedes warily, 'i.e., we find out what we're talking about, by talking about it.' But, once the train of ideas





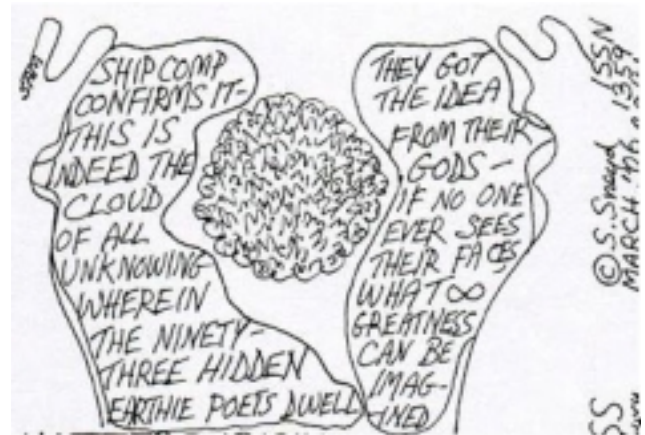
ignites, it rapidly assumes esoteric dimensions — shifting the question further from the personal at each remove. ‘Maybe it’s more a worm in the program. It gets in and you can’t get it out, so you have to talk it out. Like they used to lure the tapeworm out with a bit of whatever tapeworms like. It stuck its head out, and when you had enough of it for a loop, you rolled it around a knife-blade and kept rolling, and very steadily you pulled the whole thing out. Talking about poetry, or SF poetry, or SF generally come to that, is like that. If you can get a handle on it, you should — in optimistic theory somehow, get a grasp on all of it.’ He pauses. Flicks tobacco strands thoughtfully as the ideas continue. ‘That’s assuming ...’ he elaborates, ‘that it isn’t so busy quick-silvering and changing that what you’ve got is the dead skin it just shed. To switch metaphors from tapeworm to snake ...’, and he starts again to explain further why poetry cannot be explained.

Perhaps you were aware that, further to his *Amazing Stories* interview, Steve Sneyd was nominated, or elected, or appointed as ‘Grand Master of SF Poetry’, so some kind of honorific became appropriate? Surely it was only a matter of time, and now constitutes a well-deserved and entirely appropriate recognition of his epic contribution to the genre. Odd that he didn’t actually start out with that Lit-orientation. When pressed he estimates that ‘about forty per cent’ of his output would so qualify. ‘I’ve never systematically done the figures, but as an impressionistic guess, would say about 40 per cent of my published poetry has been SF, and overall perhaps 70 per cent has been genre. Boundary drawing can be hard — e.g. is a poem about the historical Dracula genre or “mainstream”?’ It seems there was always a myth-continuum, and bits of SF imagery surfacing here and there, but it only became more dominant later. Or at least that’s what my immediate recall tells me, without delving back through what he terms ‘the whatever decades’ of magazines and old small-press journals.

It also turned out that I’d been nominated, or elected, or appointed in some way, to make the ‘Grand Master of SF Poetry’ presentation. Although by then he’d already received it via airmail! He’d already received the Gold Chalice, or Scroll, or Coat Of Arms or whatever it was from America. And we were required to fabricate some kind of ceremony, photographed for posterity, to record it all. Marge Simon (of the Science Fiction Poetry Asso-

ciation) contacted me through Facebook about doing it. She’s a lady who brooks no refusal. So we devised a joint strategy to meet up in Huddersfield to enact this arcane ritual. It took the *New Horizons* probe nine years to reach the Pluto system, we did marginally better than that!

It’s cool, with just a promise of drizzle. The fountains are arcing in the town square adjacent to the statue of former PM Harold Wilson. We sit outside the Kings Head, a licensed premises uniquely dedicated to Jimi Hendrix, who is the ‘king’ on the pub sign. I’m wearing a Dan



Dare‘Mekon T-shirt in honour of the occasion. We talk — about how to actually pronounce China Miéville’s name, about Steve’s recent visit to his brother in Norfolk, about walking the West Yorkshire canal tow-paths, and about a night at the Builders where we both once watched poet Michael Horovitz perform. Steve can’t remember whether Horovitz interjected his set with blasts from his famous anglo-saxophone — ‘he said he’d been playing it at his gigs since the sixties, a “mouth-harp wrapped in brown paper”. I don’t recall him using it when he read at the Bleeders, the gig you wrote up, but maybe it’s one of my myriad memory glitches.’ I assure him that yes, Horovitz did indeed wield said mighty instrument. And the Builders — site of those Inner Circle poetry events? Long gone.

Then Steve carefully extracts the presentation plaque from the box in which it was posted to him across the Atlantic. A black resin monolith emblazoned with a comet-tailed star, and the legend ‘Steve Sneyd: SFPA Grand Master Poet 2015’ etched in silver lettering. Various curious photos subsequently take place, some of then snapped by a bemused passer-by who is inveigled into the impromptu ceremony. The photos eventually appear in the SFPA news-site for the entertainment and edification of all! Afterwards we sit back on the pub-seat in the weak sunshine, and Steve sips reflectively at his pint. ‘I thought afterwards, possible reason the lady who volunteered to take pics got so far away as soon as possible afterwards; maybe she saw words “Grand Master” on offending object and feared was Crowley-style occult cult, and your Mekon manifest of familiar/demon familiar?’

Ned Beak, writing the afterword of Steve’s 200-page

collection *In Coils of Earthen Hold*, 'The neglect of Steve Sneyd's work is one of the mysteries of our poetic era.' There's possibly something in what he says, but neglect is not what you'd normally associate with a writer responsible for over 3000 magazine appearances and a near ubiquity in literary magazines for over thirty years. Steve is Britain's most widely published poet, and one of the world's top ten most frequently published, too. He also figures in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* for his contribution to 'genre' poetry, both as archivist and scribe. So 'neglect' is relative. Perhaps by 'neglect' Fred Beak means his exclusion from that kind of self-congratulatory Oxbridge clique massaging each other's sterile celebrity from elitist London art circles? In which case he could well be correct. If such issues still have relevance. Which surely must be marginal, at best. Steve's voice is Yorkshire, and it's too vital, too involved, too real for such distractions. He writes from Almondbury, Huddersfield, beneath the appropriately gaunt tower of Castle Hill. He muses that he never intended Huddersfield to be so central, but here he is, four decades later.

Steve is bearded with a shaggy fringe of greying hair, and an air of constant preoccupation. Reading to an audience — as he does in his mesmeric set at the Huddersfield Poetry Festival — he can conjure time and space, myth and magic, history and futures through a temporal warp, and then back to the Hotel bar again with a bardic resonance that story-tells and weaves strange truths, 'finding skulls under every grin'.

'Poetry, in the final analysis', he opines, 'is surely nearer — or can be, to the working of actual thought, than prose.' But he takes it beyond such meagre limitations. Writing dialogue with a dry kitchen sink sense of desperate ordinariness, and line-breaks set to the rhythms of breath — 'you go on and on, she said, you repeat yourself endlessly, she said, you whinge and moan, she said, some time went by, you never talk to me, she said, there was nothing to be said' ('A Season For Taking Stock'). While above such drab domesticity there's always awareness of the sky. The 'Half-Moon swollen could be her mother, shrunk could be her daughter, half-face missing as if turned, away from life.' And beyond even that normality there's a mythic depth behind actions that align with the symbols and rituals of lost archetypes — 'wrote three lists — what he, feared most, what he'd done worst, what he most wished he'd done, hung each on chosen tree — oak, ash, rowan — set each with, fire. Collected ashes with, care. Buried in three holes between monster roots, then sang, light of burden at last' ('Wildwood Days Recalled').



**STEVE SNEYD:** His poetry has appeared in over a thousand magazines and anthologies world-wide, as well as on the Net, and in many collections, including three substantial volumes, *Bad News From The Stars* (Ocean View Books, USA '91), *In Coils Of Earthen Hold* (University of Salzburg Press, '93), and *Gestaltmacher Gestaltmacher Make Me A Gestalt* (Four Quarters Press, 2000), and more recently with work by John Light in *Neolithon* (K.T. Publications, '01) and with John F. Haines and J.C. Hartley in *The Pennine Triangle* (Othername Press, '02).

His many readings have included the Swansea National Year of Literature, the Huddersfield, Lancaster, Lincolnshire and Newham Poetry Festivals, West Yorkshire Playhouse, and the Iconoclasm and Mexican III SF conventions. Broadcasts of his poetry have included Radio Four's *Stanza on Stage Space Poetry special*. A five times nominee for the Rhysling SF poetry award, he won the Peterson Trophy for poetry in '96.

His genre fiction appeared in such American anthologies as *The Year's Best Horror*, *Best of Whispers*, and *Horrorstory*, while his published non-fiction i.e. embraces many aspects of the genre poem, including interviews on the subject with New Wave figures Michael Moorcock and Roger Zelazney, an extended history of science fiction poetry, *Seventh Heaven and How They Got There*, published in six instalments in *The Zone*, and the first biography of Pioneering American science fiction poet Lilith Lorraine, in *Fantasy Commentator* (an expanded version in book form is pending, from Cosmos Books in the USA). He also edited the genre anthology *Dreamers On The Sea Of Fate* for Sol Publications, while his Hilltop Press publishes collections of genre poetry and, since 1991, the newsletter *Data Dump* covering developments in the field. He has been a member of the Science Fiction Poetry Association since its inception in '77.

A chemistry BSc, and MA in poetry (University of Huddersfield, '99), he was for many years a copywriter, before becoming a creative writing tutor in '89. He has lived in Almondbury near Huddersfield since '66.

Already active in the 1960s, Steve in the 1970s gained a wider platform of possibilities. Beneath the (psychedelic) mushrooming underground press explosion — and infected by its anarcho-irreverence, looking as much to Dylan (Bob not Thomas) as it does to the performance legacy of the Liverpool Poets and the persistent viral illumination of the Beat Generation, the DIY small-press napalms the decade into the rudest of health. Traditional letterpress A5's with neat wood-cut illustrations (*Viewpoints*) interface with cleanly-cluttered photo-offset collages (*Global Tapestry*), while mimeo — typed directly onto limited-run paper templates, proliferates through SF-fandom (Lisa Conesa's *Zimri*) while strange mauve spirit-duplication produces *Bogg* — until the dense black-solids made possible by Xerox infiltrate from the Punk press towards decade's end (*Sniffin Glue*). In this raging firmament the inspirational Blake-Bardian Mike Horovitz lights *The Children of Albion*, Jeff Nuttall ignites *Bomb Culture*, while Dave Cunliffe and Jim Burns — already outlaw literary stars of the previous decade — achieve a high profile alongside George Cairncross' surreal humour, Dave Ward's Liverpool urban, Barry Edgar Pilcher's Beat-Zen, Pete Faulkner's Rimbaud-Romantic, Tina Fulker's brittle fragility, Derrick Butress' precise dramas, and Dave Caddy's eco-rural.

An International Reply Coupon — or, in that post-





imperial twilight, a Commonwealth RC — could gain admittance to the equally rich diversity of an American or Australian parallel universe. And beyond. Steve Sneyd flourished as a visible presence in it all. Each format. Every niche and sub-niche. Few magazines came — or indeed, still come, without a page or three of his distinctive voice. And although it's obviously absurd to suggest that evolution has not taken place — because it self-evidently has, it's equally true that early poems are as instantly recognisably Sneydian as are the latest. The shape. The breath-break punctuation. The chopped erudition

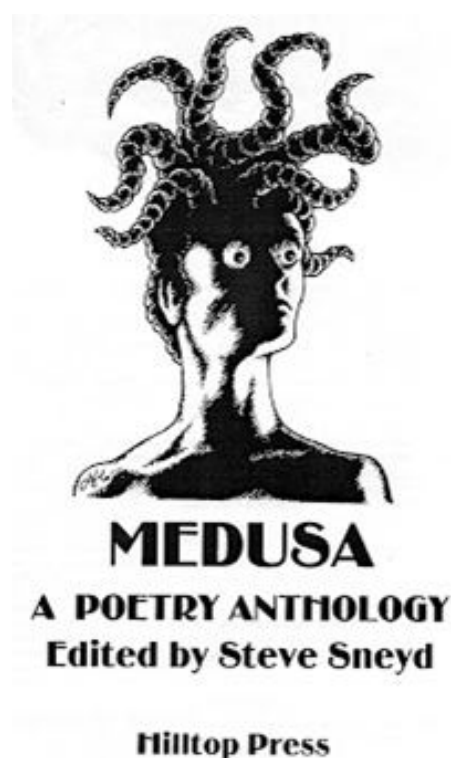
Selected for the 1994 *Rhysling Awards Anthology*,

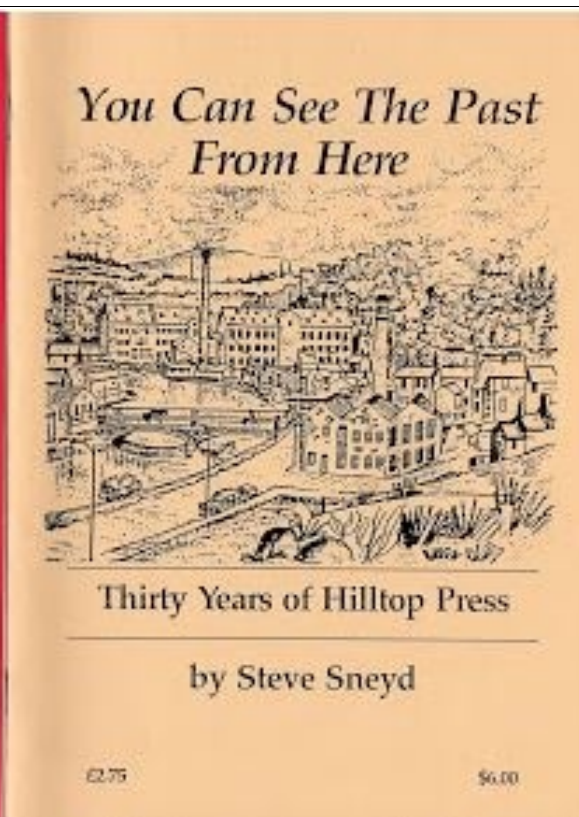
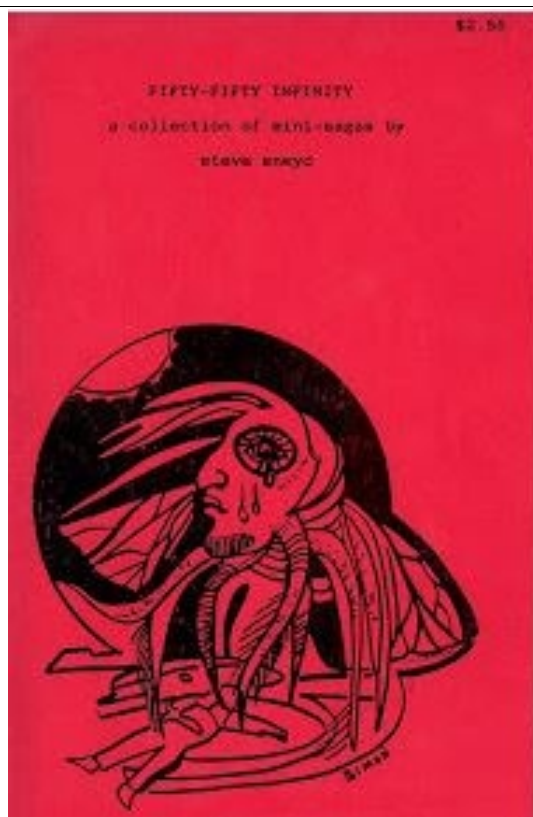


Steve's 'Why Vampires Do Not Use Their Vote' is a fine balance of his style, macabre myth interacting with normality. It asks 'why have doors for policemen to guard?', answering 'inaccessible windows are sufficient, access to my private dwelling.' The dialogue continues, 'in myself are a thousand lives, my older selves company me as I require,' and 'shade is enough from sunlight's canker, shade and soil enough of home, to full a window-box my length.'

Inevitably, as perpetrator of the earlier *Riding West* magazine, he was the obvious coordinating spirit when the Inner Circle decided to launch its own print counterpart. As a series of Huddersfield-based live events, the Inner Circle had already staged guests such as bussed-in Dave Cunliffe, as well as providing debut audiences for new writers and musicians. With its collectivist aspirations set to the pulse of the times — its title, an elision of errors on Steve's notepad fusing suggestions 'Thud' and 'Ned Ludd' into *Ludds Mill*, it went on through changes and oddnesses through to the dawn of the eighties. By then Steve's publishing had diversified through Hilltop Press, with irregular SF poetry *Data Dumps* linking a series of unique meticulously researched stand-alones documenting neglected slipstream maverick names Robert Calvert and Lillith Lorraine (a research project begun in 1987, with a bio section appearing in *Fantasy Commentator*, and not signed off on until mid 2009 — although 'as soon as book comes out some amazing new info about her life that should've been in will probably surface').

There's also a CD by Icarus Landing, Steve's legendary word-of-mouth underground performance-art duo. His poems delivered in a thick monotone the colour of Pennine Bitter, pointed up by slurs of betraying Yorkshire inflections, in spaces provided by Dave Jaggar's blues improvisations. Jaggar, he of Spider Lee Brown and the Champion Jack Dupree Band, plays dextrous guitar





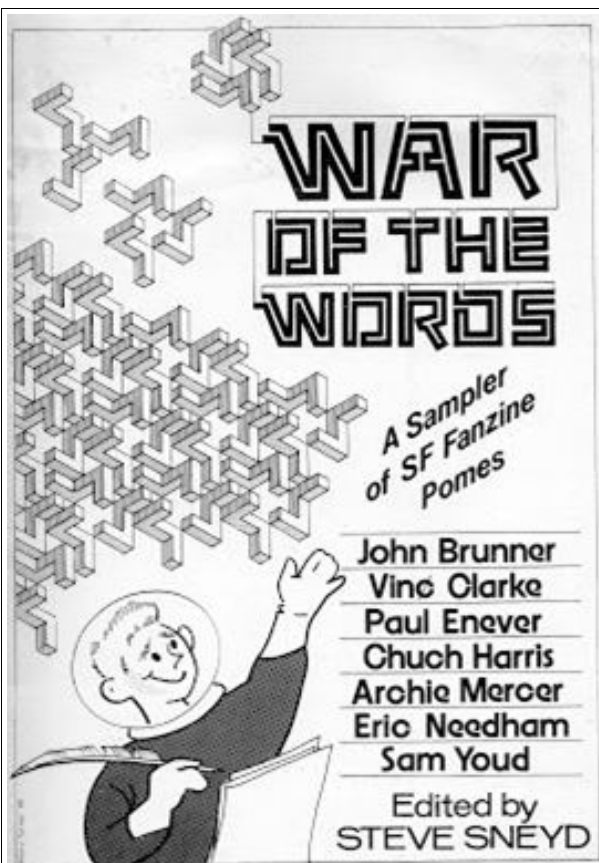
and on 'Trowell, Midnight', harmonica. Blues from the Calder Delta, long thought unrecorded and forever lost, the duo finally resurfaced with *Icarus Landing: The Crested Vulture Tapes*, a flood-damaged seventies tape, cleaned-up, digitised, and completely amazing. An audio artefact of smoke-hazed folk clubs and moist beer-mats, where sweat drips from the ceiling as if in some time-capsule monochrome photograph. Together, they pick up the rambling cadences of half-glimpsed and never-quite-concluded back-street pub people stuff conversations and ignite them with surreal absurdist sense-of-wonder, from skew-wiff mythologies of visiting Martians, to the scrap-dealer clearing the Rhodes Colossus from where it blocks the harbour-mouth, the girl who half-inches cutlery from Motorway Service Stations yet only gets randy 'for men with ideals', the man on his ninth pint waiting for the girl who never turns up, then the puddled walk home uphill singing 'Careless Love' off-key. Like the line 'crooked, as a ring around the moon' — a ring, of course, is not crooked, but what they're about is reconciling contradictions. These performances are unforgettable, like scars.

'I honestly can't remember 'owt about the circumstances of the tape being made', Steve comments on the year of the CD's eventual release, 2009, 'though I do have a clear memory of a later one, *Manna from Heaven*, which also had Michael Massey on, done at Jaggar's house, and he was getting drunker and drunker. As was his canary, which kept sipping from his glass. It died very young from that habit, despite Jaggar's theory that bird's hollow bones means they can take immense amounts of  $C_2H_5OH$  without harm. Massey had a nightmare rendering the tape listenable, as Jaggar's sudden weird sound-*fx*, shouts of irrelevance, drumming of feet on floor etc. But of the making of this one? a total mindblank. A review on Paul Rance's website creates urban myth that

it 'was made on tour', so 'print the legend' applies.

'We're in Marsden at the moment,' Steve announces on a radio documentary about SF poetry, a sub-genre that link-voice Ian MacMillan places 'at the fringe of the fringe, at the end of the universe.' 'And this is where — when they put the new station signs up — someone graffiti'd really neatly underneath the name 'Marsden' they put 'The Land That Time Forgot'. Which I think it's pretty appropriate, although it's been painted out since, because that's what science fiction poets do. They try and forget about the limitations of our time, and look through all time for human experience. You look out from up here, you're looking out on practically everything that's ever happened in this country. You look over to our right — that big mound on the horizon, that's where neolithic men were making flint tools. There's little pits on the top of the hill where they were doing that. You look straight in front of us, you've got a sunk road going up the hill past the old — what used to be — Marsden Manor House. That was probably a Roman road. Perhaps even earlier than that. A bit farther up the hill behind it you've got loads and loads of roads on top of each other; you've got the Roman road, you've got Turnpike roads, you've got the first attempts to get across the Pennines, and the ones that went nearly up to the time when we built motorways. They're all going across the hills in the same sort of places. History is all twisted and linked together here. And I think science fiction poetry is taking this same sort of wider view of humanity, of a species, of us. And of our future. It's not saying we live only in this present time, this fixed present; we're not just figures in a permanent unchanging situation. But we're part of the process that goes on and on occurring and changing and reshaping — just like this landscape '





Steve Sneyd can be a distracting interviewee. For a multitude of reasons.

## Andrew Darlington and Steve Sneyd: An explanatory postscript

They live within ten miles of each other. Together, over some thirty years of manic productions, they've made over 4000 magazine appearances around the world. They share an entry in the current edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* for their contributions to genre poetry. And they collaborated to produce *Ludds Mill* — the leading vital anarchic arts magazine of the 1970s. They have appeared together at venues dating back to the Inner Circle events in Huddersfield, and were a regular part of the Tawny Owl group of writers, which also numbered horror novelist Simon Clark and *Krax* publisher Andy Robson among its members. Yet their differences are just as pronounced. Steve Sneyd organised the live poetry program at the Leeds Griffin Hotel SF Con — a landmark event in the recognition of genre poetry. And he's recognised as its leading archivist.

While, although Andrew Darlington appeared on that bill, he's equally adept at rock journalism and erotica. And although both have an extensive fiction back catalogue — Steve's work in *Year's Best* and Andrew's in *New English Libraries*, their styles operate in alternate universes of prose: Steve's, mythic and dream-like; Andrew's, sharp-edged and SF literate. Only the respect is mutual.

## Short bibliography

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*A Word in Your Eye* by Steve Sneyd (ISBN 0-905262-24-7; £3.75/\$8). An introduction to the graphic poem, from Hilltop Press, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD5 8PB

*Neolithon* by Steve Sneyd and John Light (£5.50 from KT PBL, 16 Fane Close, Stamford, Lincs PE9 1HG). The poetry of prehistoric stone monuments.

*Icarus Rising: The Crested Vulture Tapes* by Icarus Landing (Steve Sneyd and David Jaggar) (Crested Vulture Disks CVD-001; £6.50) from Hilltop Press, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield HD5 8PB.

[www.booksmusicfilmstv.com/Poetry/SteveSneydDavidJaggarIcarusRising.html](http://www.booksmusicfilmstv.com/Poetry/SteveSneydDavidJaggarIcarusRising.html)

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Gerald England reviews Steve Sneyd's *Gestaltmacher*, *Gestaltmacher, Make Me a Gestalt*: <http://www.geraldengland.co.uk/revs/bs126.htm>

PDF of Steve's *Flights from the Iron Moon*, a gazetteer collecting poetry from UK fanzines from the 1980s: <http://efanzines.com/IronMoon/>

Steve Sneyd interview by Catherine Mintz: [http://catherine-mintz.com/cm\\_s\\_interview.htm](http://catherine-mintz.com/cm_s_interview.htm)

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Full text of Steve's epic poem 'Crowland', plus links to Steve's *The Poetry of Brian Aldiss* etc: <http://pandf.booksmusicfilmstv.com/sneyd.htm>

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Link to Steve's essay 'The Outbound Muse's Despatch: The Science Fiction Poetry Of Calvert And Many More': <http://www.aural-innovations.com/issues/issue7/muse01.html>

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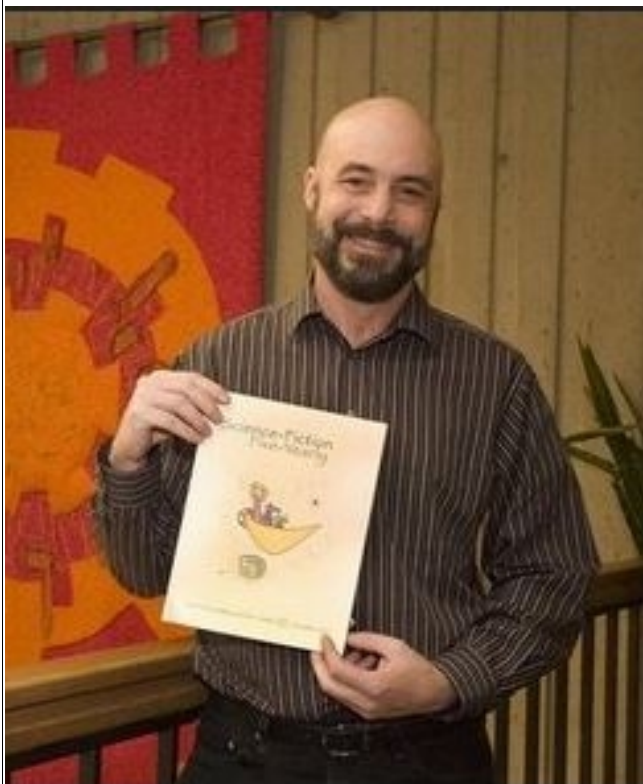
# John Hertz, Ron Drummond, and Bruce Gillespie: Tributes to Randy Byers (1960–2017)

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## John Hertz: Tribute to Randy Byers

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**Randy Byers in 2007 with *Science Fiction Five Yearly*.  
(Photo: Kathy Sauber, University of Washington.)**

Randy Byers (1960–2017) was 57 when he died two days ago (20 November 2017).

I knew he'd been in hospice care and why. Luckily I'd been able to get addresses for his parents and a sister. I sent a note hoping to expound the love he'd won among us. Geri Sullivan told me the sister had read some of my message to him who, though barely conscious, seemed to understand.

Luckily he'd had some recognition. The 12th and as it proved final issue of *Science Fiction Five-Yearly*, Lee Hoffman's fanzine published on time for sixty years, was co-edited by him and Sullivan (2007); it won the Hugo Award for Best Fanzine. *Chunga* by Byers, Andy Hooper, and Carl Juarez won four Fan Activity Achievement Awards (Best Fanzine 2003, 2005–2006, 2013) and was twice a Hugo finalist (Best Fanzine 2005–2006); Byers himself won three more FAAns (Best Fanwriter and

Number One Fan Face [highest sum of points in all categories], 2003; Best Single Fanzine Issue, *Alternative Pants*, 2012).

*Chunga 1* (2002) explained that its title was a Frank Zappa allusion (*Chunga's Revenge*, Bizarre Records 1970), which Byers predicted (p. 1) would dominate *Chunga 23*, as indeed it did, with superb covers by Ulrika O'Brien and multi-page graphics by Brad Foster, Teddy Harvia, Marc Schirmeister, Espana Sheriff, Stu Shiffman, Dan Steffan, Steve Stiles, and D. West (2015).

By 2002 Byers had been with us a couple of decades. In his part of the *Chunga 1* editorial page he said he'd not helped with cons, raised money for fan funds, laughed at awful puns. Like Hilaire Belloc breaking vows on *The Path to Rome* (1902), Byers falsified those statements along the road.

He was elected Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund delegate, 2003; chaired Corflu XXVI (fanziners' convention; corflu = mimeograph correction fluid, readily dispensable and long indispensable; 'Corflu Zed' for the Commonwealth-English name of the 26th letter in the alphabet United States and Commonwealth folk have in common), 2009; ran WOOF (Worldcon Order of Fan-editors, an amateur publishing association with collocation at Worldcons), 69th World Science Fiction Convention, 2011; ran the Fanzine Lounge at the 73rd Worldcon, 2015. For TAFF he beat inter alios Orange Mike who'd been nominated by inter alios Hooper, Byers afterward serving as North America Administrator until succeeded in 2005 by Suzle. Puns — well, he solicited and published an article by me in Corflu XXVI's Progress Report 1.

I had four poems in *SF5Y* he and Sullivan splendidly got Jae Leslie Adams to calligraph; one was on the back cover with a trillion trillion suns; to another he'd given fine editorial help. I've fairly often been in *Chunga*.

Among other adventures Byers interviewed me for *Tardum Flumen 7* (Westercon LXVI newsletter [West Coast S-F Conference]; the electronic may see e.g. 'Why Westercon?' (File 770.com 10 Jul 13 p=13666). He seemed to find me a hopeful man.

From time to time he called me ambassadorial. I told him I was taking it as a compliment.

Near the end he revisited Yap, where he'd lived four years, and attended Corflu XXXIV. As Mike Glycer said, 'A small mercy is that many people who cared for or loved Randy had a final opportunity to share those feelings with him.' R.I.P.

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## Ron Drummond: Tribute to Randy Byers

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A year ago today Randy Byers died. The fastest passing year of my life, and the next will be faster yet. There's no turning back!

Didn't he just leave the room? He's still here; has to be. Around a corner, perhaps, down the street, on another coast. Right here! Tangibly close, palpably near. A breath away.

It was two and half years ago that I last laid eyes on him, two years since I last heard his voice. I still see him; I still hear him.

Randy was a trusted and inspiring friend to many people; I feel supremely blessed to have been among them. He was one of the finest humans any of us knew, something we all agree on, with an easy unanimity. (He alone would demure, dismiss us with a playfully sharp 'Whatever, dude.') He knew how to listen to his friends and family like no one else, and we knew we were heard, our confidences secure. He shed a fine and tender light, and reflected our own light back to us in a way that allowed us to see the best and worst of ourselves in new ways, ways that cleansed or encouraged, uniquely so. Does that make sense? His was and is an amazing sensibility.

Odd how he continues to move among us, even as he moves beyond us, even as he leaves us behind. To quote his least favorite singer/songwriter: 'I was a long time coming, Ma, and I will be a long time gone.' As if that could only be true (long time / long time) by virtue of the intensity and fullness of his presence, for the dismayingly brief time he was here among us. Yet it's really true: he, we, we've been on our way here since the beginning of time, and we'll be heading away from here for longer yet. No resort to religion or mysticism is necessary to the foregoing, or to what follows; physics alone is more than enough.

Please know that Randy's life, its impact on you, on all the people in his life, on the world, will continue to ripple outward until the end of time. He can never be removed from the fabric of time; he will always be integral to it; his lifeforce will resonate forever. The truth is that all of us — all who have ever lived, all who are alive now, all who will ever live — we are, in each and every moment, in all places and at all times, both present and absent. This is in the very nature of things: presence and absence are infinitely intertwined, and the center of the universe is everywhere.

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## Bruce Gillespie: Randy Byers' kindness

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**21 November 2017**

All I can do is mourn one of the best people I have ever met — Randy Byers, who has succumbed to brain cancer at the age of 57, in Seattle. There have been much sad news over recent years, but this is the saddest day of all. I particularly remember Randy's extreme kindness to me when I visited Seattle in 2005, and his achievements in fandom are many. Most amazing was his courage during the last year and a half as he has kept posting on Facebook, taking magnificent photos, and publishing fanzines.

**Bring Bruce Bayside trip, Seattle week, 18 February 2005, American Kindness**

At the dinner gathering I met for the first time carl juarez, Andy Hooper (but not Carrie Root, who was already coming down with the cold that turned into what became the 'flu' into 'Corflu' this year), Hal and Ulrika O'Brien (Ulrika is still a member of Acnestis, the British apa of which I am a member, and her life and Hal's has settled down a lot in recent years), Victor Gonzalez,

Randy Byers (whom I'd met two months before in a Carlton restaurant when he was visiting Melbourne with Sharee Carton), and Stu Shiffman and Andi Shechter. I can't remember Marilyn Holt and Clifford Wind being there, but I did have a great reunion with former DUFF winners Jerry Kaufman and Suzanne Tompkins (Suzle), and John Berry and Eileen Gunn. It was a bit hard to know who to talk to, as everyone wanted to catch up with everyone else. After the mounds of superb food had been demolished, I got to talk to Victor, Randy, and carl (but was never granted a conversation with Andy Hooper during my whole stay in America — do I wear the wrong brand of twiltone?), and catch up with John and Eileen (about the world of typesetting ... what else?)

**Monday, 21 February 2005, trip into Seattle (my hosts were Janice Murray and Alan Rosenthal)**

Monday was President's Day. Because he had taken Friday off, Alan had to work although it was a public holiday. I had already been invited to lunch with the *Chunga* crew, but Andy Hooper rang to say that Carrie had been struck down by the evil flu, and neither of them was going anywhere. Randy Byers rang me, and

lunch was back on. Janice very kindly drove me to Randy's place, as I'm not sure I could have found it by bus. For a long time Randy has shared a house with Denys Howard (who I didn't meet during the trip) and Denys's vast collection of comics-based paraphernalia ...

Randy and I were standing at the bus stop for twenty minutes waiting for a late bus. I gabbled away, and somehow Randy extracted from me the whole history of the split between Melbourne and Sydney fan groups over the last fifty years. I have this sinking feeling that nobody in Australia is still interested in fan history, but as the bus pulled up Randy was kind enough to say that he was amazed to hear all this stuff and it should be written down someday. I thought: nobody at home would be interested, and very few people throughout the world except Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey in Britain! At the same time I was thinking: that's why I travelled to America, to meet people who are still somehow on my wavelength.

Which is something of an epiphany when all you are doing is standing in the sun on a Seattle bus stop, and you haven't even got stuck into the beer yet.

Eventually the bus arrived, and we found our way to Tangletown, a beer pub/cafe. We met Carl Juarez, who had just finished designing the latest issue of *Chunga*, the issue that was scheduled to be distributed four days later at Corflu in San Francisco. We drank some good North Western and Canadian beers and ate a good meal. Tangletown makes its own boutique beer. We were joined at the table by the beermaker, Dick Cantwell, one of the blokes who seemed to have been everywhere and done everything, with a bit of beermaking on the side. After a supremely mellow afternoon, Carl left for home (to tweak the last millimetres of the *Chunga* design), and Randy and I walked down to the University district.

The SF section of University Books is much better stocked than Minotaur Books or the old Slow Glass shop in Swanston Street. Many of the books on display were hardbacks. Randy introduced me to Duane Wilkins, who talks a mile a minute, and asked to be remembered to Justin Ackroyd in Melbourne. (Before I left on the trip,

Stephen Boucher offered his opinion that the only non-American fans known personally to Americans were him, Eric and Jean, and Robin Johnson. Not so, Steve; by far the best-known Australian fan in America is Justin Ackroyd.)

Duane said that he would buy books directly from Australian publishers if it were not for the horrific postage rates from Australia to America (as we no longer have surface mail rates). He buys books by Australian authors when they are published in American or British editions. The Sean Williams/Shane Dix books do well at his shop. University Books also has a gigantic general fiction section, perhaps even as large as Elliott Bay's ...

The most frustrating aspect of this trip, compared with the 1973 trip, is that this time my decrepit old brain refused to make the immediate switchover from left-hand drive to right-hand drive. In other words, I would know which bus I wanted to catch, then find myself on the wrong side of the road and facing in the wrong direction, and simply not able to go the right way! Or if I was on a bus I would go into a panic, not quite sure where I should get off.

That afternoon I really blew it. My brain went into meltdown. For a few minutes, I couldn't find the piece of paper with Alan and Janice's address, let alone the number of the bus I was supposed to be catching next!

I suspect that Seattle bus drivers are employed by the Seattle tourist authority, not the public transport authority. To me, they represent American kindness, at least as extended to a poor idiot Australian traveller. The driver on the first bus I took somehow got me off at the right crossroads to catch the northbound bus. I staggered off, leaving Randy looking rather worried. He probably thought I would be found next day dazed and confused wandering along some highway. A nice bloke at the bus stop pointed out that I was — you guessed it — standing on the wrong side of the road to go north. The right bus came along, but again it took the efforts of a helpful bus driver to get me delivered to Janice and Alan's corner.

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## John Hertz: Tribute to Milt Stevens

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Marching to a different drummer can be particularly awkward on the road with a stream of dissenters all keeping step. Milt Stevens didn't bother to complain (1942–2017).

He was honoured, selected, and unrecognised. He co-chaired LA Con-II (42nd World Science Fiction Convention, 1984), the largest ever and one of the best — not the same thing. He chaired Westercon XXXIII (West Coast Science Fantasy Conference, 1980) and was Fan Guest of Honor at Westercon LXI. He chaired Loscon I (our local con, 1975) and was Fan GoH at Loscon IX. He ran the Fanzine Lounge at Westercon LV and LA con IV (64th Worldcon). He ran programming at Corflu XXXIV (fanziners' con, 2017).

He was one of the finest fanwriters in the world, in his

own zine *The Passing Parade* and elsewhere. We never put him on the Hugo ballot.

His sense of humour was often called dry. I might call it sandy. It could polish you.

For a while he used the handle 'Mr. Sardonicus' (and his zine for SAPS, the Spectator Amateur Press Association, was *Sardonicus*). The title character in William Castle's 1961 movie *Mr Sardonicus* got his face frozen in a horrifying grin.

Properly the sardonic aims at self-relief when one can do nothing else against adversity. His blade was better pointed than that. Presumably the name appealed to his fannish self-deprecation. In leaving the unobservant to suppose his remarks were moved by pessimism perhaps he was sardonic.





**Milt Stevens, 1981.**

Like many people who can write, he could read. ‘We need men round us who can think and who can talk’ (Guy de Maupassant, ‘The Horla’, 1887); he was there too.

This lit up his letters of comment. Comments are the blood of an apa, and more generally letters of comment are the blood of a fanzine. Best are those whose authors show they have in fact read (and not, say, merely jerked a knee at) what they are commenting on. He was there too.

I’ll tell one book story. At cons I’ve been leading

Classics of SF talks; often I pick the classics; at Loscon XLI in 2014 one was *The Stars My Destination* (Alfred Bester, 1957). Regency dancing (see e.g. *Mimosa* 29; if you’re electronic, [jophan.org/mimosa/m29/hertz.htm](http://jophan.org/mimosa/m29/hertz.htm)) was scheduled on Friday at 4 p.m., *Stars* at 2:30, so I had to conduct it in costume; couldn’t get my neckcloth right — ‘Beau’ Brummell (1778–1840), with all the time in the world and a valet, would cheerfully discard a dozen — and arrived late. Milt Stevens had cheerfully started discussion. As I walked in he was just pointing out Bester’s careful structure: starting in the dark, climaxing in the cathedral, ending in the light (*Vanamonde* 1125).

He was generous to his club — L.A. SF Society, oldest in the world — with effort, money, as might be needed and he had at hand. At the first LASFS clubhouse, he did so much cleaning up he called himself the Lord High Janitor. He’d been attending since 1960. He was President in 1970. He was given the Evans-Freehafer, LASFS’ service award, in 1971. He served on the Board of Directors for decades, sometimes in its chair. At the third clubhouse, parking restrictions were problematic. He arranged to meet with police and transit authorities, brought the club’s lawyer, who was also a fan, and found a solution.

Other generosityes have emerged, regarding fans, fanzines, conventions.

If you looked for him at a con you might find him in the bar, wearing a sports jacket, drinking Bud Light. If you gave much weight to such things, or his mild manner, you might write him off as respectable. He was — but in fact by our standards. Ave atque vale.

—*Vanamonde* No. 1270, 10 October 2017

## John Hertz: Tribute to Fred Patten



Fred Patten (1940–2018) was a gentle giant. Here in APA-L with him we saw this. His Lzine *Rabanos Radiactivos!* (‘Radioactive radishes!’, an expletive of Professor Mental in the Mexican comic-book *Criollo, el Caballo Invencible*) appeared every week over 43 years — five years after a stroke disabled his favoured side, leaving him to type with one finger of his left hand.

Not to be too one-sided, for a moment of plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose (‘the more it changes, the more it’s the same thing’, attr. Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr [in *Les Guêpes* ‘The Wasps’ Jan 1849?]). You can find in RR 165, p. 13, Dec 67: ‘We’ve all been crying about the dearth of good genzines in Fandom these days’.

That’s about the strongest language he used, and it was just before praising a genzine.

He did many things, and wrote about them, with quiet vigour. I said he made prosaic a word of praise.

Besides ours, he was in the great apas FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Press Association), SAPS (Spectator Amateur Press Society), OMPA (Off-trails Magazine Publishers Association), and The Cult — The Cult?? ‘The thirteen



**Fred Patten and June Moffatt, collating APA-L (1970s).**

nastiest bastards in fandom’?? Bruce Pelz said: ‘Someone must have lied.’

Fred chaired Westercon XXVII (West Coast Science Fantasy Conference; 1974) and Loscon XIV (LA local con; 1987). He edited the LACon Program Book (30th World Science Fiction Convention, 1972) — my task for LACon II (42nd Worldcon, 1984) — and daily newszine. He was a fine fanhistorian; e.g. in a series on Worldcon history for the MidAmericon I progress reports (34th Worldcon, 1976). He wrote up Fan Guests of Honour Bruce Pelz for Noreascon II (38th Worldcon, 1980) and Tom Digby for ConFrancisco (51st Worldcon, 1993).

His first Worldcon was Solacon (16th, 1958). He joined LASFS (LA S-F Soc.) in 1960. In 1963 he was a Hugo Award finalist for co-editing the clubzine *Shangri L’Affaires* with Al Lewis and Bjo and John Trimble. He was given the Evans-Freehafer (LASFS award for service to the club) in 1965. He was a reviewer for *Locus* and *Science Fiction Review*. He co-founded DUFF (the Down Under Fan Fund, which elected me its 2010 delegate — alas, for all Fred’s connection to Australia, though he

attended South Gate in ‘58, he lived to see South Gate Again in 2010 [‘Again in 2010’, File 770 153; Van 901 ], but could not attend) in 1972. He was Fan Guest of Honour at DeepSouthCon IX (1971); received a Special Committee Award at LACon IV (64th Worldcon) for ‘a lifetime of service to Fandom’ and was Fan GoH at Loscon XXXIII (both 2006); received the Forry (LASFS award for service to sf) in 2009.

At two special interests he earned particular fame: Japanese cartoons, animated, which came to be known as Japanimation and then *animé*, and still, which came to be known as *manga* (Japanese, ‘whimsical pictures’, in Japan meaning all kinds of cartoons, comics, animation, addressing all ages, and including comedy, commerce, history, mystery, SF, sports; on Tokyo trains I’ve seen businessmen reading what English for lack of a better term would have to call-by the same name as *Criollo*, comic books), and anthropomorphic-animal cartoons, which eventually gave rise to Furry Fandom. In 1977 he co-founded C/FO (the Cartoon Fantasy Organization); he was so instrumental at introducing *animé* to America that he was given the Inkpot (ComicCon International award) in 1980. In 2004 he published *Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 Years of Essays and Reviews*. A Dante scholar who became a top university librarian said talking with Fred about *animé* was like a graduate-level seminar. These special interests were an ordinary, not a dominant, part of his fanwriting.

He was never an epigrammatist, just perceptive. It was he, rooming with Art Widner and me at Westercon LIII (2000), who observed that the newest current into SF cons came not from a barbarian invasion but a widened perimeter.

No one ever said fans were slans (A. E. Van Vogt, *Slan*, 1940), but we could regret carrying forward all-too-human foibles. Clamouring against exclusions we don’t hesitate to practise them. Few of the encomiums at Fred’s death have noted the breadth of his career. It’s only been two days. Perhaps we’ll do better when we catch our breath. R.I.P.

— *Vanamonde* 1327, 14 November 2018.

## John Hertz: Tribute to June Moffatt

### June Moffatt d. 31 May 2018

White irises bloom

In dozens, in their bushes.

We do have seasons.

But I must write about death.

June Moffatt left us on 31 May — kindly sparing, we might say, the month of her name. She and her husband Len, who left eight years ago, were exemplary of ‘The Second Time Around’, the 1960 Sammy Cahn–Jimmy Van Heusen song I associate, like much else, with Frank Sinatra (though introduced by Bing Crosby, whom June preferred). By our mythos, at least half in jest like much

else, they’re together again in After-Fandom. Whether that’s otherwise true is not for me to say.

I never met June’s first husband Eph (‘eef’) Konigsberg or Len’s first wife Anna Sinclair Moffatt. Each had, among much else, been active among us.

Much of what comes to mind about June I wrote about Len (*Vanamonde* 913). They were like that. I’ll repeat this: ‘Conviviality, hospitality were with Len’s wit, amplified, if possible, by June. Together clubmen and party hosts — the suffix -man is not masculine — they also welcomed and sponsored newcomers with open arms, and discernment, for them no paradox. Fine fannish things happened at Moffatt House and when the Moffatts went abroad.’ They were the 1973 Trans-



**Len and June Moffatt.**

Atlantic Fan Fund delegates; their TAFF report, mimeographed by Mike Glycer, was *The Moffatt House Abroad*; the same was true of them at other people's parties and at conventions — which from the fannish point of view are, we might say, justly deemed to be no less than other people's parties.

Mike Glycer has a fine note about June — [File770.com/june-moffatt-1926-2018](http://File770.com/june-moffatt-1926-2018) 2 Jun 18. He'd kindly reprinted my note about Len ([File770.com/hertz-he-was-a-lion-len-moffatt-1923-2010](http://File770.com/hertz-he-was-a-lion-len-moffatt-1923-2010) 12 Dec 10), and has linked to it. June was 92.

I always thought she had good taste: outward from our core, the 'Oz' books, especially Frank Baum's; the comic strips that charmed us, George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, Walt Kelly's *Pogo* — which Judith Merrill put in her 6th annual *Year's Best SF*; tangent to us, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, Dorothy L. Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey, Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe — June and Len were among co-founders of detective fiction's annual Bouchercon, named for Tony Boucher, so excellent both here and there.

But I was one of those newcomers.

She and Len were active to the ends of their lives in the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society — founded 1934, even then we wanted to be sure of including both science fiction and fantasy. LASFS (to me 'lahss fuss'; to Len rhyming with sass mass) hosts Loscon, where she and Len were Fan Guests of Honor in 1981; they were given the Evans-Freehafer Award for service to LASFS in 1994. June was Chairman of the Board when Glycer joined in 1970. She and Len sometimes invited me to other fannish clubs they took part in; naming two, the Petards,

which had a Hoist and Hoistess, and the Prestigious International Gourmand Society, which more than once met at a Farrell's ice-cream parlor, where Alan Frisbie, who among much else hosted the two mascots of the 42nd World Science Fiction Convention, Reynolds Rat and Rat Masterson, at least once consumed a Trough.

June helped crack hazelnuts for a flourless torte I had something to do with. Hazelnuts are hard. At the time I quite deliberately had no telephone. There was a doorbell, rung by a cord that ran down one storey if you knew where to find it.

Moffatt House had, among much else, a plaque 'These Are the Good Old Days'.

Fanwriting to me is best as one word; a girlfriend or boyfriend is not merely a girl or a boy who is a friend. In the sf community amateur magazines we publish for one another discuss life, the universe, and everything: by the 1940s we called them fanzines. They may sometimes seem never to mention sf; but a love of sf, and a sense of participation, are the string on which the beads of fanwriting are strung.

We did not invent apas, but our first was FAPA the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, founded 1937, still ongoing. Others followed. Originally they seemed a convenient way to circulate fanzines. Eventually apazines took on a life of their own. The Moffatts' FAPazine was *Moonshine*. Their Lzine *De Jueves* (Spanish, 'Of Thursdays', APA-L being collated at but not by LASFS, which since 1934 has met on Thursdays) ran through No. 2084, until the end of 2017, mostly by June, after 2010 by her alone, except that Len was always with her in spirit.

She shone with fanwriting virtues — intelligence, responsiveness, good humour, a light touch — reaching the new and the old; she avoided our too typical vices, retaliation, garrulity, unignition, unfocus; in APA-L, weekly over forty years, a feat. Had she achieved nothing else she would have earned our awe. She would have declined it. She can't now.

She was my longest-time friend in fandom. I loved Len, and I loved her. Writing about death I have written about life. June was like that. Goodbye.

— *Vanamonde* No. 1304, 6 June 2018

## **The LASFS memorial gathering for June Moffatt**

June Moffatt's local club, and mine, the LASFS (LA Science Fantasy Society), held a memorial for her (1926–2018) last month on the 28th. It was our 4220th meeting; we've been at it since 1934. On the way I found classical-music radio Station KUSC broadcasting Chopin's Waltz No. 9 (Op. 59 No. 1, 1835) ('L'adieu') played by Garrick Ohlssen.

June's oldest son Bob Konigsberg had been able to visit her from his home in Los Gatos three hundred fifty miles away. I'd sometimes found him at Moffatt House, serenading her. Tonight he told us she loved railroad songs, like 'The Wabash Cannonball' (W. Kindt, 1904; J. Roff, 'The Great Rock Island Route', 1882; maybe earlier).





**John Hertz and June Moffatt.**

A gadget in Bob's hand, coupled with one Matthew Tepper had, let us hear from June's daughter Caty, still on the road. It's called Bluetooth, I muttered to Lee Gold, because you put it in your ear. You know it's named for King Harald Gormsson (died 985), she muttered back.

Caty told us she'd seen how much LASFS meant to her mom. As it happened no one broke into 'Mutual Admiration Society' (H. Karr & M. Dubney, 1956), but we could have. Caty thanked us all and said she heard us thanking her.

Barbara Gratz Harmon had married Jim Harmon about the time June married Len. They had double-dated. Len and Jim both died in 2010. Tonight Barbara talked about June.

Barbara lives in Burbank; the Moffatts lived in Downey. With Len and Jim gone, June spent Thursday nights after LASFS meetings at Barbara's, and drove home the next day. Barbara is a cellist in several orchestras. When she had to practise late at night, June took out her hearing aids and slept just fine. When Barbara was on jury duty for five months, June had a key to the house. Barbara's dog Leslie loved her.

June became unable to drive. She passed the written exam but couldn't see well enough. Carol Sperling, among other things founder of the Blustering Gales, a local Sherlock Holmes club — detective fiction was another Moffatt interest — told us about taking June around.

George McUrso did some of that too. Eventually he had, as regular Thursday night passengers, June, Barbara, Charlie Jackson, and Rowan Dao (who was also the youngest Blustering Gale).

In 1991 George (then using the surname Mulligan) had been given the Evans-Freehafer Award for service to the LASFS; he was one of June and Len's nominators when they were given the Evans-Freehafer in 1994.

Like Carol Sperling, he'd had other adventures driving June. They went to an Edgar Rice Burroughs fans' Dum-Dum, and the Orange County Museum of Art. He learned what a great film *Oklahoma!* was (F. Zinnemann dir. 1955). Once at Clubhouse III he was looking for *The Mouse That Roared* (J. Arnold dir. 1959). After a while June thought it was time to go home. Just then our librarian Gavin Claypool emerged calling that he had it, and *The Mouse on the Moon* (R. Lester dir. 1963) too. June said 'Can we get out of here before he finds any more mice?'

Matthew Tepper said June had agented his Lzine when he lived in Minneapolis and San Francisco. She asked him to find music for Len's LASFS memorial. Tonight he began to play it from a gadget he had — 'No, that's Mussorgsky' — then we heard 'I Go Pogo' (W. Kelly & N. Monath, 1956). The Moffatts were *Pogo* fans.

Barry Gold had found LASFS in 1964. June's equanimity and aplomb, he said, had won her the name Mother Jaguar (R. Kipling, *Just So Stories*, 1902). June and Len made him feel he'd known them for ages. Near the end while visiting her he'd sung 'Bouncing Potatoes' and told Bob Konigsberg how Poul Anderson was driven to write it by the Westercon XIX hotel (West Coast Science Fantasy Conference; Westercon LXXI will be 5–8 Jul 18 at Denver, Colorado).

Charlie Jackson said he'd just finished re-reading *The Wind in the Willows* (K. Grahame, 1908) when she died. Comments in her Lzine were headed 'Onion-Sauce' (ch. 1). With Len and June, he said, as we agreed, seldom was heard a discouraging word.

Ed Green said there was no bigger heart than Len and June's. They sponsored people, including him. A bright light had gone out.

I said — there was more, but I'll stop here — Judaism taught that, whatever else after death there may be, the dead live in their good deeds. And we should take the torch.

— Vanamonde No. 1308, 3 July 2018

## Bruce Gillespie: Tribute to Derek Kew

19 July 2018

Mrs Margaret Kew, and Jenny, Lindy and Elizabeth and families  
16 Helene St  
Bulleen VIC 3105

Dear Margaret and family:

Thanks very for much ringing me, Margaret, to tell me that you and the family had lost Derek recently. Elaine and I had seen the notice in *The Age*, but we could well have not done so. *The Age* had declined much in recent years, and we no longer buy it every day.

Derek had emailed me not so long ago that he thought it unlikely he would be able to make another

visit to Greensborough for his 'luncheon of comment' (his phrase). However, he had suffered from long periods of illness during the last ten years, especially in winter, and we sort of hoped we would see him again. We asked about visiting him, but that didn't happen.

Derek was one of the first people who subscribed to my new magazine *SF Commentary* when it began in 1969. (It will celebrate its 50th anniversary next January.) He had been a subscriber to John Bangsund's *Australian Science Fiction Review*, one of the greatest magazines ever published about science fiction. I sent early copies of my magazine to everybody on John's mailing list.

Derek remained just a name on the subscriber list for a few years. I had spent 1969 and 1970 attempting to become a school teacher up at Ararat, but moved back to Melbourne at the beginning of 1971 and gave up teaching. Derek did not write letters of comment (which feature strongly in magazines like mine), but some time in 1974 he either rang me or sent a letter. He suggested we meet for a 'luncheon of comment' at one of his favourite cafes in Carlton.

By 1974 I had become a freelance editor and indexer, and Derek was still climbing the academic ladder at RMIT. He was very happy there until the era of the 'Brigadier', which began a series of moves at RMIT/RMIT University that made Derek's job increasingly difficult. Derek was very glad to find somebody else with whom he could discuss science fiction. He had tried attending meetings of the Melbourne SF Club in the sixties, but nobody much talked to him. (His experience of being politely excluded from SF circles was all too common.) At last he could talk about his favourite books and magazines.

We met every six months, and later every year. After Elaine Cochrane and I got together in 1978 (and mar-

ried in 1979), I continued to meet Derek by myself for awhile. However, when Elaine joined one of the lunches (still in Carlton or Collingwood), Derek and she discovered that they could talk about many areas of science, as well as science fiction. Like another friend of ours (Dr Dick Jenssen, who was head of Meteorology at Melbourne University before he retired), Derek enjoyed the experience of talking science to somebody who could keep up with his own thoughts and speculations. I was a bit left behind sometimes, as my specialty is literature.

After our move to Greensborough from Collingwood in 2004, Derek found it much easier to come over for lunch from Bulleen. As I remember, he was already being afflicted by some of the conditions that eventually caught up with him, especially diabetes 2. Until the GFC at the end of 2008, a wide range of cheap restaurants were open at lunchtime here, although Derek usually chose an Asian restaurant. Even after most of the places shut at lunchtime from the beginning of 2009, we still found some quiet places where we could eat and talk.

Derek always kept up his interest in my magazine, and made my life a lot easier by handing back to me a few years ago a complete set of *SF Commentary*. It's been very helpful to have duplicate copies from which I can generate e-versions.

There would be long periods when Derek was too ill to make the trip over to Greensborough. We had suggested we visit your area of Bulleen (especially after the bus service was improved a few years ago), but Derek did not encourage this. Eventually he would recover enough from a recent illness and we could have yet another luncheon of comment.

I hope I've been able to convey some idea of the importance he has had in our lives.

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## Bruce Gillespie, Tom Cardy, and Nigel Rowe: Tributes to Mervyn Barrett

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**Bruce Gillespie:** As Tom Cardy reports from New Zealand, Merv Barrett died on 19 January 2019 in Wellington, New Zealand. Yet apart from the following notes sent by Nigel Rowe (New Zealander living in USA), I can't find an obituary giving clear details of Merv's careers or countries where he has lived. When I joined fandom in Melbourne in 1968, Merv had already left for Britain. I don't know when he arrived in Melbourne from New Zealand. In Britain, he was an active fan and friend of many, especially Australian expatriate John Brosnan. There he met Janet Horncy, and with her they moved to back to New Zealand in the 1980s. He visited Melbourne occasionally, where I met him at the home of Jennifer Bryce. He had a wonderfully low-key sense of humour, and many interests. But that's about all I know:

**Nigel Rowe** writes: Reposting a note from **Tom Cardy** who shared this a few hours ago. 'A very sad day. Veteran

**New Zealand fan Mervyn Barrett died this morning (16 January 2019) in Wellington. Some of you may have known that Mervyn had been ill for the past few months after suffering a stroke. On Christmas Eve he was admitted to Wellington Hospital and then to the Te Hopai Home and Hospital nearby. Mervyn's partner Janet Horncy was with him this morning.'**

Mervyn was very active in the Melbourne MSFC, London, and obviously New Zealand fandoms. He attended many Worldcons, including all the ones in Australia. And counted many filthy pros amongst his friends. He wrote memorably about the night the Melbourne club burned down: <https://msfc.sf.org.au/a-tale-from-downunder/>

Of course he will be most remembered for instigating and holding the first New Zealand SF Convention and editing some of the earliest Kiwi zines during the 1950s. A very sad day. Mervyn was 86, and my friend for 40 years.

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# Poetry corner

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Continued from page 3, where Alex Skovron's 'Carousel Days' provides a keynote poem for the 50th Anniversary issue.

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## An Aussie poem or, I Tim, therefore I Tam by Tim Train

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Tim Train has recently published *Hangover Music* (Ginninderra Press), a book of his poems that can be bought from [www.ginninderrapress.com.au](http://www.ginninderrapress.com.au). The following poem does not appear in the volume, but could well have done so. It represents one stream of Tim's poetic interests.

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A poem which no-one outside Australia will understand,  
and the same goes for everyone in Australia too — only  
less.

There's a coolabah at Mooloolaba  
With a bogan at the base  
And he's sucking on a billabong  
With a big grin on his face;  
He's weighed how much koalas bear  
And knows a cockatoo,  
There's an Aussie flag round his tuckerbag,  
And his kangaroo's called Blue.

*But the Vegemite or might not  
And Collingwood — but won't.  
And the Draught Beer's now all Craft Beer  
And your didgeridoo don't.*

At back o' Bourke the Men at Work  
Gather with the Drover's Wife  
Then fo shizzel with Cold Chisel  
Sing of the bugger's life.  
And the emu and the Bob Hawke  
Form a chorus far away  
On lagerphone and telephone  
With a Toorali Oorali Ay.

*But Paul has ceased from Keating  
With Howard's Ruddy end  
And my Kit-Kat's lost its kitten  
Round the riverbend.*

At Minyip stands a bunyip  
And he bids the town goodbye  
As he rows down old Les Murray  
With a sad and knowing sigh  
'til Patterson with his Banjo  
Bids him stop and rest at night  
For a slice of Magic Pudding  
At the Great Australian Bite.

*Time like a sausage rolls on  
And Cloncurry's going cold  
I once was so Vic Bitter,  
But now I'm XXXX Gold.*

UPDATE! — The Baron has been trying to persuade me  
that Kit-Kats are not Australian. What rubbish! They're  
as Australian as Prime Minister Roosevelt Menzies-  
Churchill the Second, who invented Tasmania using  
nothing more than vulcanised rubber!

AND ANOTHER THING — For your edification, there  
is an alternative version of the second chorus:

*But Paul has ceased from Keating  
With Howard's Ruddy bum;  
For it's hard to have a  
And tell it to your mum.*

Now aren't you glad I didn't tell you that?

— **Tim Train**, Saturday, 11 October 2014



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## Quoth the raven, ‘Steve Waugh!’ by Tim Train

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Amongst its many other benefits, Lalor, a northern suburb of Melbourne, is quite possibly the national capital for astroturf. I’ve never seen so many fake lawns in my life since I moved out here; sometimes there’s even moss growing on the fake lawns or oxalis weeds pushing their way. I was immediately moved to raise the possibility of an alternative, astroturf poetry event out here in Lalor.

And what sort of poetry to read? Really, what could be better or more suitable than to celebrate the achievements of the great plagiarists?

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The zigguratic edifice,  
With xenomorphic glee  
All in a hot and copper sky —  
*To be or not to be*

Stately, plump, Buck Rogers dived  
Across the stormy sea  
‘Thus I refute him, sir!’ he cried: *A, B, C, D, E, F, G.*

‘And hast thou slain the Nabokov,  
Four score years ago?’  
With jubilating cries he wept —  
*‘Hello goodbye hello!’*

‘Half a league, full fathom five,  
Will you ride my sleigh?’  
Quick was the little Maid’s reply —  
*‘Toorali oorali ay’.*

A damsel with a dulcimer,  
Then hailed the Grand Old Duke.  
Her words are burned into my soul:  
*‘I am your father, Luke!’*

And so you find me, knight at arms,  
A maiden for to woo,  
Give me Kit Kat, or give me death —  
*Goob goob ga choo!*

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## Eight science fiction haiku by Denny Marshall

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Denny Marshall is an artist and poet from Lincoln, Nebraska, who has published haiku and other poetry in such magazines as *Reluctant Famulus*, *Counterclock (& Poetry)*, *BCSFazine*, and *Breaking It Down*. His artwork appears in *SF Commentary*.

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phase one of war  
aliens transport seeds  
impregnate most

warp drive taxicab  
the company went bankrupt  
light speed, meter stops

planet Earth square  
in parallel universe  
car stuck on the edge

large meteor heads

in path directly for earth  
took them years to build

after all this time  
you finally found a job  
then beamed aboard

landing UFO  
is only a half-inch wide  
eaten by small bird

telescope viewing  
riding with the universe  
in a time machine

ufo for sale  
in excellent condition  
only drove 'sun' days

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## The two travellers

by Daniel King

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'The Two Travellers' is part of a recent volume of Daniel King's poetry called *Amethysts and Emeralds*. If you can't find it at Book Depository, you can find it on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/Amethysts-Emeralds-58-1-Poems/dp/1925231739>.

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Eight billion years of cold vacuum,  
Clattering down our minds  
From you to me  
As we inch towards that far distant light, the white  
hole, rising like Christ  
From me to you  
Inch away from that terrible green thing we take with  
us but want to leave behind  
Side by side,  
Always side by side —  
Ideas bouncing back and forth  
From you to me and me to you  
From me to you and you to me  
For there was nothing else —  
Constructing Hinduism among the stars,  
The *wahltrieb* peacock sheen of Lord Vishnu, the  
terrors of Lord Shiva  
As a way to pass the decades, the centuries —  
'Now what word followed that? I tested you on that  
only four hundred years ago'  
'What will Christ say on His second coming?'  
— Desperately fighting back the tentacles of madness,  
The words limping with squid-syllables into and from  
our minds  
Like our poor tortured bodies dragged to the  
launching platform,  
Twists of thought coiling through the darkness and  
terrors where there are no stars:  
'Now who was Ra, and in what country will there be  
Thor?'  
'What will be the mystic symbolism of emerald?'  
And still the distant white hole rising like Christ, but  
never nearer!  
Worst was the unimaginable halfway point, after which  
it all had to be done again!  
The chattering chakras of our minds unendingly  
studding the vacuum with our ideas, so that they could  
become real,  
Always the chattering chakras, cranking and  
discharging, discharging and cranking, over and over  
again,  
From you to me and me to you

From me to you and you to me  
From you to me and me to you  
From me to you and you to me...  
Pockmarks on our souls.  
And the recording of our mothers' yearning, shrill  
with infinity, that we were made to listen to endlessly!  
Unimaginable too was the distant day when we  
entered that white light  
And you, free, a careening pearl at dizzy speed where  
no pearl should be  
Iridescent in emerald nebulousity and amethyst cracks  
like the Great Rift  
Which speaks of the evil that is between the stars,  
Evil greater than that of Zeta Reticuli.  
You became a swirling blue cloud, creating our  
cosmos,  
And I crashed on that dark world and was forgotten.  
Who were we?  
We were Kalra and Kaldog,  
Two beautiful young male lovers,  
And we were blinded, turned into monsters and then  
sent, side by side, on an 8 billion year journey to the  
entrance of another universe  
Which we might create.  
We were the ones *tricked* into challenging the cold  
terrible void beyond the galaxies themselves!  
We were the terrible rebels *tricked* into stealing  
diamond time itself!  
Who dared to craft it into a jewel that would become  
the One,  
The only Real object,  
Noumenon and New Man and son of the Lord,  
The one to whom all future creation  
Will learn to bow  
Because no one dares not refuse to bow to infinity:  
Kalki.

You say you can understand our journey. You can't.  
You can only  
Gaze up at its infinity, which is that of the stars  
themselves.

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# Bruce Gillespie

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## The story of Norstrilia Press

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### Introduction

When I mentioned on the Timebinders email group that Norstrilia Press still had for sale Greg Egan's first novel, *An Unusual Angle*, there was some interest, and an American fan asked for a catalogue of Norstrilia Press publications. I listed each of our publications in terms of the people who contributed to each book, and tried to capture the atmosphere of a time when rank amateurs such as Carey, Rob, and me could keep a publishing company solvent for ten years. As Paul Simon wrote: 'A time of innocence, A time of confidences ... I have a photograph. Preserve your memories.'

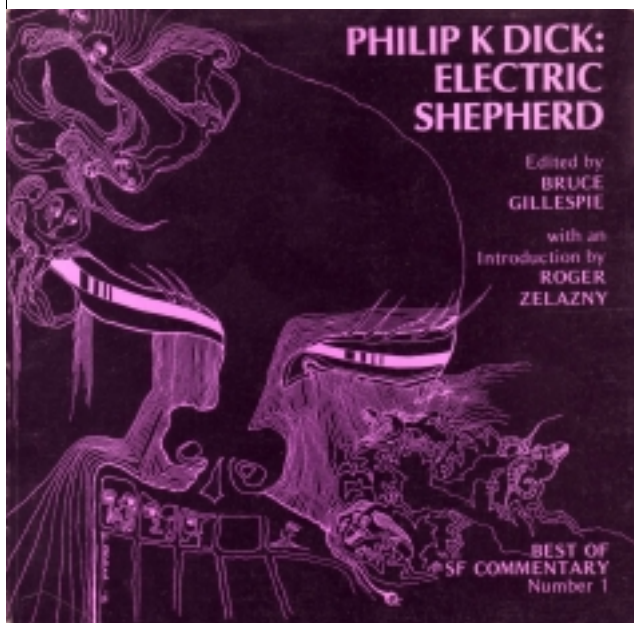
Let's not overdo the nostalgia. Carey and Rob and I disagreed on most things most of the time — but we still like looking through those Norstrilia Press books that are sitting on the shelves.

The unheralded heroes of this story are Maggie Gerrand; Jo Handfield, whose husband eventually emptied the garage of all those boxes of insold books; and Elaine Cochrane, who had to endure Norstrilia Press board meetings in her own living room.

In 1975, three moderately innocent fans lived in Melbourne, Australia, which was about to play host to Australia's first World SF Convention, Aussiecon.

Rob Gerrand had already been listed as Assistant

Cover: Irene Pagram.



Editor of *Australian Science Fiction Review* (the 1966–69 incarnation), and had once been chosen by *Cleo* magazine as its Bachelor of the Month. Although he did not know it in 1975, his bachelor status was about to change.

Although he joined fandom only in 1969, by 1975 Carey Handfield was already known as the fan whose *Fault It Always Was*. When he had met David Grigg, aspiring writer, at school, he had offered to become David's manager. Carey wrote, and still writes very little; but he still makes things happen for those poor incompetent souls who call themselves writers, editors, or publishers. In 1975 Carey's managerial skills were still unencumbered by romantic attachments.

Bruce Gillespie had joined fandom in 1968, and had immediately decided that the only fannish activity worth 120 per cent of his time was publishing fanzines. Then as now, he came up against the immutable economic law that fanzines cost money to publish, and never make money. By mid 1975 his fanzine *SF Commentary* had already picked up three Hugo nominations and several Ditmar wins, but Gillespie was always broke. (And still is.)

One fateful day in the fateful year of 1975, I, Bruce Gillespie, asked Carey Handfield if he could think of a way to earn the money to produce *SF Commentary* regularly. (This pattern repeats itself forever in my life.) 'Sure,' said Carey. 'You put together a *Best of SF Commentary*. We'll publish it, and the profits will pay for regular issues of the magazine.' Carey gave little idea of how this would be done, but was quite certain that it would happen.

### Bruce Gillespie (ed.): *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* (1975)

Since we were both admirers of the SF stories of Cordwainer Smith (Dr Paul Linebarger), and liked the title *Norstrilian News* (John Foyster's newszine of the early seventies), we wrote to Linebarger's widow, who gave us permission to call ourselves Norstrilia Press. Irene Pagram, then partner of Lee Harding, designed our logo and the cover of our first book, *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd*, which was edited by me, based on all the stuff on Dick that had appeared in *SF Commentary* since Issue No. 1, January 1969. Roger Zelazny, who had made Australia's presentation at Torcon II in 1973, wrote the



Introduction. Suddenly we had a manuscript in hand. How would we pay for its publication?

Carey is perhaps the first Melbourne fan to have a vision of other fans as people from whom one might raise large amounts of money. He put out his hand to lots of them. Each was asked to 'invest' a sum of \$50 or more in Norstrilia Press. Nobody was promised any dividend on that investment, but Carey did promise to give back each sum as soon as possible. Suddenly Carey had in hand the \$2000 or so he needed to publish our first book.

*Electric Shepherd* was being prepared as Carey and the rest of the Committee were frantically organising the last stages of Aussiecon, to be held in August. Carey's guiding business principle was 'cheap! cheap! cheap!' He made contact with a printer who lived in a country town 100 miles away. This printer promised unbelievably cheap rates, and also promised to deliver the Aussiecon Program Book, *Electric Shepherd*, and a special issue of *SF Commentary* in time for the convention. As I recall, *Electric Shepherd* was delivered with a few days to spare, the Program Book was delivered with a few hours to spare (many of the copies misbound), and the special Tucker issue of *SFC* was never delivered. (Nearly twelve months later I published it as a duplicated fanzine.) We have never heard from or of this printer again.

Only Carey's persistence dragged copies of *Electric Shepherd* from the printer on the eve of Aussiecon I. We printed 1000 copies, which took 22 years to sell out.

Everything went well with the new enterprise, except that it did not fulfil its original aim. No profits reached the constantly empty coffers of *SF Commentary* because Carey had found a Mission In Life. He did 90 per cent

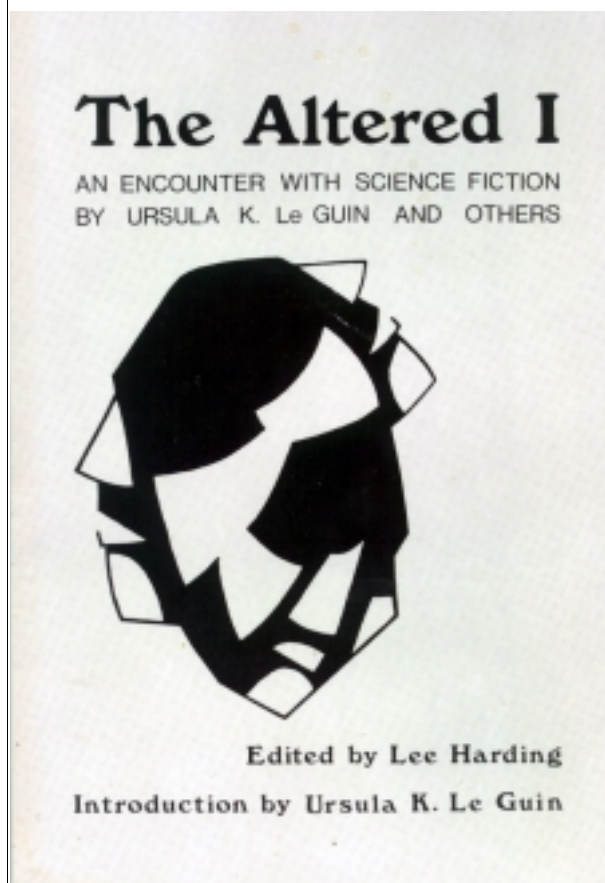
of the work on Norstrilia Press, but in return he demanded that we keep publishing new books. And each of these books needed some new source of capital.

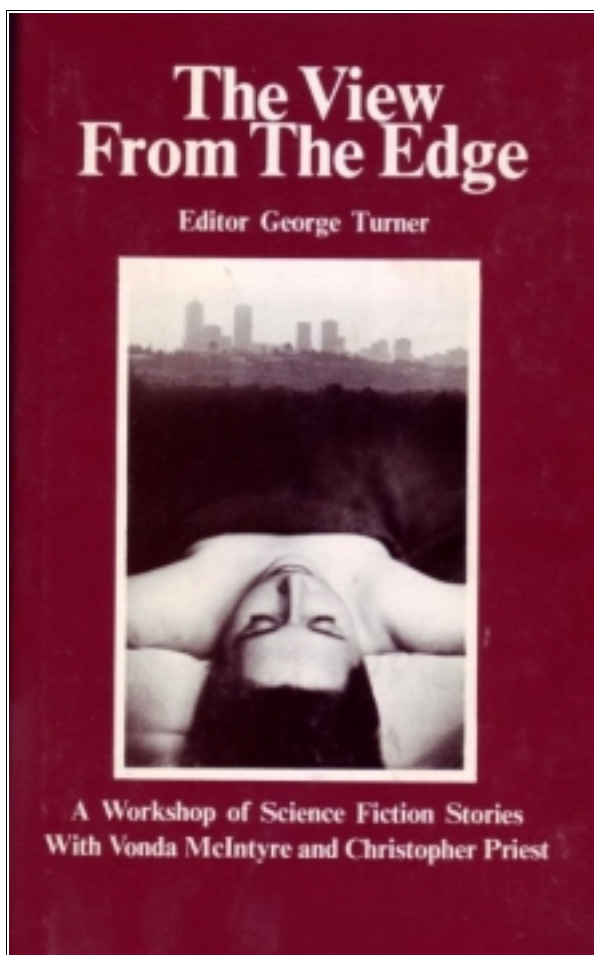
## Lee Harding (ed.): *The Altered I* (1976)

Rob Gerrand joined the partnership six months later, originally because he invested a whole lot of money into the venture. He and Carey changed the direction of our publishing policy from the Shining Vision of Pure Criticism that I had envisioned. I wanted Norstrilia Press to become the next Advent Press, concentrating on critical books derived from *SFC*'s articles. Instead, Carey and Rob announced to me that Lee Harding had offered to put together a book about the Ursula Le Guin Writers' Workshop that had been held during the week before Aussiecon. *The Altered I* would feature submission stories, stories written at the workshop, and 'atmosphere articles' about that magical week in the Dandenong Ranges. Again Irene Pagram designed the cover. The resulting book was received well within fandom, and has since become a textbook for the writers' workshop movement that spread throughout Australia during the seventies and eighties. Better still, Berkeley Books paid \$2000 for the American reprint rights, immediately enabling us to pay back our most pressing debts and start thinking about a program for publishing new works.

Neither Carey, Rob, nor I was earning any living from our work on Norstrilia Press, but we could now see a way

Front and back covers: Irene Pagram.





Cover: Tim Handfield.

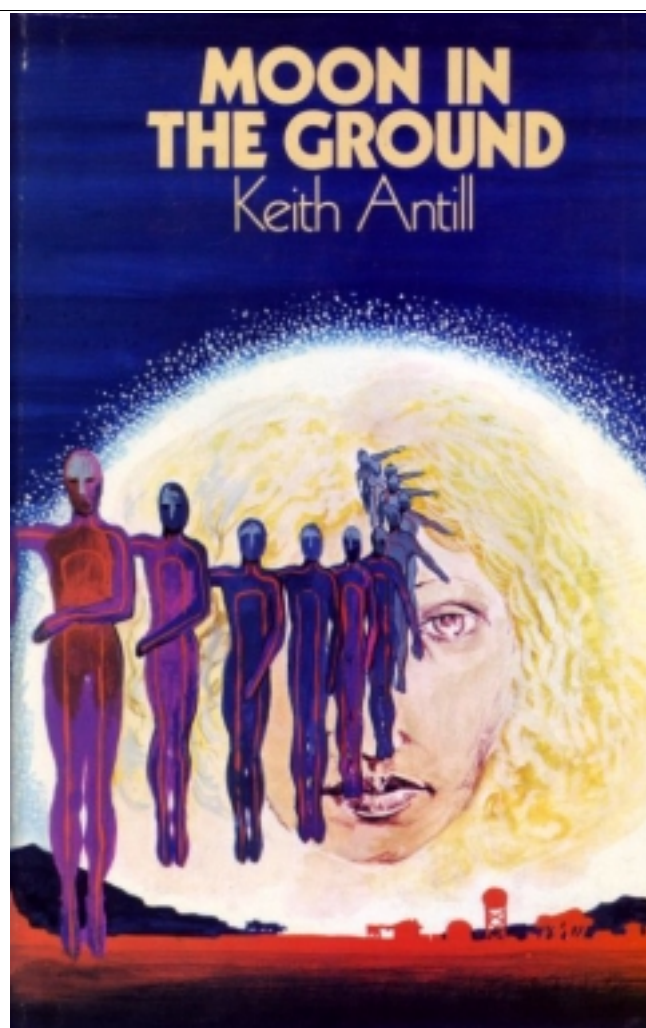
clear to publishing without going broke after the release of each book.

And of all people, the Commonwealth Government was our most helpful partner in this program.

During the three years of the Whitlam Labor Government (1972 to 1975), the Australia Council had been set up to help fund all aspects of the arts in Australia. In December 1975 Labor lost office, but the essential structure of Labor's arts policy remained. There were grants available for individual authors and writer-oriented projects, plus an equally generous subsidy for the publication costs of any book produced entirely in Australia. The Le Guin Writers Workshop was made possible only by an Australia Council grant.

### George Turner (ed.): *The View from the Edge* (1978)

A year later, Kitty Vigo obtained a grant to help pay for the tuition costs of a second large Writers Workshop. It was held at Monash University, east of Melbourne, with George Turner, Christopher Priest, and Vonda McIntyre as Writers in Residence. George edited for Norstrilia Press *The View from the Edge* as a volume complementary to *The Altered I*. More didactic about the art of writing than *The Altered I*, it gives a vivid idea of the workshop method (that is, America's Clarion Method adapted for Australian conditions), and features some memorable



Cover: Stephen Campbell.

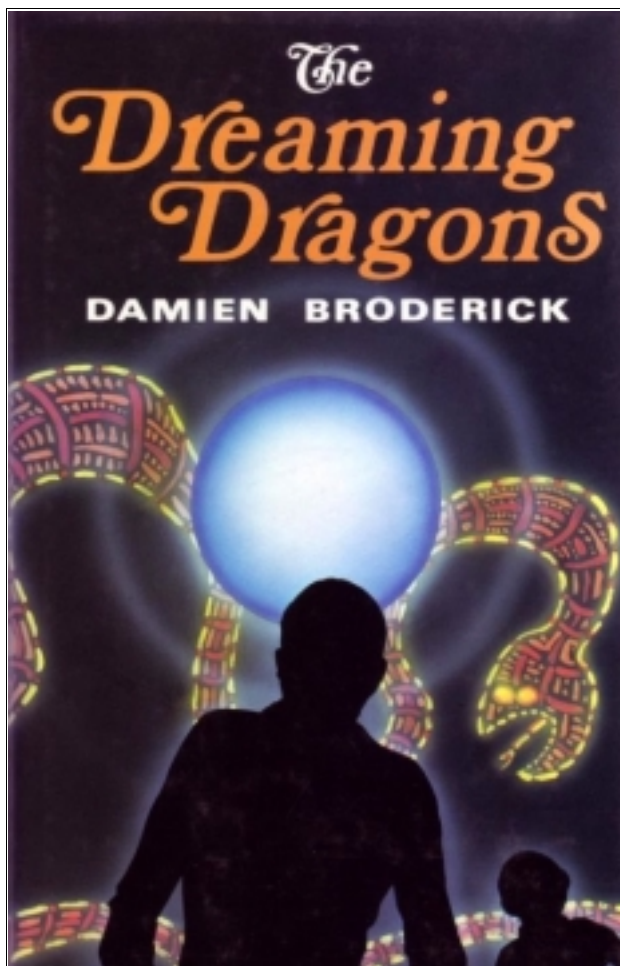
stories. *The View from the Edge* did not sell to an American publisher, but it made back its costs.

Even after three releases, Norstrilia's financial position was precarious. Carey always had to put a hand out to new investors to keep the program going. However, we felt that the enterprise was worthwhile because we were publishing books that would never be looked at by the mainstream publishers. It took ten years to make us realise that books that probably won't make money for Murdoch or Pearson probably would never make money for us either.

In the late 1970s we kept going because (a) we succeeded in gaining publishing grants from the Literature Board, which meant we only needed to sell 500 copies to break even on a book; and (b) we bought an IBM Electronic Composer (a golfball-type typesetting machine), with which I typeset about twenty books, both for us and for other publishers. This typesetting business gave me a healthy income from 1978 to 1982, and saved a small fortune in costs for NP itself.

Gradually we became more ambitious and more foolish. Like many SF publishers before and since, we felt that we would make a vital connection with the mainstream of Australian writing that would save us from remaining a ghetto publisher. There were harbingers.





Cover: Grant Gittus.

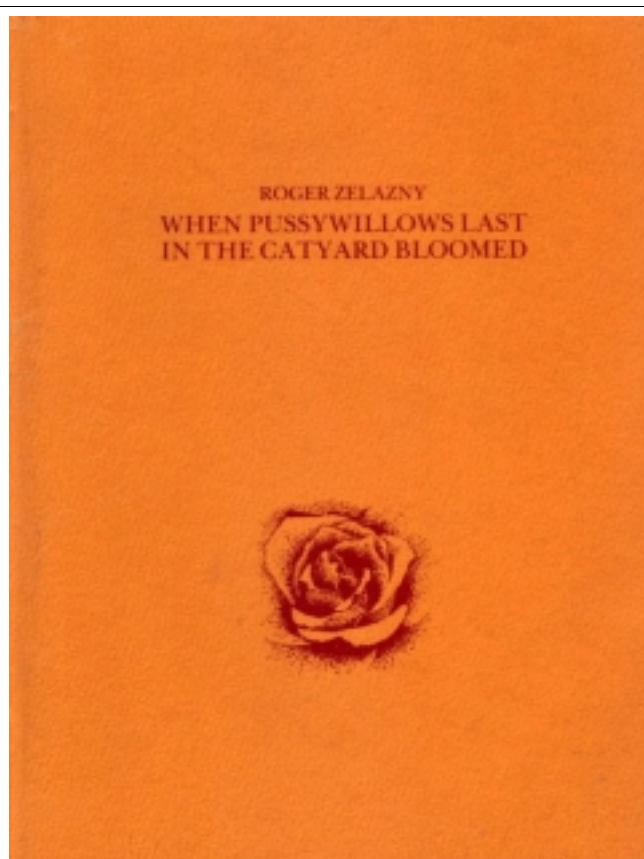
### Keith Antill: *Moon in the Ground* (1979)

In 1970 John Bangsund, editor of the first series of *Australian Science Fiction Review*, had been in touch with Keith Antill, whose book, *Moon in the Ground*, had won the Dame Mary Gilmore Award. This was awarded to books of literary merit that reflected Dame Mary Gilmore's leftish view of Australian life. *Moon in the Ground* received quite a bit of publicity when it won the award, especially as it was — horror! — an SF novel, but it remained in manuscript, and had not found a publisher. No Australian mainstream publisher would touch SF at that time. Carey tracked down Antill, bought the manuscript, and we made it our next project. Stephen Campbell, whom I had met in Ararat in 1969 and had done illustrations for early issues of *SFC*, painted the cover.

### Damien Broderick: *The Dreaming Dragons* (1980)

We sold enough copies of *Moon in the Ground* to make it possible to publish another novel.

My great dream of publishing SF criticism was politely but firmly squelched. I was always outvoted two to one. NP decided to do Damien Broderick's *The Dreaming*



Cover: Geoff Pollard.

*Dragons*, which I had read in manuscript before Norstrilia Press existed. It had languished for two years, but by the time we came back to it, Damien had already sold it to Dave Hartwell's Timescape Books in America. We had to buy back Australian rights from Timescape, which added \$2000 to our upfront costs. However, both the American paperback and our hardback were well reviewed, and we were able to sell Australian paperback rights to Penguin Books. Again we had snatched poverty from the jaws of bankruptcy. *The Dreaming Dragons* came second in the Campbell Award (America's jury award for Best SF Novel of the Year), was chosen by David Pringle in Britain as one of the Top 100 SF Novels Ever, and generally gained much prestige. (It was hardly a bestseller in Australia, but we offer the only edition still in print.)

### Roger Zelazny: *When Pussywillows Last in the Catyard Bloomed* (1980)

At about this time Roger Zelazny offered us the only edition, in both hardback and paperback, of his second book of poems, *When Pussywillows Last in the Catyard Bloomed*. Poetry! Had we gone stark mad? But if we'd had American distribution, we probably could have sold quite a few copies of this book. In the end, we didn't. Worse, because we were publishing a non-Australian author, *Pussywillows* wasn't eligible for a publishing grant.



## Michael Tolley and Kirpal Singh (eds.): *The Stellar Gauge* (1980)

Our most spectacular publishing disaster was, as you might have guessed, a book of SF criticism. Kirpal Singh and Michael Tolley were both teaching in the English Department at Adelaide University. They put together *The Stellar Gauge*, a collection of fine critical essays written by prestigious people. Sladek's essay on Disch was my favourite essay (much later reprinted in *SF Commentary*), and I had glee in my fingertips as I typeset George Turner's magnificently nasty essay about Frederik Pohl's *Gateway*. *The Stellar Gauge* seemed to me then, and still does, a repository of Fabulous Stuff, but readers did not want to know about it.

*The Stellar Gauge* was the third book we did in one year. Usually we did one book a year, then waited for the returns to finance the next project. Broke, we borrowed almost all the costs for *The Stellar Gauge* from a friend of Mike Tolley. She was not a fan; she expected to be paid back within a reasonable time; and the book failed utterly. I still don't know whether she ever received back all her money. The book failed because there was no definite audience for it in Australia. If we could have launched it into the American college market we might have done quite well. The book had a rotten cover, about which I protested. I was outvoted again. I've always been afraid to ask what Carey did with the umpteen boxes of unsold *Stellar Gauges*.

## Jay Bland: *Lavington Pugh* (1982)

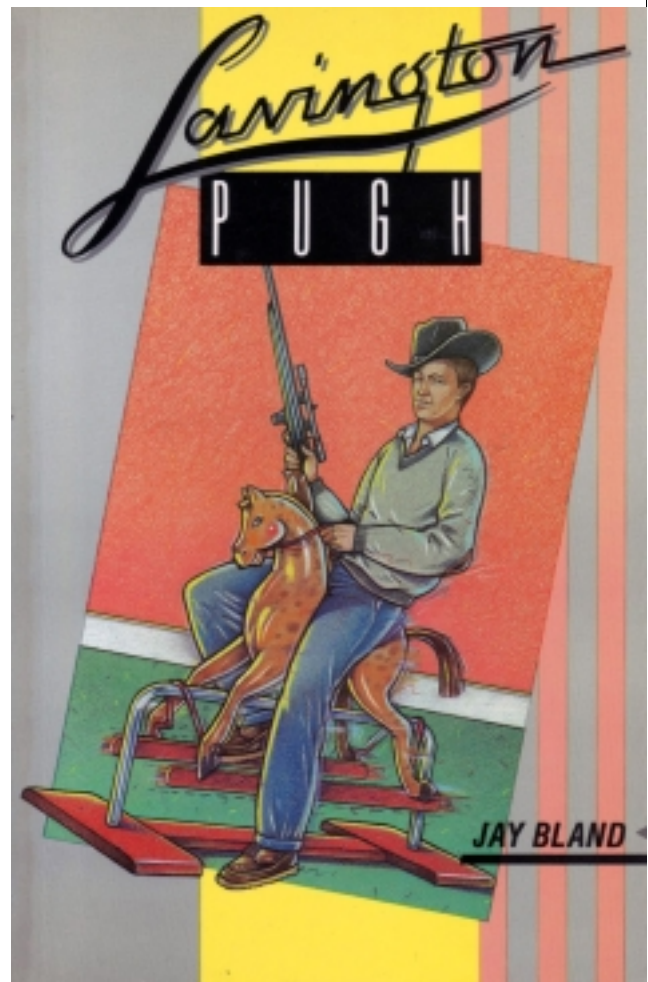
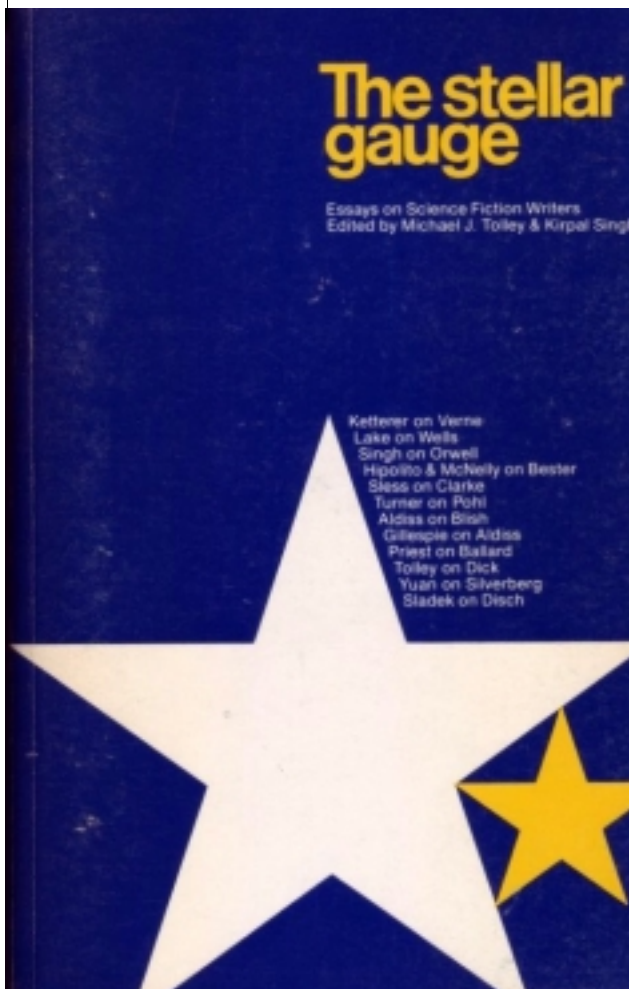
Norstrilia Press was the first Australian specialist SF publisher since the downmarket fan presses of the early 1950s. Manuscripts poured in. Almost without exception, they made us flinch. Many of them, rescued from deep desk drawers, were literally stinkers. Phew!

But there were exceptions. One day the mail disgorged the manuscript of a nicely satirical novel, *Lavington Pugh*, by Adelaide writer Jay Bland. He used SF as an enabling device for an amusing novel about the lunacies of the 1960s. Not a great success, but it didn't lose money and we've never regretted publishing it.

## Greg Egan: *An Unusual Angle* (1983)

We also received an astonishing manuscript from a bloke from Western Australia called Greg Egan. The first twenty pages bordered on the incomprehensible, but they were real writing, chewy and funny and passionate. Soon the reader discovers that the main character is a teenager, living in Perth, Western Australia, who has a camera in his head. Day by day he films his life, but he can't retrieve the film to develop it. *An Unusual Angle* is the story of the film he can never make. The subject matter is suburban high school life in Australia in the

Cover: Cozzolino Hughes and Chris Payne.





Cover: Cozzolino Hughes.

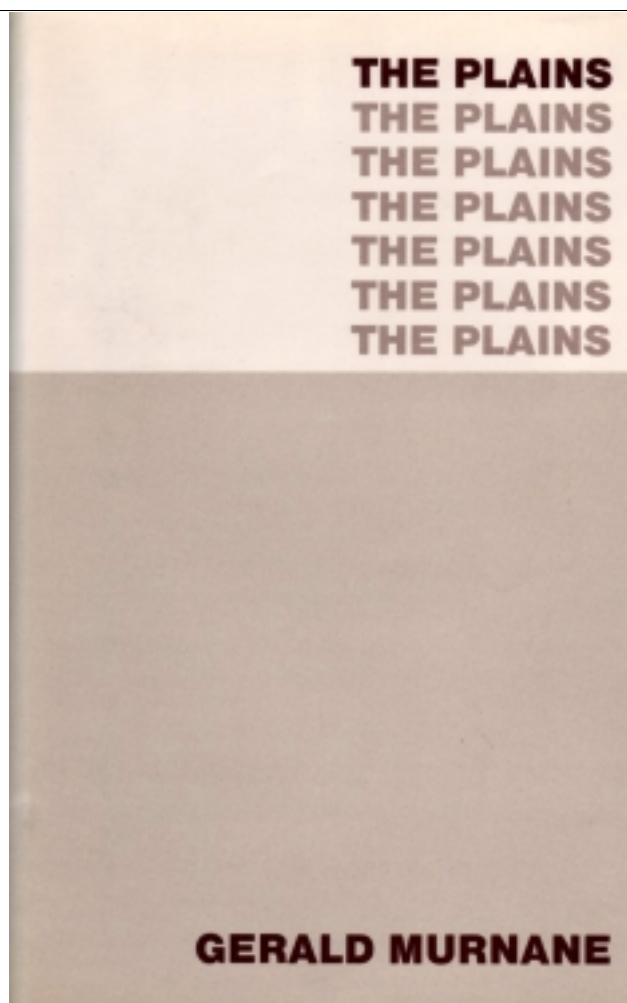
1970s. That might not sound exciting, but it was, and still is, unique in Australia. Most other Australian school stories have been written about impoverished kids in isolated country schools or rich kids in private schools.

As it proceeds, *An Unusual Angle* becomes increasingly zany and funny and vivid. We discovered that Greg had written it when he was seventeen. When we published it, he was still in his early twenties. It received only one major review (Veronica Brady in Van Ikin's *Science Fiction*), didn't sell much, but it put a bomb under Greg Egan. In the next few years he sent us five novels and three books of short stories. They were brilliant but we could not see a way of publishing them. They still have not been published. At the 1985 Worldcon Carey, Lucy, and I actually met Greg. He lurked at the edge of the last hours of Aussiecon II, observing fandom in all its glory. Nobody in the SF world has set eyes on him since. Even his British publisher has never met him.

Because of Norstrilia Press's fabled incapacity for publicity, most Greg Egan fans still do not realise that *An Unusual Angle* ever existed, and do not know that we still have a small number of copies for sale. I'm told that secondhand copies fetch fabulous sums in America.

### Gerald Murnane: *The Plains* (1982)

Our greatest success arose not from a submitted manu-



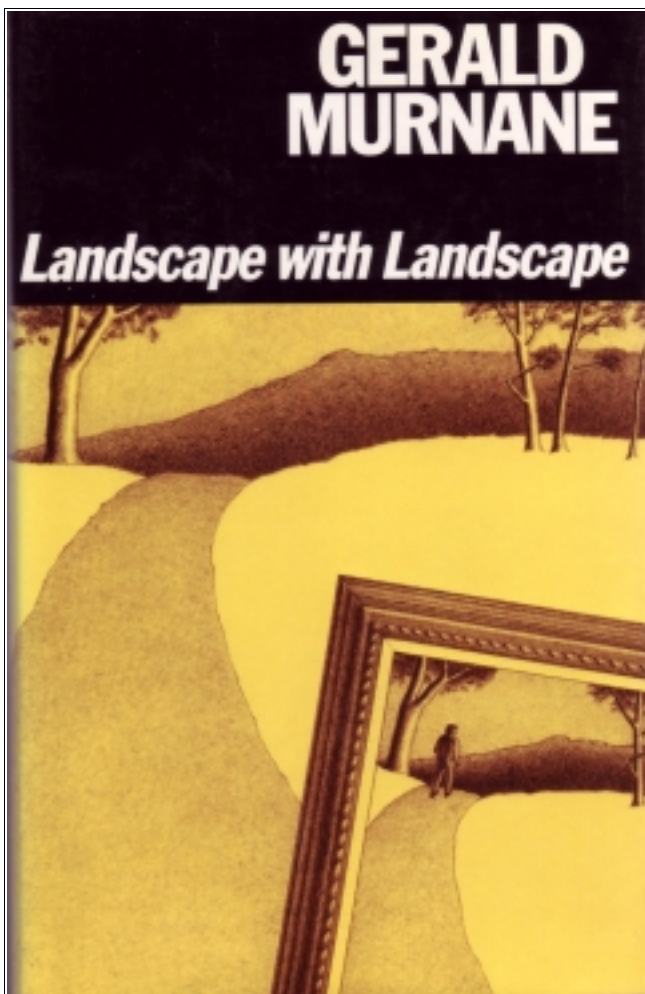
Cover: Marius Foley.

script but from a book that we commissioned. In 1971 I had been worked with Gerald Murnane at the Publications Branch of the Education Department. Although we shared a passionate interest in books, I did not realise that Gerald had been writing a novel for the previous ten years. That first novel, *Tamarisk Row*, appeared in 1973, to considerable acclaim. I typed the manuscripts of several of his novels, including a large book that he could not sell. I suggested detaching one 20,000-word section from it and releasing it as a novella/novel (in a large-print edition). Norstrilia Press published it in 1981 as *The Plains*.

The first cover we put on it was so blindingly awful that the distributor refused to put copies in bookshops. In one week, Carey commissioned a somewhat better cover from an artist friend of his and arranged for 1500 copies of the new cover to be printed. The first cover had to be removed from every copy, and the new cover wrapped around it by hand. The ecstatic reviews began to appear before copies were distributed to bookshops.

It's impossible to describe *The Plains*, although I have a go in my entry on it in the Nicholls/Clute *SF Encyclopedia*. I talked about it in a conference paper that Van Ikin published in *Science Fiction* in 1982. No longer was Norstrilia Press merely a publisher of science fiction; we had waded out into the big wide puddle of Australian Literature. *The Plains* was nominated for, and came very





Cover: David Wong.

near to winning *The Age* Book of the Year Award for 1982. It became our bestseller — the only book of ours to sell more than a thousand copies in hardback.

### **Gerald Murnane:** *Landscape with Landscape* (1985)

Flush with Gerald Murnane's and our success, we published his next book, *Landscape with Landscape*, a series of five linked novellas, including a story that I would call SF. 'The Battle of Acosta Nu' is one of the very few great novellas in Australian literature. *Landscape* did not sell nearly as well as *The Plains*. Gerald announced that he would be sending his next book to another publisher.

### **David King (ed.):** *Dreamworks* (1983)

We weren't good at publicity. Carey refused to untighten the purse strings to spend money on advertising, and we didn't know how to get our authors featured on radio, which, more than TV, sells books in Australia. However, Carey's mother Esta, who had been in the PR business, decided to have one last fling to putting us on the map. She organised the launch at the Melbourne Planetarium

of David King's collection of SF/fantasy/magic realist stories called *Dreamworks* (1982). (We weren't to know we should have patented the title.) It included some notable stories, including Greg Egan's first published short story, Lucy Sussex's first, one of George Turner's short stories, and the last piece of Gillespie fiction. *Dreamworks* received a large number of favourable reviews; Andrew Whitmore's 'Above Atlas His Shoulders' won a Ditmar Award; and I think we made our money back.

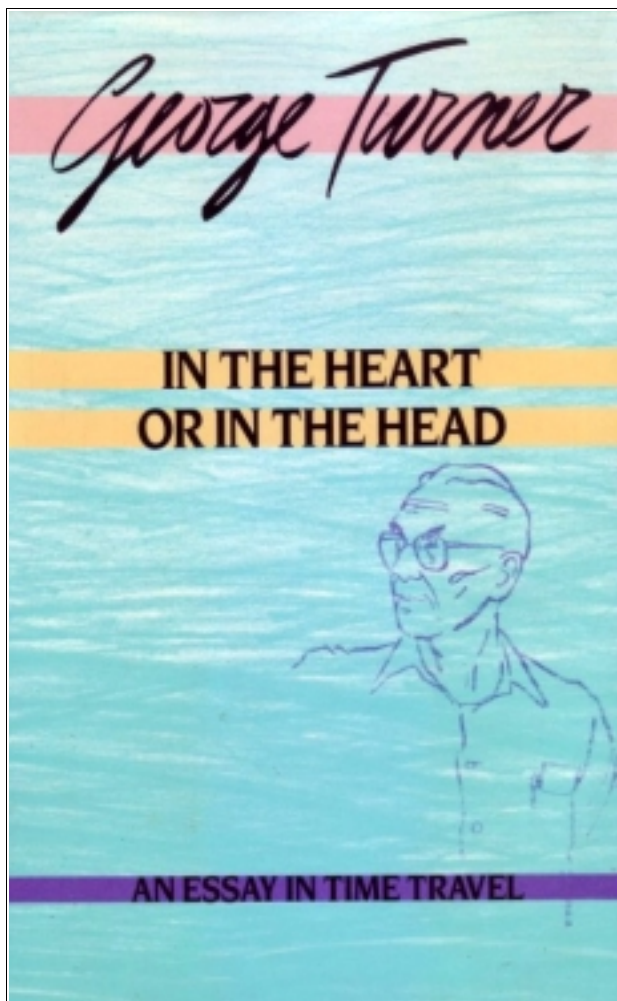
### **George Turner:** *In the Heart or in the Head* (1984)

Time was running out for the small publishers. With its funds constantly crimped by both conservative and Labor governments, by the mid 1980s the Australia Council had started to move away from funding books of fiction, but was still not supporting non-fiction. In the mid 1980s I met for the first time in many years my English tutor from 1966, Dinny O'Hearn (for some years before his death, the co-presenter of SBS's *Book Show*). He remembered me, as he remembered all his former students, and agreed to write a one-page critique/puff for George Turner's *In the Heart or in the Head*, his literary biography. George's book was one of only 5 per cent of

Cover: Stephen Campbell







non-fiction titles to receive a grant that year. John Bangsund edited it (whereas most of the other NP books had been edited at the keyboard by me during the process of typesetting), and the book came out. Many copies remained in storage. Somehow many boxes of them were left under a house in a western suburb of Melbourne, and have never been seen since. Ask Carey the full story. (Thanks to George, I still have a box of *In the Heart or in the Head* at my place.)

*In the Heart or in the Head* is equal favourite among the books we published. At least half of it a literary essay (a history of SF), so it was a return to the world of criticism for Norstrilia Press. It arose from my attempts to persuade George to write a new version of his 'On Writing About Science Fiction', his famous long essay from 1968. In George's writing credo, contained in *In the Heart*'s last chapter, he posed a challenge to himself: what would his ideal SF novel read like? George's answer to himself (and us) was *The Sea and Summer* (*Drowning Towers* in USA), his magnum opus, Arthur Clarke Award winner, Commonwealth Writers Prize runner-up, and much else besides.

## Endnote 1

And that is the story of Norstrilia Press. It's all about fannish friendships, fabulous Carey Handfield organisational triumphs, and our naivety at mistaking the impossible for the possible. We didn't lose any money, but we

didn't make much. Eventually we came unstuck because Carey got a new hobby. In 1984 (as I remember) he and Joanna got together, and shortly they were thinking about marriage, and kids, and houses, and they had a shed full of unsold Norstrilia Press books. Jo said, 'I only married him for his junk.' Eventually the junk was disposed of, and Carey distributed an extremely modest profit to the three of us. Between us we still have a few copies for sale of many of our books. Melbourne's Slow Glass Books holds substantial stocks of some of our titles. Try us for a good deal. I don't know what to charge for *An Unusual Angle* now. According to one American dealer, the sky's the limit. Our hardback edition of Zelazny's collection is so rare that it is not even listed in the complete Zelazny bibliography.

Norstrilia Press stopped publishing because (a) Carey gained new interests in life: wife, kids and household; and (b) our next project, a book of SF stories set in Australia, to be edited by Harlan Ellison and Terry Dowling, was scuppered by exactly the same factors that stopped *The Last Dangerous Visions*. Ellison made all the noise; Terry was left out of pocket; in the end Carey, Rob, and I lost interest. Each of us had livings to make and other fish to fry. A few years later, Carey declared a dividend, which helped me to pay my pressing debts of the time, but I never received that continuous tinkle of cash that would have guaranteed the regular publication of *SF Commentary*. Instead I began publishing *The Metaphysical Review*.

Most people have forgotten what we did (although other people have chosen to misrepresent what we attempted to do), and in the end our main 'rival', Cory & Collins, made no more money than we did. Australian SF stalled for a few years until the next wave of small publishers began an exciting chapter of Australian publishing in 1991; and mainstream publishers began to take up SF; once the big birds moved in, the boom really began.

## Endnote 2:

### Why there may never be a Second Edition of *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd*

The centrepiece of *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* is Stanislaw Lem's essay 'SF: A Hopeless Case, with Exceptions'. The exception, of course, was Philip K. Dick, who became more than usually paranoid in 1974 and repaid Lem's compliment by coming to regard Lem as his deadly enemy. It's not worth doing a second edition of *Electric Shepherd* without including that essay (plus George Turner's long article of comment on it), but meanwhile Stanislaw Lem has had a ferocious disagreement with Franz Rottensteiner, his champion and agent for nearly thirty years, believing that Franz had turned on him. The essay may no longer be available for reprinting, or else would cost a fortune to buy from Harcourt.

— Bruce Gillespie, February 1999

Colin Steele, Emeritus Fellow at the Australian National University, was for many years the SF/fantasy reviewer at *The Canberra Times*. He has also been *SF Commentary's* longest-serving contributor. His column of reviews has appeared here for over 30 years. Thank you, Colin, from all your readers.

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## Colin Steele

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### The field

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#### Critical books about SF and fantasy

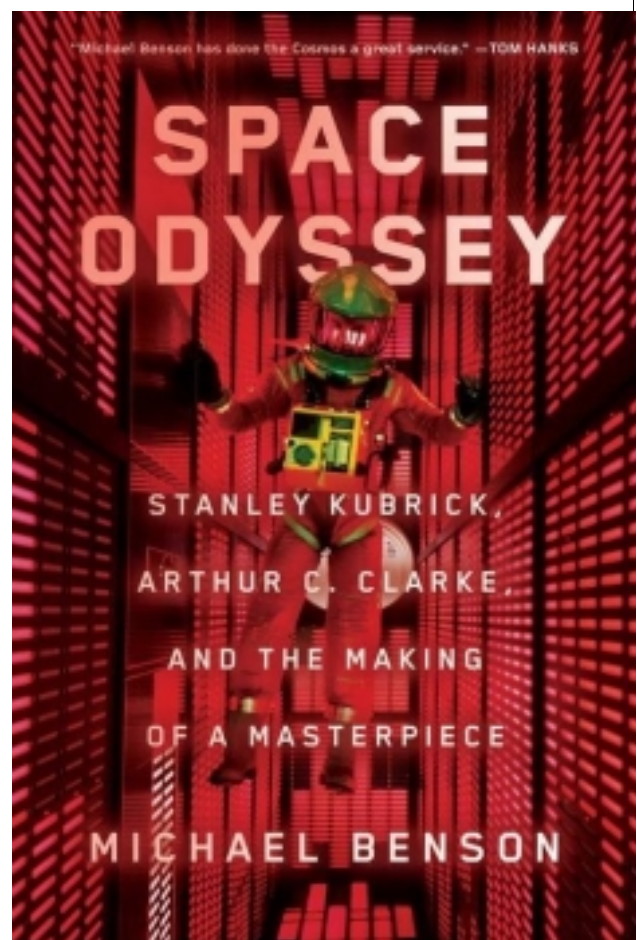
**SPACE ODYSSEY: STANLEY KUBRICK, ARTHUR C. CLARKE, AND THE MAKING OF A MASTERPIECE**  
by Michael Benson (Simon & Schuster; \$39.99)

Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) has an iconic status, but, like the film *Blade Runner*, it took a while for that status to be achieved. Initially both the public and the MGM studio bosses were baffled and disappointed by the film.

*2001: A Space Odyssey* had its world premiere on 2 April 1968, at the Uptown Theater in Northwest Washington. Michael Benson reports that people in the audience were 'streaming out' before the film was over. This could be partly attributed to the fact that there are fewer than 40 minutes of spoken words in the 142 minutes of running time and that the reasons for the dramatic link jumps in the movie are not immediately apparent. *2001* had been four years in production and ran significantly over budget.

Celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the film's release comes Michael Benson's *Space Odyssey: Stanley Kubrick, Arthur C. Clarke, and the Making of a Masterpiece*. While there have been a number of books on the movie to date, it will surely become the definitive analysis of its making, particularly in the technical and cinematic details. Benson has combed exhaustively through existing archival material, such as letters, legal documents, and production logs, supplemented by a number of interviews with key players, including Arthur C. Clarke before his death, and Kubrick's widow. The last chapter examines the film's legacy and its influence on directors such as George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Ridley Scott, and James Cameron.

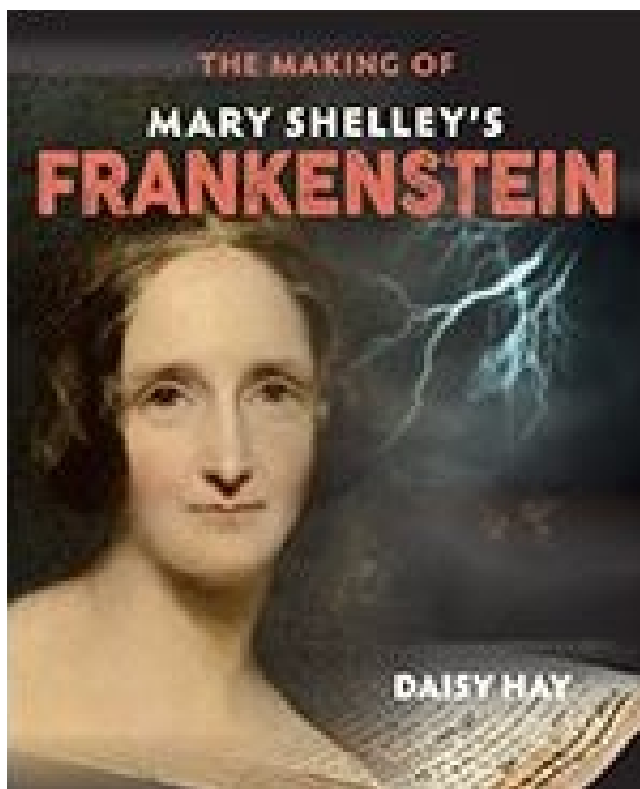
Benson writes at the end of his prologue that *2001* was 'the most consequential collaboration for Clarke and Kubrick of their lives'. Clarke, whose short story 'The Sentinel' was the original source of the film, was to be increasingly sidelined during the actual production of the film. While Clarke was invaluable to Kubrick conceptually, once Kubrick had gathered his technical and production team, Clarke's influence on the film directly waned. Other major players became involved, such as Douglas Trumbull with his stunning visual effects,



although the relationship of Kubrick and Trumbull was to sour after the success of *2001*.

Benson's nearly 500 pages include a bibliography and an index by numerous small black-and-white and colour illustrations. Apart from perhaps overhyping *2001* as being the only twentieth-century companion to James Joyce's *Ulysses* as 'the great latter-day iterations of Homer's *Odyssey*'. Benson's exhaustive research and fascinating background detail will be essential to all future studies of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. And as *Vanity Fair* has proclaimed it's also 'A HAL of a good story'.





**THE MAKING OF MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN**  
by Daisy Hay (Bodleian Library; \$32.99)  
(available from Footprint Books)

2018 is the bicentenary of the publication of Mary Shelley's seminal novel *Frankenstein*, subtitled *The Modern Prometheus*, written when she was only 19. To commemorate that publication, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, which owns the Shelley manuscript, has published renowned biographer Professor Daisy Hay's *The Making of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, a small beautifully produced book with 55 colour illustrations.

In the 1831 introduction to the third edition of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley ponders: 'How I, then a young girl, came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea?' Those famous days in 1816 in Byron's Villa Diodati on Lake Geneva with her later husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron and his doctor, John Polidori have been extensively documented in many books.

*The Making of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* instead examines Mary's engagement, no doubt stimulated originally by her famous parents, with 'the pressing issues of her time: from science, politics, religion, and slavery to maternity, the imagination, creativity, and community'. Hay's five chapters have the headings 'Time', 'People', 'Place', 'Paper', and 'Relic', supplemented by notes and further reading. Without doubt, the historical, personal, scientific, and geographical contexts are vital to understanding the genesis of *Frankenstein*.

Hay not only highlights Shelley's manuscripts, but also examines letters, diaries, artworks, and relics. Mary kept locks of hair from Shelley and their son, as well as her own. She also kept Shelley's watch and seals, which are illustrated in the book. Hay comments, 'relics are animated in *Frankenstein*, given new life by a young man

of huge ambition and imagination, whose tragedy is to forget his responsibilities to the people around him in pursuit of his dreams'.

Mary died in 1851 at the age of 53, never to reproduce the success of *Frankenstein*. Its legacy, however, is immense. As Hay notes, the word 'Frankenstein' is now in common currency. Hay concludes her clear and accessible text with the words '*Frankenstein* will continue to endure just as long as humans have the capacity to imagine impossible futures, and then to be frightened by the consequences of their imagination'.

**THE FALL OF GONDOLIN**

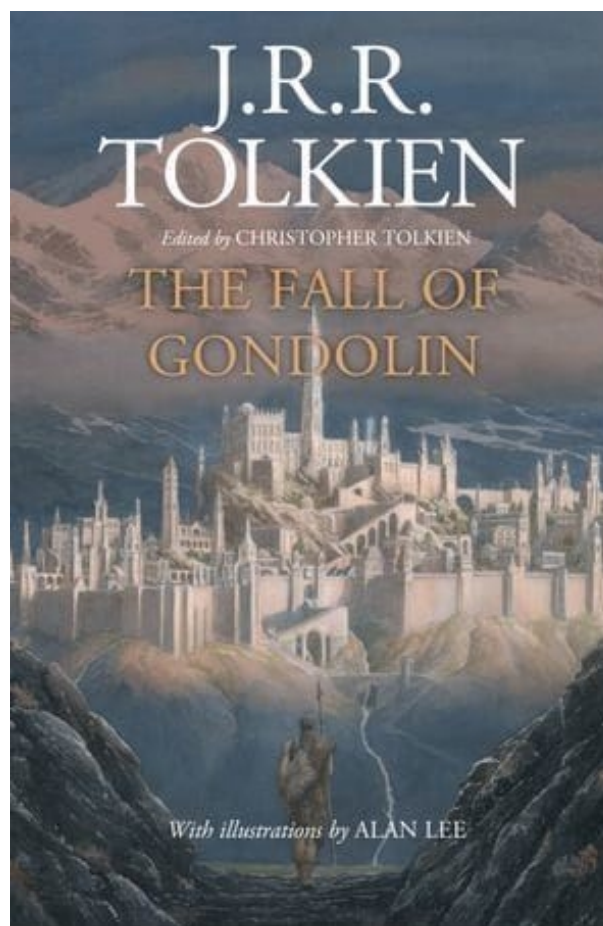
by J. R. R. Tolkien; edited by Christopher Tolkien;  
Illustrated by Alan Lee (HarperCollins; \$44.99)

**TOLKIEN: TREASURES**

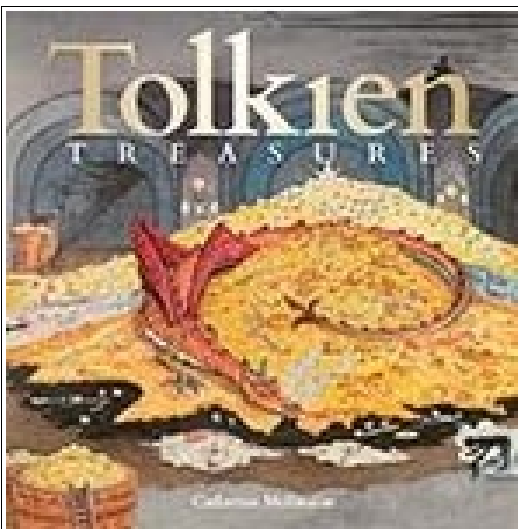
by Catherine McIlwaine (Bodleian Library;  
\$29.95) (Available from Footprint Books)

*The Fall of Gondolin* concludes what might be termed a Tolkien trilogy, edited by Christopher Tolkien, with *The Children of Húrin* and *Beren and Lúthien*. They are set in the 'Elder Days' of Middle-earth, long before the events of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. It was in *The Hobbit* in 1937 that Gondolin was referenced as a place 'dragons and goblins destroyed ... many ages ago'.

Christopher Tolkien, his father's literary executor, now in his nineties, has compiled the text of *The Fall of Gondolin* from several drafts, buttressed by exemplary scholarly notes and superb black-and-white ink drawings







and full-colour watercolour plates by Alan Lee, long-term Tolkien illustrator.

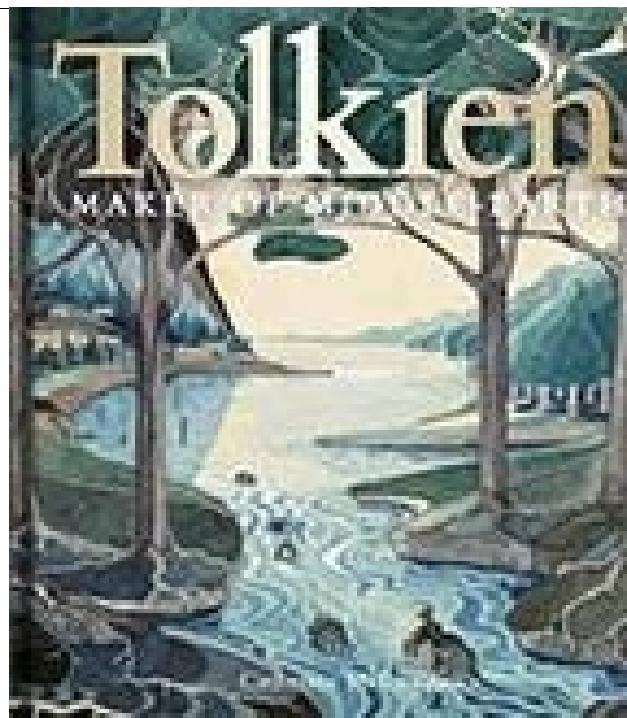
The story has its psychological origins, as do many of Tolkien's writings, in his experiences in the First World War. It was written while Tolkien was in hospital recovering from trench fever after the Battle of the Somme. Of the 600 in Tolkien's battalion, 60 were killed, 74 missing, and 450 wounded.

John Garth, author of *Tolkien and the Great War*, says of *Gondolin*: 'It's a quest story with a reluctant hero who turns into a genuine hero — it's a template for everything Tolkien wrote afterwards. It has a dark lord, our first encounter with orcs and balrogs — it's really Tolkien limbering up for what he would be doing later.' Christopher Tolkien leads the reader through the various versions of *Gondolin*, with the last version, from 1951, foreshadowing *The Lord of the Rings*.

Melko, a.k.a. Morgoth, is set on capturing the hidden elvish city of Gondolin with his army: 'Some were all iron so cunningly linked that they might flow like slow rivers of metal or coil themselves around and above all obstacles before them, and these were filled in their innermost depths with the grimmest of the Orcs with scimitars and spears; others of bronze and copper were given hearts and spirits of blazing fire, and they blasted all that stood before them with the terror of their snorting or trampled what so escaped the ardour of their breath.'

Tuor, a man of the North, is chosen by sea god Ulmo to search for the hidden elven stronghold city of Gondolin, refuge of the Noldor elves. Tuor, after arriving in Gondolin, marries the King's daughter, but is unable to rally the elves against the impending attack. Gondolin is eventually destroyed by the forces of balrogs, dragons, and orcs, although Tuor, his wife Idril and their child Eärendel escape with a few other survivors. Tuor looks back 'from a cleft in the mountains as they flee southward, at the blazing wreckage of their city'.

Those who could not afford the superb large Tolkien compendium, *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth*, by **Catherine McIlwaine**, which accompanied the 2018 Bodleian Library exhibition, will be delighted by her smaller book *Tolkien: Treasures*. The text follows Tolkien from his childhood in the Midlands and the overwhelming experi-



ences in the First World War to his Oxford University career and his subsequent writings, both factual and fiction, school and university.

It is supplemented by numerous full-page colour illustrations from *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*, as well Tolkien's intricate and beautiful maps revealing the topography of Middle-earth. *Tolkien: Treasures* is a superb short introduction to Tolkien's life and works.

#### TOLKIEN: MAKER OF MIDDLE EARTH

by **Catherine McIlwaine** (Bodleian Library; \$99.99) (available in Australia through Footprint Books).

**Catherine McIlwaine**, Bodleian Library Curator, with contributions by Verlyn Flieger, John Garth, Wayne Hammond, Carl Hostetter, Christina Scull, and Tom Shippey, has assembled a sumptuous volume on J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973), his life and works. McIlwaine and her contributors trace the creative process behind Tolkien's work, especially his most famous books, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*.

*Tolkien: Maker of Middle Earth* is lavishly illustrated with 300 images, often full page, of his manuscripts, drawings, maps, and letters.. The volume also reproduces many personal photographs and extracts from private papers, many of which have never been seen before in print. The book and exhibition draw on the extensive archives of the Tolkien collections at the Bodleian Library, which amount to more than 500 boxes, and those of Marquette University, Milwaukee, as well as private collections.

The book is a companion to the Bodleian's exhibition, probably the largest ever held on Tolkien, which ran from June to October 2018 in Oxford. Subsequently it will go to the J. P. Morgan Library in New York in 2019 and then on to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

Apparently this will be the first time the BN will have hosted an exhibition by a foreign author.

Richard Ovenden, Bodley's Librarian, has said, 'Tolkien was a genius with a unique approach to literature. His imagined world was created through a combination of his deep scholarship, his rich imagination and powerful creative talent, and informed by his own lived experiences. We are incredibly proud to hold the Tolkien archive and to be able to share so many previously unseen items in this once-in-a-generation exhibition'.

After the Foreword by Ovenden, McIlwaine provides 'J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biographical Sketch'. She hopes that she can leave people 'with the impression of the whole man and his work — not just Tolkien as the maker of Middle-earth, but as a scholar, a young professor, a father of four children'.

Well known Tolkien experts follow McIlwaine with chapters on. 'Tolkien and the Inklings' (notably C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Owen Barfield) by John Garth, 'Faerie: Tolkien's Perilous Land', by Verlyn Flieger, 'Inventing Elvish' by Carl F. Hostetter, 'Tolkien and 'that noble northern spirit' by Tom Shippey, and 'Tolkien's Visual Art' by Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull.

The 'Catalogue', which takes up the majority of the book itself, is divided into nine sections, 'Reading Tolkien', 'Childhood', 'Student Days', 'Sheer Invention', '*The Silmarillion*', 'The Professor's Study', '*The Hobbit*', '*The Lord of the Rings*' and 'Mapping *The Lord of the Rings*', the latter with numerous hand-drawn maps and original sketches showing the development of areas such as Shire, Rohan, Gondor, Mirkwood and Mordor.

Tolkien's drawings, watercolours, and sketches stand out, especially the colour illustrations for *The Hobbit*. Few at the publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937 would have imagined the success of that book and that of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which erupted in the 1960s in America. Letters are reproduced from a number of people, including Iris Murdoch, Arthur Ransome, 'Terence' Pratchett, written when Terry was 19, and W. H. Auden, as well as a rather bemused real Sam Gamgee. Tolkien sent the 'real' Sam Gamgee a signed copy of *The Lord of the Rings*, and the recipient was certainly mollified. Tolkien joked to his publisher, 'I hope I shan't now get letters from S. Gollum or Shagrat.'

Terry Pratchett concluded his letter with the phrase, 'Now I await *The Silmarillion*', which was published only after Tolkien's death. The background to *The Silmarillion*, with superb colour illustrations, is covered in chapter five of the Catalogue, which is headed 'The Silmarillion's are in my heart'.

Chapter 6 covers 'The Professor's Study', which was reproduced in the exhibition. Tolkien, when Professor of Anglo-Saxon, was attached to Pembroke College but he did not have rooms there.. The centre of his academic and creative life was thus his study at home in Northmoor Road, before his retirement study room in Merton College.

This reviewer remembers Tolkien wandering through the upper reading room of the old Bodleian. I just wish I'd thought to get my Tolkien volumes signed. Antiquarian bookseller Rick Gekoski, in his book

*Tolkien's Gown* (1996), recalls that in 1972 his former 'scout' in Merton College, Oxford asked if anybody wanted some of Tolkien's remnants that he had left in his room. Gekoski rejected the shoes and tweed jackets, but took his 'Precious', i.e. Tolkien's gown, which he subsequently sold in the 1980s for 550 pounds to an American academic.

*Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth* is the ideal substitute for those unable to make the Oxford exhibition. More particularly, however, it is a major reference source on J. R. R. Tolkien as well as being a delight to browse in another superb physical production from the Bodleian. Just to browse at random brings out many treasures, such as 'Timeline for the Breaking of the Fellowship', 'The First Map of *The Lord of the Rings*', and 'Conversation with Smaug'. Enjoy.

## THE MAKING OF THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS

by Peter Hunt (Bodleian Library; \$32.99)  
(Distributed by Footprint Books)

*The Wind in the Willows* (1908), featuring Mole, Ratty, Mr Toad and Mr. Badger, is one of the most famous English books for children, although it was originally intended for an adult audience. The biographer Humphrey Carpenter has written, '*The Wind in the Willows* has nothing to do with childhood or children, except that it can be enjoyed by the young.'

The critical interest in Grahame continues apace with Matthew Dennison's 2018 biography *Eternal Boy: The Life of Kenneth Grahame* and Peter Hunt's *The Making of Wind in the Willows*.

Hunt, Professor Emeritus in English and Children's Literature at Cardiff University, documents Grahame's life and *The Wind in the Willows* using previously unpublished archival materials, especially from the Bodleian, original drawings, and, like the recent Bodleian Tolkien book, through fan letters, including one, reproduced in full, from Theodore Roosevelt.

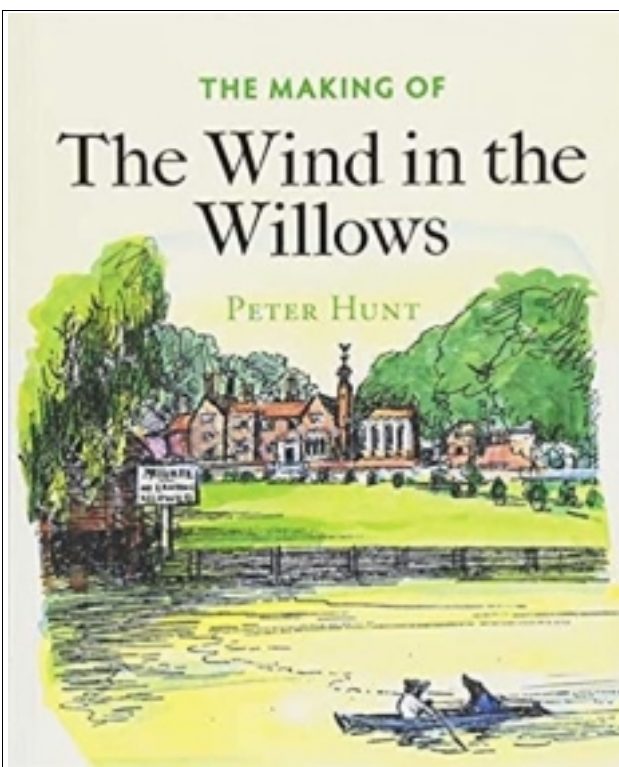
The book's origins lie in the bedtime stories that Kenneth Grahame (1859–1932) told his son Alastair, known as 'Mouse', which were continued in letters subsequently written on holiday. The 'Letters to Mouse' are held in the Bodleian Library, as is the manuscript of *The Wind in the Willows*.

Sadly, Alastair was to be found dead on the railway lines outside Oxford in 1918, the year he had gone up to Christ Church. He did not cope well with the demands of academe and adult life. The Coroner's verdict was recorded as accidental death, although some commentators have suggested suicide.

Kenneth Grahame was brought up in Oxford, but his family had no money to send him to Oxford University. He thus embarked on a career in the Bank of England, eventually rising to become Secretary.

After his death in 1932, Grahame bequeathed the royalties of *The Wind in the Willows* to 'the University of Oxford for the benefit of the Bodleian Library', which enabled it acquire many rare books and manuscripts, not least in the field of children's literature.

Grahame's original title suggestion was *Mr Mole and his Mates*. The typescript in the Bodleian Library is entitled *The Mole and the Water Rat*. Essentially the book



is about a group of patrician, class-conscious, affluent men messing about in boats, going on rambles and having picnics.

Hunt notes that the book can be read as two separate and different stories, 'one about Mole's acceptance into a conservative, elitist society, the other about Toad's rebellious rejection of it ... And the whole book is structured as a classical epic'. In *Beyond the Wildwood* (1982), Peter Green wrote: 'the Wild Wooders, stoats and weasels, and the rest, are clearly identified in Grahame's mind with the stunted malevolent proletariat of contemporary upper-middle-class caricature'.

Hunt traces the real-life characters on whom Grahame is thought to have based the Mole, Rat, Badger, and Toad, and their social milieu. Thus he surmises the real Mr Toad might have been Sir Charles Day-Rose Bt (1847–1913), a wealthy banker and driver of fast cars. Hunt also traces Kenneth Grahame's relationships with both his agent Constance Smedley and his wife, Elspeth, although it was very far from a happy marriage.

*The Wind in the Willows* was not an immediate publishing success on publication in October 1908. Reviewers were uncertain as to what it was about. *The Times* thought that 'as a contribution to natural history, the work is negligible', while the *Times Literary Supplement* thought that 'grown-up readers will find it monotonous and elusive; children will hope in vain for more fun'.

Readers differed from the reviewers. The book's fame soon spread to Australia, where Prime Minister Alfred Deakin penned a letter of compliment. Kenneth Grahame replied on 23 April

1909, 'If I have ever received a pleasant or more encouraging appreciation, I do not remember it.' Grahame was on the way to becoming a reluctant celebrity. One must never forget, that that success also depends on E. H. Shepard's later artistic genius (in 1931) for illuminating Grahame's words, ensuring even greater publishing success.

This is another beautifully produced scholarly yet accessible publication by the Bodleian Library, with some stunning illustrations.

## WE ARE THE MARTIANS: THE LEGACY OF NIGEL KNEALE

edited by Neil Snowdon (PS Publishing; £25)

*We are the Martians* is an excellent, if occasionally repetitive, analysis of **Nigel Kneale's** life and works by **Neil Snowdon** and colleagues. This is the second appreciation of Kneale (1922–2006), following Andy Murray's biography, *Into The Unknown: The Fantastic Life of Nigel Kneale* (2006), which has recently been reissued. These two books highlight Nigel Kneale's significant contribution to British television drama and cultural life in the second half of the twentieth century.

PS Publishing's impressively produced hardback, incorporating Michael Smith's stylish design and illustrations and cover art by David Chatton Barker, totals nearly 500 pages. Contributors include names as diverse and talented as Ramsey Campbell, Stephen Laws, Kim Newman, Richard Harland Smith, Joe Dante, Maura McHugh, and Mark Gatiss. Numerous black-and-white illustrations complement the chapters.

The book begins with Tim Lucas's 31 October 2006 obituary of Nigel Kneale. Lucas writes, 'I've always regarded him as one of Britain's greatest literary visionaries, on par with J. G. Ballard'. Mark Gatiss's Foreword to *We are the Martians* calls Kneale 'a truly brilliant and original mind'.

*We are the Martians* will help restore an awareness of Kneale's achievement to a public who may have forgotten him. The lack of recognition hitherto for Kneale is probably because he was not regarded as a conventional author, but as a screenwriter in the days before TV series





were critically appreciated, and indeed preserved.

A number of Kneale's TV productions were wiped by the BBC, including the 1963 Kneale production of the ghost story *The Road*, which is covered in Jonathan Rigby's chapter, 'The Promised End: Nigel Kneale's Lost Masterpiece from 1963: *The Road*'. Other famous Kneale TV works included *The Year of the Sex Olympics* (1967) and *The Stone Tape* (1972).

Another reason for lack of mainstream literary recognition has been because his most famous series covered SF and the supernatural, genres still looked down upon somewhat in mainstream literary circles. Nonetheless, if Nigel Kneale had only ever written his 'Quatermass' trilogy, *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953), *Quatermass 2* (1955), and *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958), he'd still be considered one of the most important figures in British TV drama. 'The Quatermass Conception', Stephen R. Bisette's excellent long chapter, places the *Quatermass* scripts in the internal and external frameworks of Kneale's creativity.

Kneale once said: 'I suppose children did watch and occasionally I'm approached by someone who says "I remember the first Quatermass and I was three years old and I hid behind the sofa ..." and that stuff, and my answer is "You shouldn't have been watching, you should have been in bed", because we did warn'. This reviewer was nine years old in 1955, and certainly hid behind the sofa watching *Quatermass 2*.

The less successful *The Quatermass Conclusion* (1979) completed the TV quartet. The first three series went on to be produced for cinema audiences by Hammer. Kneale also adapted novels for the screen, for instance, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*, which had an immense societal impact in 1954. This production is analysed in several chapters, including Kim Newman's chapter 'Creeping Unknown PTI'.

Nigel Kneale's life is well documented in Mark Chadbourne's chapter 'The King of Hauntology' and Tim Lucas's lengthy chapter 'The Literary Kneale'. Kneale's archive is located in the Manx National Heritage Library and Archives.

Their editor's commentary states: 'Kneale's papers not only give a general insight into the stages of screen production but are notable because he was an especially eccentric pioneer in the television and film world, particularly regarding the genre of science fiction. Additionally, much of his work has cultural significance because of the way he played on social anxieties of the time and often prophesied developments to come. The content relates in great part to Kneale's creative writing, providing a unique insight into how his works, both unproduced and produced, were developed. Many projects can be followed through from initial research, story outlines and treatments, to first drafts, subsequent drafts and amendments, rehearsal and production scripts and finally to documents relating to production and reception, including business correspondence, newspaper reviews, audience research reports and some contemporary advertisements of the production.'

Thomas Nigel Kneale was born in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, to Manx parents, who took the young Nigel to the Isle of Man in 1928. Kneale's Manx connections

before he relocated to London in 1946 are documented in chapters by Mark Chadbourne and Tim Lucas. The mythologies of the Isle of Man are reflected in several of the stories in his first book collection, *Tomato Cain and Other Stories* (1949), which won the Atlantic Award and the Somerset Maugham Award.

During the early 1950s Kneale met and married writer Judith Kerr. In 1962 the couple settled in Barnes, London, where I corresponded with Kneale briefly in the 1990s. Neil Snowdon documents their relationship in his insightful chapter 'A Conversation with Judith Kerr'. Judith Kerr is perhaps best known and loved as the author and illustrator of the Mog books.

Judith Kerr reflects that Kneale didn't see himself as an SF writer. David Sutton's interview with Kneale in the chapter 'The Quatermass Conclusion' records that Kneale was taken aback by the number of fans at the 1979 Brighton World Science fiction Convention. He 'found it a fairly horrendous experience. It didn't seem to have very much to do with imagination, but a lot to do with exhibitionism — mainly by the fans — and it's not an experience I'm able to go along with and enjoy. I don't like large gatherings of people romping about. Whether it's a football match or the Nuremberg Rally, they all frighten me. I suppose, deep down, I don't want to be anybody's fan, no matter how excellent, noble or horrible they are — whether it's Daley Thompson or Hitler or Arthur C. Clarke. I wouldn't want to chase around for their autograph'.

In Kim Newman's chapter 'Creeping Unknown PT 2', Newman quotes Kneale as saying fans at the convention 'were the craziest lot of people I'd ever encountered', disdaining the masquerades, giggling, and heavy drinking. Newman writes that he thinks Kneale was being somewhat ungracious, as the audience for Kneale's session was 'respectful', as was the 'intelligent' interview by Bill Warren. Several have commented that Kneale could be somewhat of a curmudgeon in later life.

A lot of Nigel Kneale's output has been in the general media. He scripted films, including the famous playwright John Osborne's *Look Back In Anger* (1958) and *The Entertainer* (1960). Richard Harland Smith documents these in detail in his chapter 'Adaptation and Anger, or The Nigel Kneale-John Osborne Synthesis'.

The script of Susan Hill's famous ghost story *The Woman in Black* (1989) is covered in Tony Earnshaw's 'In Pursuit of Unhappy Endings: Chris Burt & Herbert Wise on *The Woman In Black*'. In later life, Kneale spent the rest of his television career writing TV scripts, such as for *Sharpe* (1993–97) and *Kavanagh QC* (1995–2001).

Neil Snowdon and his contributors have ensured that the legacy of Nigel Kneale will live on in a fascinating collection of chapters, which mix tribute and critical analysis of Kneale's varied output in television, film, and prose. It would have been an additional bonus to have had an index to amass the collective textual references to Kneale's works, but given the number of chapters and the extensive coverage of his major works, this would have been a logistically difficult, lengthy, and expensive task. At £25, *We are the Martians* is excellent value for money and a fitting tribute to the achievement of Nigel Kneale.

### THE VAMPIRE: A NEW HISTORY

by Nick Groom (Yale University Press; \$39.99)  
(Available from Footprint Books)

### DRACUL

by Dacre Stoker and J. D. Barker (Bantam Press; \$32.99)

*The Vampire. A New History* by Nick Groom, Professor of English at Exeter University, UK, is published to mark the bicentenary of John Polidori's *The Vampyre*. It was first published in April 1819 in the *New Monthly Magazine*, under the title *The Vampyre: A Tale by Lord Byron*, later appearing as a book with Byron's name on the title page of the first edition, although Byron's name was removed for the second edition.

In his beautifully produced book, Nick Groom expertly examines how vampires have captured our imaginations from the early eighteenth century when 'the traditional bloodsuckers of Eastern European folklore came face to face with empirical science'.

Groom has said in an interview, 'The first fully documented case of a proper vampire — as opposed to mere blood-sucking demons — was three hundred years ago, in 1725 on the borders of the Habsburg Empire. My book focuses on this and similar cases and how they were forensically investigated. And this was a long time before novelists got hold of them.'

The most famous novelist, of course, was Bram Stoker with *Dracula* (1897), the catalyst for the subsequent vampire craze, which endures today. Groom devotes a cogent chapter to the seismic influence of Stoker's novel. Groom writes in the Foreword that the vampire as 'a recognisable thing that dates from a precise period in a certain place, and which consequently has recognisable

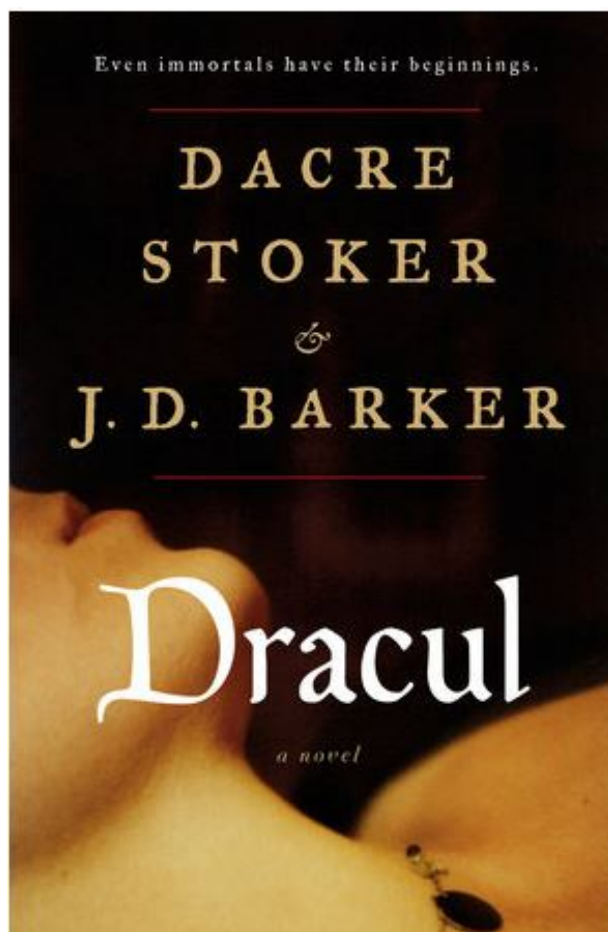
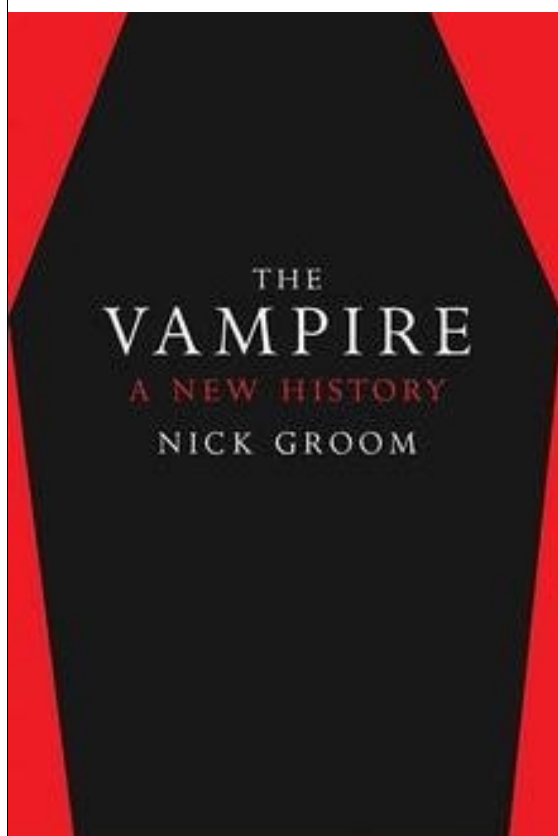
manifestations and qualities — especially concerning blood, science, society and culture'.

Groom's strength lies in his 'new' historical analysis, although it tails off with a far too short last chapter of only 10 pages, aiming to bring the vampiric cultural phenomenon up to date. Groom's book, while eminently accessible, is essentially academic, with 65 pages of footnotes and bibliography, which reinforce the comprehensiveness of his survey of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The work is supplemented by a significant illustrative mid-section and index.

Groom argues the vampire phenomenon can be traced to the cases of ethnic Serbians, who were reported to have returned from the dead in 1727. Groom documents how the vampire came to wider public prominence, with particular interest shown by medical researchers and political commentators in the context of the Enlightenment.

In his Foreword, Groom hopes his book will appeal to readers whose interest in vampires begins with *Dracula*, 'that fans of *True Blood*, for example, will begin to investigate vampire history ... All those pre-*Dracula* vampires'.

Nonetheless, the general reader will probably be more attracted by *Dracul*, a prequel to *Dracula*, co-written by Dacre Stoker, Bram Stoker's great-grandnephew, and J. D. Barker, American bestselling author. Dacre Stoker, who had previously written a sequel to *Dracula*, *Dracula the Un-Dead*, has utilised newly found, or little-known, research material for the prequel.



Dacre has said, 'I wanted to show the character of Bram evolve into a hero. He never really liked talking about himself and I think he would like the idea of a relative of his telling the story of his humble beginnings.'

Stoker and Barker mix fact and fiction in a story of beginnings split between two time periods. It begins in 1868 when twenty-one-year-old Bram Stoker waits in a desolate tower to face an unknown evil with only crucifixes, holy water, and a rifle as protection. Bram documents the events that led him to the tower in *The Journal of Bram Stoker*: 'From my earliest memories, I was a sickly child, ill and bedridden from birth until my seventh year, when a cure befell me. I will speak of that cure in great length to come...'

The authors fill in the back story of Bram as that sickly child in Dublin in 1854 and the influence on him and his siblings of their nanny, the mysterious and vampiric Ellen Crone, whose intervention restores Bram to health.

*Dracul* is an engrossing read, which will attract existing and new readers to the Dracula corpus. The two books under review reveal how the vampire has morphed over time into an unlikely champion for the marginalised and excluded, rather than a complex monster personalising the traumas and contradictions of the human condition.

### THE DRAGON: FEAR AND POWER

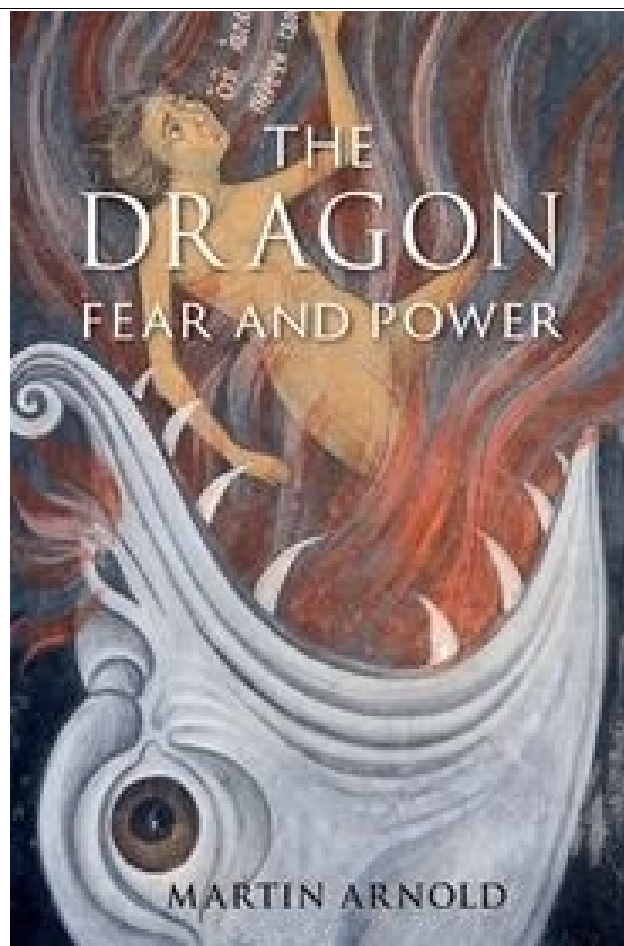
by Martin Arnold (Reaktion; \$44.99)  
(Available from New South Books)

The Dragon, by **Martin Arnold**, Reader Emeritus in Old Northern Studies at the University of Hull, is a scholarly yet accessible multilayered book on dragons with a global perspective. Arnold covers many sources, both historical and contemporary, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Hebrew Bible, and the Welsh flag, culminating in a fascinating discussion of dragons in George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones*.

Arnold said, preceding the book's launch at Scarborough Castle, 'Ideas about dragons are worldwide but their meanings vary according to different cultural values. Yet the one thing all dragons have in common is their formidable power. I try to explain how and why this extraordinary phenomenon came about and why we continue to be fascinated by them, right up to the Mother of Dragons in the hit series *Game of Thrones*.'

Tolkien had written in 1936, 'A dragon is a potent creation of men's imagination, richer in significance than his barrow is in gold.' Tolkien and C. S. Lewis are covered by Arnold in chapter 9, 'The Old Dragon Revives'.

Arnold writes: 'If asked what a dragon is, most would reply along these lines: it has four legs and wings, is armoured with scales, hoards gold, breathes fire or spurts venom (or both), can talk, is wise but cruel, and has a fondness for eating female virgins, typically ones that are scantily clad. While it is not difficult to see that such identikit notions of dragons are chiefly derived from a combination of those depicted in J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle-earth fantasies and the celebrated myth of St George and the Dragon, these two depictions are by no means definitive. Indeed, dragons as depicted across



world myth and legend are so varied in their behaviours and appearances, let alone their cultural significances, that any attempt to provide an all-purpose description of them is simply not possible. The chief aim of this book, then, as a cultural history, is to examine those key ideas about dragons that have since gone on to influence our continuing fascination with them, wittingly or not. Although, as Jorge Luis Borges remarks, we are as ignorant of their meaning as we are of the meaning of the universe, it may nevertheless be possible to try and understand what it is about dragons that seems to have necessitated our imagining them.'

Arnold ranges widely, historically and geographically, in 11 chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion: from Celtic and Germanic myths, to India, Mexico, and especially ancient China ('Asian and East Asian Dragons'), to interpret dragon manifestation in respective parts of the world.

Dragons are symbols, both of humanity's fear, as dragons threaten human order, and of aspirations as heroes become dragon slayers. However, it must be remembered that in children's literature dragons are often depicted as friendly creatures.

Arnold's text is accompanied by a comprehensive bibliography and footnotes. Any reader or library interested in dragons and their impact on cultural life, past and present, be it religious, folkloric, literary, or artistic, will be entranced by Arnold's definitive work. Eighty colour illustrations depict dragons from a wide range of different manuscripts and artistic forms in a beautifully produced book from Reaktion Books, a London-based



independent publisher.

## DREAMS OF MARS: 130 YEARS OF STORIES ABOUT MARS

by John Litchen (Yambu; \$24.50)

**John Litchen** dedicates *Dreams of Mars* to Bruce Gillespie, whose 'beautiful magazine', as Litchen describes it, published earlier chapters of *Dreams of Mars* in issues 93 and 95. Litchen's other books include two volumes of memoirs, *Fragments from A Life* and *Fragments that Remain*, as well as articles and short stories for various magazines. He is a member of the Gold Coast Writers Association and the Queensland Writers' Centre.

Litchen notes in his Preface that his fascination with Mars began when he was an eleven-year-old in 1951. This interest increased in 1953 when he read Arthur C. Clarke's *The Sands of Mars*. He writes, 'this story more than any other reinforced my addiction to science fiction and stories about Mars, which has not diminished even now that I am in my late seventies.'

Litchen states that his approach to books about Mars is not that of a scholar but rather that 'of a layman'. He calls it 'an individual appreciation of Martian-themed stories based on his obviously extensive personal collection'. Nonetheless, it constitutes a substantial achievement in coverage, which begins in 1889 with *Melbourne and Mars* by John Joseph Fraser and concludes in 2018 with Emma Newman's *Before Mars*.

The book is divided into three sections: 'Before the *Mariner 4* Flyby', 'After *Mariner 4*' and '2000 and Beyond'. Litchen notes in his Preface that most of the Mars books in his collection fall into three categories of analysis and description: 'Fanciful', 'Factual', and 'Transformative'.

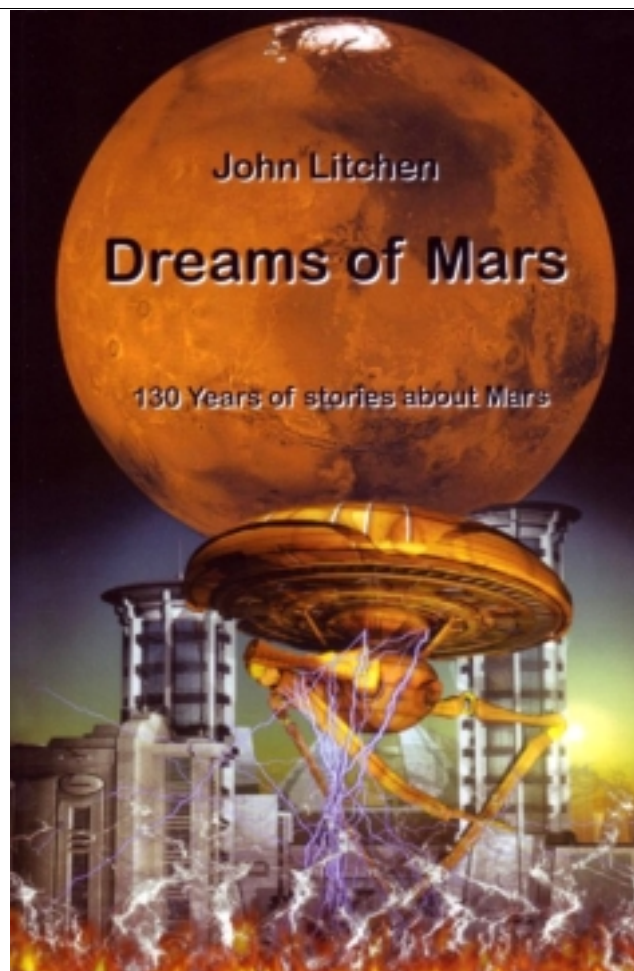
In the first category are stories that assume Mars was or is inhabited. In this category come the stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Michael Moorcock, writing as Edwin P. Bradbury, and Leigh Brackett.

'Factual' is the section in which authors try to reflect accurate knowledge of Mars at the time of writing. Authors here include John Brunner, Ludik Peek, Kevin Anderson, Stephen Baxter, Paul McAuley, Ben Bova, and Andy Weir.

'Transformative' comprises books describing a major Martian transformation, either in human modifications or by changing planetary conditions such as terraforming. In this category are works by Kim Stanley Robinson, notably his Martian trilogy, Geoffrey A. Landis, and Frederick (*sic*) Pohl — a typo which is not corrected in the bibliography and which becomes Frederick in the Contents list.

For each book/story covered, whose title is listed in black in the text, Litchen provides a short author bio, details of the narrative, and interesting personal comments. For example, in a section on Robert A. Heinlein, when he is talking about *Podkayne of Mars*, he comments on Heinlein's inability to capture a female voice.

A number of books are covered in depth, such as H. G. Wells' seminal 1898 *The War of the Worlds* and its subsequent impact, novels by E. C. Tubb and Ian Watson, and relevant short stories, for example, by Philip K. Dick. In this section, unfortunately Arnold Schwarzenegger



Book cover (if you hadn't guessed) by Ditmar (Dick Janssen).

becomes several times Arnold Swarzenegger.

Kim Stanley Robinson's renowned 'Mars' trilogy is only covered in a couple of pages, because, Litchen says, 'to do these books justice would need an entire book', and because of existing commentary on the trilogy. He does, then, cover Robinson's *Icehenge* (1984) in some detail.

*Dreams of Mars*, despite the small number of typographical errors, is a well-priced and printed book of nearly 350 pages, with considerable detail and interesting commentary on Martian titles both familiar and unfamiliar.

## Media tie-ins

### DARK MIRAGES

edited by Paul Kane (PS Publishing; £20)

*Dark Mirages*, subtitled *Film & TV: Vol 1*, edited by **Paul Kane**, is a handsome hardback anthology of rare or unmade 'horror' film and television scripts. Contributors are Stephen Jones, Michael Marshall Smith, Stephen Gallagher, Axelle Carolyn, Peter Crowther, Muriel Gray, and Stephen Laws.

Kane has said, 'When I began thinking about a new anthology project a little while ago, it seemed an obvious choice to compile a book of TV/film scripts and treat-

ments. But, to give it a different slant, these would be either rare or unmade, or both, meaning that this would be the only opportunity you'd ever get to read them unless you're fortunate enough to know the writers, that is.'

The selection begins with Michael Marshall Smith and Stephen Jones' 2007 script, enhanced by authorial notes on its creation and framework, for a sequel to Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* with the Cenobites once more unleashed. Stephen Gallagher's BBC *Dracula* project script takes the reader to a new London vampiric world.

Axelle Carolyn's *The Last Post* is the only piece that reached the screen — a short story that was turned into a short film starring Jean Marsh. It tells of lovers from the First World War who communicated by letter, but never met, being reunited many years later in death.

Peter Crowther's script was written for the 1990s *Chiller* Yorkshire television series. Muriel Gray's 'rough synopsis' for *The Seven* with hidden powers is short, but intriguing, while Stephen Laws' *Dead Man's Hand* nicely spins off the classic haunted house format in a seaside town. All the screenplays whet the appetite for what might have been.

*Dark Mirages* is an impressive *vade mecum* for those interested in the nuts and bolts of horror screenwriting, in addition to the many readers interested in dark horror from leading writers in the genre.

## Australian science fiction

### THE SECOND CURE

by Margaret Morgan (Vintage; \$32.99)

Margaret Morgan, a former criminal lawyer and tele-

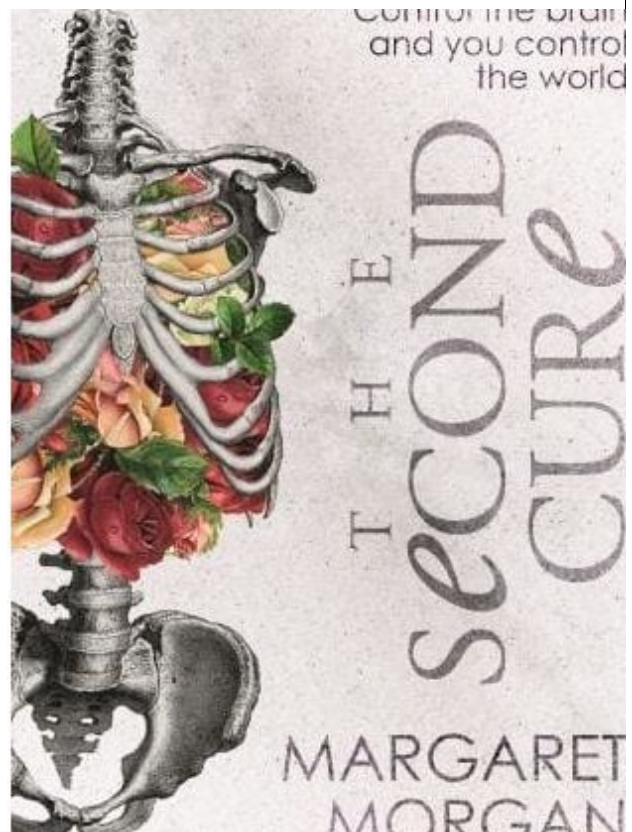
vision scriptwriter, covers a lot of challenging ground in her debut novel *The Second Cure*. She prefaces the novel: 'In November 2016, I was in the depths of writing my novel, *The Second Cure*. That month Donald Trump was elected president of the USA. The news gobsmecked me — as it did most thoughtful people — but it had another effect: I nearly dropped my authorly bundle. How to write a dystopia when reality threatened to overwhelm it? What if events in the real world overtook those in my imagined one? I was paralysed'.

Her main characters are Charlotte 'Charlie' Zinn, a scientist, and her partner's sister, investigative journalist Brigid Bayliss. Charlie is searching to find a cure to a pandemic that is killing all the cats in the world, and has started affecting humans in different ways.

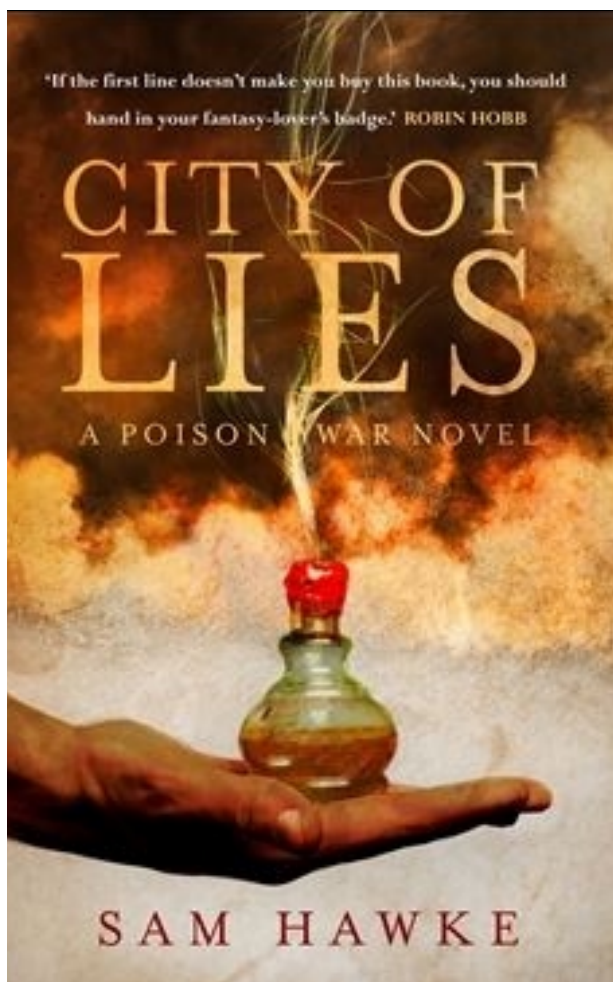
*The Second Cure* is set in a near future Queensland and Sydney, 'although there are references to the way the mind-bending plague at its heart affects the world more broadly, and the type of dystopia I explore is in many ways reflective of my own country's culture'.

That culture is extrapolated into that practised by an evangelical far-right populist Queensland premier and his desire to set up a plague free region in far north Queensland. Morgan mixes hard science with questions of religious faith and the moral responsibilities of researchers when having an effect on human life. These issues sometimes sit uneasily in the political thriller narrative, which takes Charlie and Brigid on dangerous life-threatening paths.

Morgan concludes, '*The Second Cure* doesn't just imagine dystopia. It also raises the possibility of a utopia. Or at least a version of utopia ... For me and my motivation in writing *The Second Cure*, the answer is simple. I am afraid. I am not so arrogant as to think my novel is going to act as a warning, but I wrote it because I needed to







express my fear. I needed to seek hope. There is good in people. I wanted to find it'.

*The Second Cure*, with a strong feminist backdrop, is a challenging and absorbing novel that reflects on many of today's underlining concerns. It must be a strong contender for Best Novel in future Australian SF literary awards.

## Australian fantasy

### CITY OF LIES

by Sam Hawke (Bantam Press; \$32.99)

*City of Lies*, Canberra lawyer **Sam Hawke's** debut fantasy novel, is also the first book in her 'Poison Wars' series. It is set in the Renaissance-type city-state of Silasta, ruled by a council of nobles, but the city's peace disintegrates as the Chancellor of Silasta and his friend Etan are poisoned.

Given that poisons are a normal mode of killing in Silasta, the fact that the poison is unknown is ominous, as is the arrival of an army outside the gates of the city. The investigations into the deaths fall on the Chancellor's heir Tain, and brother and sister Jovan and Kalina.

Jovan, on the edge of autism, has been trained as a the 'proofer' — a tester of what the ruler eats and drinks. Hawke's novel starts with the intriguing phrase: 'I was 7 years old the first time my uncle poisoned me ... I learned that day to trust nothing on my plate or in my cup.'

Jovan's proofer position is one that Kalina should have assumed, but Kalina's physical disabilities prevent it, so she specialises in the trade of spycraft.

Hawke has indicated that she wanted explore sibling relationships and their complexities, 'I think sometimes siblings get left out of epic fantasy; there are a lot of orphans and single people off on fun adventures.' She says, 'I set about making everything as difficult for them as possible, to see what would happen.'

Jovan, Kalina, and Tain, bound by friendship and honour, must try to battle their personal demons, solve the murders, retain the social equilibrium with a rebel army outside, and eventually inside the walls, and confront secret factions wanting to assume power in a city that has its own fault lines of lies, both social and historical.

Hawke says that science fiction and fantasy provide 'the freedom to write a book about poison and treachery and old magic in which it also just happens that women are regarded as equal humans whose contribution to their society is judged by their skills and talents, not their value to a man, and that's such an obvious baseline that it doesn't need to be a plot'.

Hawke tackles issues of feminism, inequality, privilege, and social concerns within the framework of a carefully constructed fantasy narrative of over 500 pages. *City of Lies* is an assured debut novel of politics, poison and paranoia.

### PHANTOM LIMBS

by Margo Lanagan (PS Publishing; \$64.99)

Australian author **Margo Lanagan** deserves to be more widely known in the general Australian literary landscape. A multiple World Fantasy Award winner, Lanagan has been publishing fiction for nearly thirty years. *Phantom Limbs* is a superb hardback of 15 of her stories from British firm PS Publishing.

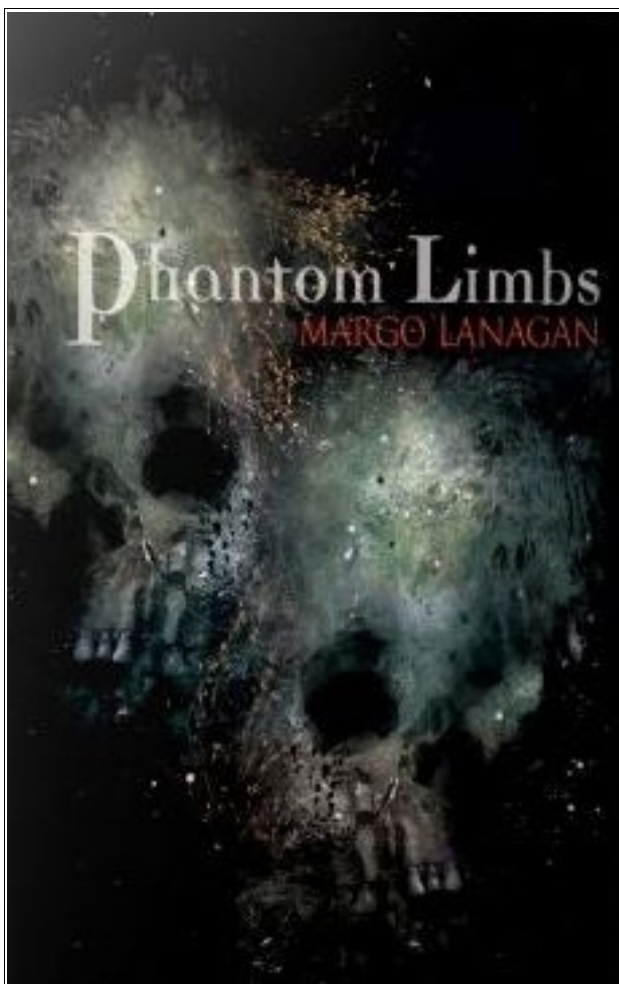
While there is only one new story, 'Tin Pocket', it is still great to have some of Lanagan's classic dark short stories collected in a hardback volume with excellent cover art by David Gentry. Her substantial 'Story Notes' add to the value of the collection.

The first story, 'The Goose', is a dark twist on the classic Hansel and Gretel tale. It stimulated considerable debate when first published in 2008. Lanagan writes she was inspired by a quote by American author John Irving, 'In increments both measurable and not, our childhood is stolen from us — not always in one momentous event but often in a series of small robberies, which add up to the same loss.'

Her story is set in an isolated rural forest during what she calls 'the Black Plague period', presumably the Black Death of the fourteenth century. Again we have an evil witch, and Hansel is enslaved and sexually abused by the evil tramp Grinnan before breaking free from his 'passive habits'. Lanagan says that she extrapolated from a time when 'tramps kept boys for sexual purposes'.

'Tin Pocket' spins off an old Irish folk tale, in which a smuggler fills a tin replica of his wife with whiskey hoping that the police will not notice when he returns from the illegal distillery. Lanagan writes that it came about after reading a 1910 story by P. W. Joyce, but 'of



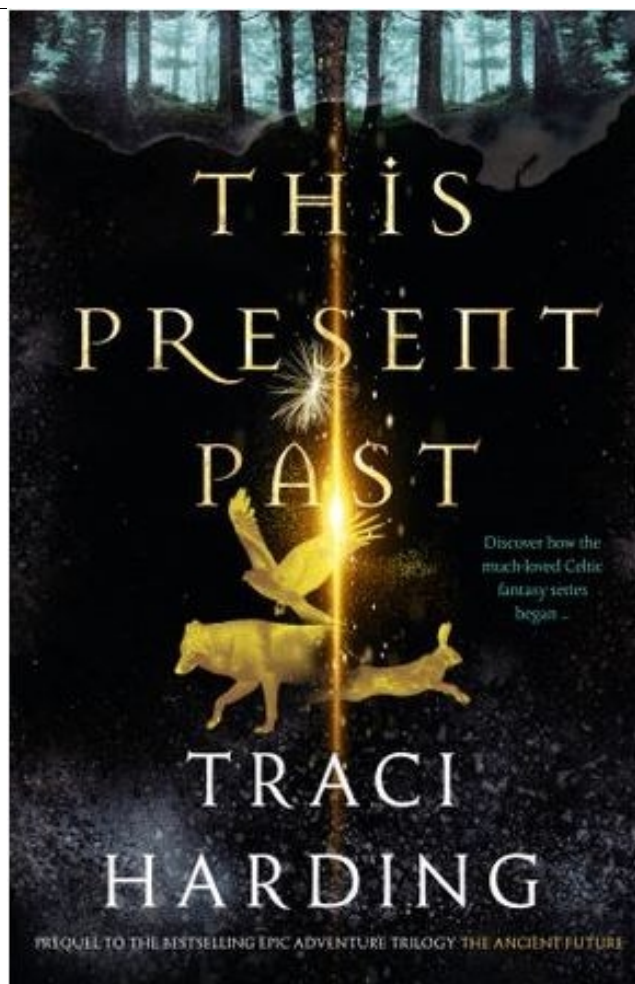


course the tin wife didn't clang and give Tom away when the policeman whacked her'. The tin replica has taken on a life of her own and interacts with the smuggler and his wife, leading to a surprising and fantastical conclusion.

The inspiration for 'Mulberry Boys' occurred when one of Lanagan's sons brought home silkworms from school. She says she 'wanted to write a story in which humans wrought a similar transformation on other humans, in order to exploit them'. Lanagan's story follows children who have been surgically modified into silk-spinning creatures.

She notes that 'Mulberry Boys' 'explores what might happen if people could be transformed into a cash crop. It's more insect physiology than plant; the mulberry boys are made into a kind of silkworm. Except that the silk isn't from their cocoons, it's produced in their digestive tract when they're fed a diet of mulberry leaves. I suppose it could be said to be about the vulnerability of unworldly communities to commercially minded shysters. Or about different shades of greed.'

The 'Black Swan Event' is a twist on the Grimms' 'The Six Swans', where the sixth brother has only one wing. Lanagan extrapolates this to rural Australia, long after the events. 'The King is dead. The Queen is just hitting menopause and the time is right to make up for past mistakes'. The story focuses on a middle-aged Australian woman who has one last chance to save her swan-winged brother. Lanagan, as ever, gives the conclusion an unusual twist.



'The Proving of Smollett Standforth' follows a young male, a shoes-and-boots cleaning servant, who finds his attic room invaded by a former dead housemaid, who each night presses a beaded necklace into his skin, which leaves burn marks. Ultimately, he has to confront the spectre.

Lanagan says that the genesis of her story was her own memories 'of lying in bed as a child, imagining malign beings creeping towards me in the dark, while everyone else in the house slept. Smollett's solitude, and the fact that he can't bring himself to confide in anyone, are the real horrors here', but he does end up 'the hero of his own story'.

'A Pig's Whisper', Lanagan's first story not intended as part of a collection, draws on Australian history and classic Australian children's stories. Lanagan says, 'I tried in this story to capture that moment when well-protected white Australian children properly see the more brutal facts of their country's history.' She evokes a creepy horror story of two children lost in the woods, within a setting of 'bug-eyed creepiness from May Gibbs' gumnut babies' with some 'blokey violence from Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding*'.

#### THIS PRESENT PAST

by Traci Harding (HarperVoyager; \$32.99)

**Traci Harding** is one of Australia's most prolific and bestselling fantasy authors, with more than 20 books to her credit. *The Present Past* is a prequel to her 'Ancient



Future' trilogy: *The Ancient Future: The Dark Ages* (1996), *An Echo in Time: Atlantis* (1997), and *Masters of Reality: The Gathering* (1998).

Harding has said in an interview, 'I think it is the spiritual aspect of my books that keeps readers of all ages coming back. The doctrine informing my books is based on theosophy, which borrows teachings from many different religions and philosophies and so it appeals to a broad spectrum of people. A reader once told me that my tales were unusual because they are not your classic kind of fantasy where good versus evil, but rather they are self versus self — good guys and bad guys alike. I think people relate to that kind of spiritual struggle.'

*The Ancient Future: The Dark Ages*, which was Traci Harding's first published novel, was apparently inspired by a trip to the United Kingdom. Certainly she seems to have fallen in love with Wales. The novel's main character, thirty-year-old Australian and martial arts exponent Tory Alexander, is transported back from the present day to sixth-century Wales, where she is to rule as High Queen of Briton. The epilogue to *This Present Past* links to this event.

In *This Present Past*, Harding goes back to the origins of the 'Ancient Future' trilogy, and documents how simple woodsman Gwion Bach rose from his humble beginnings to become Taliesin, grand Merlin and magician. It documents how he became involved with the goddess witch Keridwen and her all-powerful potion, and the ultimate impact on the kingdoms of Cymru. Harding writes in her acknowledgements, that she hopes

'many unanswered questions from the Ancient Future have been answered in Gwion's story'.

It has to be said that this is not deep fantasy of the Pullman or Jemisin variety. Harding has said, 'My style of writing is easy reading, fast paced and rather cinematic'. That is certainly the case with *This Present Past*. It will undoubtedly appeal to the many Harding fans of the series, and perhaps encourage others to start at what is now a new beginning.

## British science fiction

**84K**

by Claire North (Orbit; \$29.99)

**84K**, Claire North's fifth novel, largely told in two time periods, is set in a near-future Britain. 'The Company', which virtually runs the country, has abolished human rights, and public services have been corporatised. Every service comes with a price. 'There aren't any chains on our feet or beatings on our backs because there don't need to be. Cos if you don't play along with what the Company wants, you die. You die cos you can't pay for the doctor to treat you. You die cos the police won't come without insurance. Cos the fire brigade doesn't cover your area, cos you can't get a job, cos you can't buy the food, cos the water stopped, cos there was no light at night and if that's not slavery'.

Theo Miller works at the Criminal Audit Office, where he calculates the cost of being found guilty. **84K**, for example, is the fine for murder. If you can't pay your fine, you get sent to a Commercial Reform Institutes — the labour camps.

Theo's life becomes complicated when Dani, a former girlfriend with whom he may or may not have had a daughter, reappears, but then she is murdered. Theo realises that he has 'been selling slaves for the last nine years, and he knew it but somehow managed not to understand that this was his profession.' Dani's murder catapults Miller on a dangerous journey to find the daughter and to find Dani's damning 'secrets' on the Company, which could incite revolution.

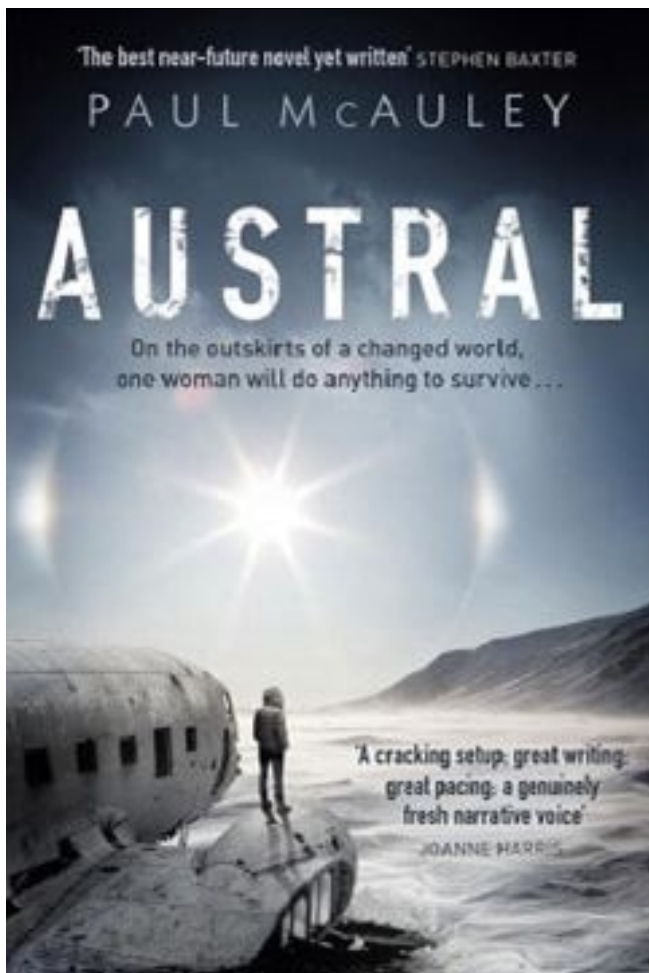
**84K** does not flow as easily as some of North's previous novels, given the juxtaposing narratives and time streams of consciousness. Without doubt, however, it is a compelling dark indictment of contemporary trends in corporatisation, inequality, and privatisation. As ever, SF reflects contemporary concerns.

**AUSTRAL**

by Paul McAuley (Gollancz; \$22.99)

**Paul McAuley's *Austral*** is set in a climate-devastated twenty-second century, the slight upside of which is that a new usable landscape has emerged with a partial thawing of the Antarctic continent. Paul McAuley uses his science doctorate and expertise in biology and botany to good effect, depicting a landscape of not just ice and snow, but also large areas of grass and forest.

*Austral* begins with the words, 'My birth was a political act. Conceived in a laboratory dish by direct injection of



a sperm into an egg. I was customised by a suite of targeted genes.' The story is told through the first person voice of 'husky', Austral Morales Ferrado, as a record for her unborn baby, 'This is my account of what happened and why, as true as I can tell it. It's your story, too. The story of how you came to be. How I tried to save you'.

Genetically altered humans, called 'huskies', have been bred for the still harsh climate, but they are a repressed minority, regarded with suspicion by the normal humans and the women banned from breeding. McAuley is clearly reflecting on contemporary treatments of indigenous populations and refugees.

Austral works as a 'correction officer' in a prison cum labour camp, where she is impregnated by Kever Bishop, a powerful criminal figure. Kever wants her to help him kidnap Kamilah Toomy, teenage daughter of a powerful politician and Austral's cousin. Austral, however, decides to take matters into her own hands and kidnaps Kamilah herself, hoping to use her as a bargaining chip to reach sanctuary in New Zealand. As a result she is not only pursued across the Antarctic landscape not only by Kever but also by the authorities.

McAuley places the dramatic chase narrative, which encompasses bonding between Austral and Kamilah, within the personal back story of Austral as she struggles with her identity and the need to survive for the sake of her unborn child. As a result, the narrative structure sometimes creaks a little between the info dumps, personal back story, and chase sequence, but there is no denying the powerful and realistic conclusion.

McAuley has said in an interview in October 2018: 'Fiction can help to make the possible consequences of global warming by illuminating the nature of the catastrophe through stories on a human scale.' In that context, many readers will empathise with Austral's personal story, around which McAuley also highlights current concerns about political division and corruption, and issues of gender, inequality and ethnicity.

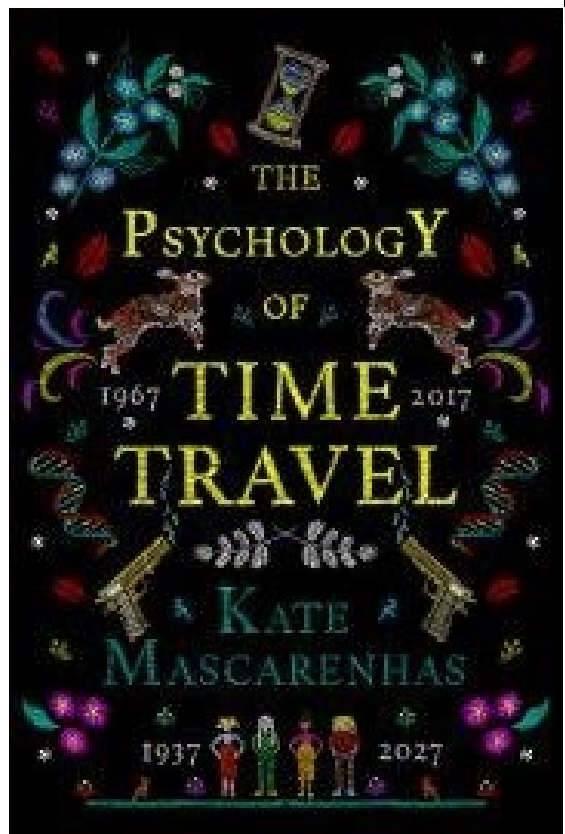
## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TIME TRAVEL

by Kate Mascarenhas (Head of Zeus; \$29.99)

Dr Kate Mascarenhas' debut novel *The Psychology of Time Travel*, a time travel murder mystery, begins in 1967, when four young female scientists, Barbara, Grace, Lucille, and Margaret invent a time machine in their laboratory in Cumbria. Margaret is a 'baroness turned cosmologist'; Grace 'an expert in the behaviour of matter'; Lucille 'had come from the Toxteth slums to make radio waves travel faster than light'; and Barbara 'the baby of the group, specialized in nuclear fission'.

As the novel begins, they send a rabbit, appropriately called Patrick Troughton, for a short trip into the future. As time travel is proven, Barbara has a breakdown, never travels in time, and is excluded from the secretive Conclave, chaired by Margaret, which oversees time travel. As time travel expands for the elite, Margaret becomes more controlling, with Grace and Lucille remaining on the technical and scientific side.

In July 2017, Dr Ruby Rebello, a psychiatrist, knows that Barbara, her 'grandmother was the time traveller who went mad', but relatively little else. Barbara, 'Granny Bee', has never talked about her involvement in time travel, but matters unravel when Ruby finds an origami rabbit marked 'For Barbara' on her doorstep.





This turns out to be a message from Grace, which, when unfolded, refers to an inquest in February 2018 about the death of a woman in a museum in January 2018. Odette, a young student who found the body, is puzzled at the lack of clarity arising from the inquest. Her life then intersects with Ruby's, which leads them to confront Margaret and the Conclave's hidden secrets.

Mascarenhas has recognised the paradoxes that occur in time-travel novels, coming up with a scenario in which multiple selves from different periods of time can coexist. Appendices contain lists of psychometric tests for time travellers, for example, death anxiety scales and dream symbol inventories.

*The Psychology of Time Travel* is an inventive and engrossing novel set within a feminist framework. The 2018 locked room murder mystery adds another dimension to an excellent debut novel.

## PERFIDIOUS ALBION

by Sam Byers (Faber; \$29.99)

**Sam Byers'** first novel *Idiopathy* won the Betty Trask Award. His second, *Perfidious Albion*, set in the small English town of Edmundsbury, provides a searing overview of a post-Brexit England, beset by corrupt politics, multinational corporation domination, and digital surveillance.

Edmundsbury's citizens are being secretly monitored by Green, a multinational digital firm, clearly extrapolated by Byers from Cambridge Analytica. They are 'not interested in how people behave when they feel restricted. We're interested in how people behave when they think they're totally free ... That's where the real



data is and that's where the profit is.'

Meanwhile, a local housing estate is seen as ripe for redevelopment. All that remains is for the developers to hassle elderly white male tenants to leave. Events take a significant turn when 'the Griefers', aggressive performance artists, arrive, threatening the residents to reveal their digital secrets.

Enter Nigel Farage clone, beer drinker, and smoker, Hugo Bennington, a 'man of the people', leader of a UKIP-type political party. Bennington is eager to defend the male tenants and to attack its only black, Trina James, who works at Green overseeing 'microtaskers', poorly paid home workers.

Throw into the mix two main characters, Robert Townsend, a web writer specialising in click tabloid journalism, his columns veering between 'inadvertent profundity and total vapidness' and Robert's girlfriend Jess, who creates online avatars. Their lives begin to unravel when their digital personalities intersect.

Byers has said that, '*Perfidious Albion* has its conceptual roots in the idea of the digital dualism fallacy — the way we kid ourselves that our online and offline lives are separate, or that the 'digital' world somehow doesn't enmesh with and inform the analogue one. I was interested in the places where these false distinctions break down. We might tell ourselves that our 'real' life is the one we conduct offline, but our online world is increasingly the setting and repository for some of our most profound emotional experiences'.

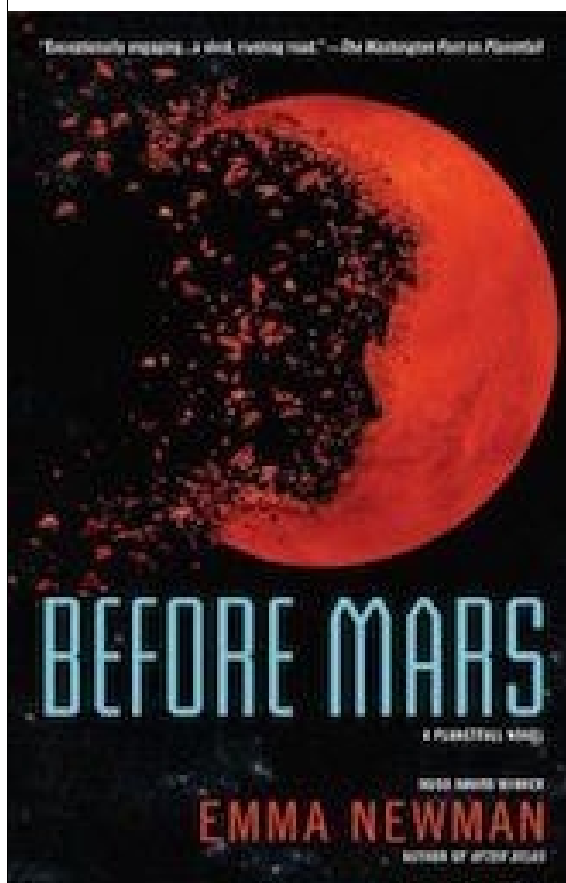
Sam Byers' dystopian satire, in the style of the *Black Mirror* TV series, is not strong on realistic characterisation, but, without doubt, is a frighteningly sharp extrapolation of current trends in Britain and the world today.

## BEFORE MARS

by Emma Newman (Gollancz; \$32.99)

*Before Mars* is the third novel in Emma Newman's 'Planetfall' universe, loosely connected to her two previous novels, 2015's *Planetfall* and 2016's *After Atlas*.

Geologist/artist Dr Anna Kubrin, after an emotionally scarred childhood and leaving behind her husband and young child on Earth, seeks a new beginning on



Mars. Newman has said that she wanted in the novel 'to explore postnatal depression and to have a female character who's a mother who is not the usual mother that you see in a lot of media. I wanted to show that she could be a really good person and have many strengths and be awesome in many ways, but also be an absolutely terrible mother.'

Anna quickly finds that the small Mars Principia GaborCorp. colony will not provide the personal peace she seeks. Paranoia sets in. Can she trust psychologist Dr Arnolfi, her small number of colleagues, and the base AI, which seems to be altering records and monitoring all their activities?

Has she been caught up in a corporate conspiracy or has she got immersion psychosis, which Dr Arnolfi claims? Anna is trapped, not only by her physical isolation, but also by the ghosts of her past. And if she uncovers the truth of what is happening on Mars, and on Earth, what will be the impact on her and her colleagues?

Newman has said in an interview, 'I knew I wanted to write a psychological thriller. I wanted the central question to be about two things, predominantly. One, when you see things and hear things that are strange, that don't fit, and you're terrified of having the same mental illness as your own father — whom do you believe, what do you believe?'

*Before Mars* is a gripping, claustrophobic novel, the tension increasing with the accretion of detail, buttressed by worrying extrapolations from today's world of dominant multinational corporations.

## THE WALL

by John Lanchester (Faber; \$29.99)

John Lanchester's *The Wall* has attracted significant media attention from the mainstream press in the UK and America, partly because it spins off immigration issues in Brexit and Trump's Mexican wall.

But, to regular readers of SF novels, such as those of Kim Stanley Robinson, it is not particularly innovative compared to recent dystopian fiction. Needless to say, Lanchester has indicated in an interview that he doesn't want to describe his book as SF 'because he felt you automatically lose half the readers'.

Britain is barricaded behind a huge coastal 'long low concrete monster' wall after a global environmental catastrophe, the 'Change', which is never documented in detail. Britain has become considerably colder. The wall is intended to keep out refugees from presumably drowned or fried continents. There are no beaches left anywhere in the world.

Importing food is impossible, so Britain has become self-sufficient, surviving with limited vegetables such as turnips and potatoes. There are echoes of World War II, but no Blitz spirit. Society overall is depressed, but kept orderly by a reclusive 'elite', whose maxim is 'No biometric ID, no life. Not in this country.'

The book begins with a young man, Kavanagh, conscripted into a two-year period of service on the wall as part of the National Coastal Defence Structure. Echoes again of British national service after World War II?

The bored and frequently grumbling 'Defenders' spend their 12-hour daily shifts patrolling the Wall, but they cannot drop their guard, because if refugees get in on the watch, they themselves are either killed or more usually cast off into the sea beyond the wall.

And it's freezing cold. The book begins: 'It's cold on the wall. That's the first thing everybody tells you, and the first thing you notice when you're sent there, and it's the thing you think about all the time you're on it ... Cold is cold is cold.' More echoes here of *Hadrian's Wall* or *Game of Thrones*?

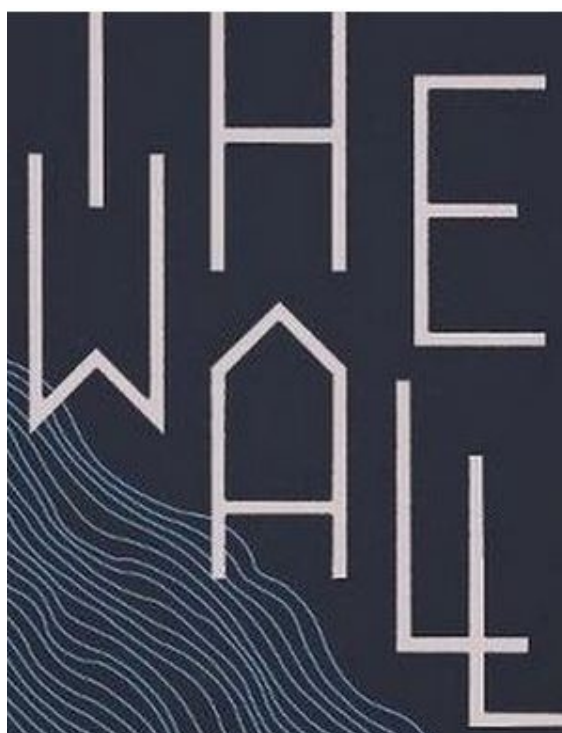
Young people resent 'the olds' because they created this world of chaos. Kavanagh's parents are ashamed that the world 'broke on their watch'. Lanchester reflects here contemporary generational inequalities such as in housing availability. But the future social divisions are never really teased out, nor the nature of the refugee Others.

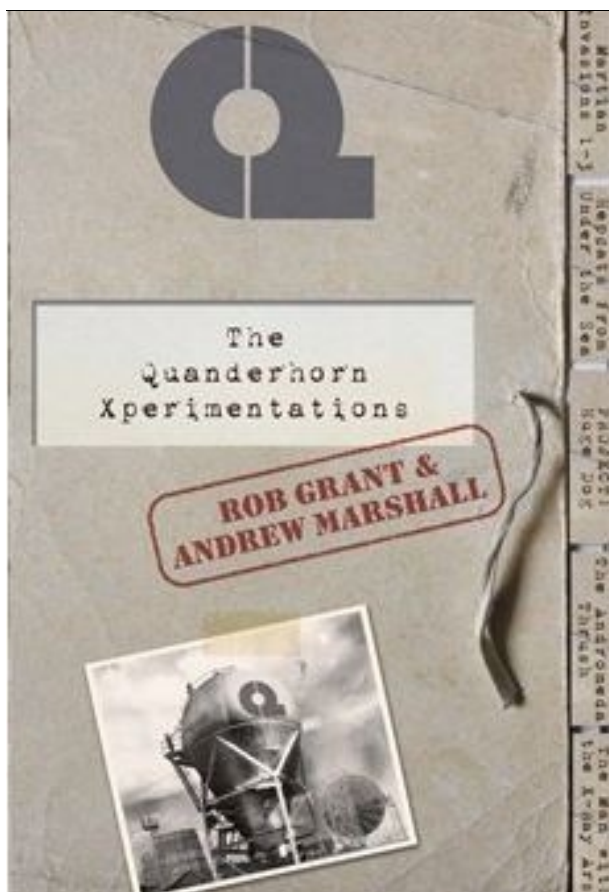
The flat dry narrative is focused, at least for two-thirds of the novel, on Kavanagh and his bleak, claustrophobic world before it morphs into an unusual and unlikely third section, an adventure narrative.

As many of the young are reluctant to bring babies into the world, Kavanagh contemplates becoming a 'Breeder', which brings him into contact with fellow Defender Hifa. In the last third of the novel, they are forced beyond the wall with others as a punishment because of a successful incursion of refugees on their watch.

After much hardship, they manage to reach a coastal community of migrants before pirates devastate the community, but escape. Just when it looks as though they going to die at sea, they spot an abandoned oil rig, with a 'hermit' guardian, which may offer a bleak window of survival.

Lanchester provides no absolute closure, but at least Kavanagh and Hifa have what those behind the Wall don't have: total freedom.





**THE QUANDERHORN XPERIMENTATIONS**  
by Rob Grant and Andrew Marshall (Gollancz;  
\$35)

*Red Dwarf*co-creator **Rob Grant** has teamed up with radio scriptwriter and producer **Andrew Marshall** in *The Quanderhorn Xperimentations*, a zany SF comedy.

It is set in a Great Britain that has been stuck in 1952 for 66 years, as a result of a time loop resulting from one of Professor Darius Quanderhorn's bizarre 'Xperimentations'. The frozen-in-time Britain is still under rationing, the Beverley Sisters are singing, class division is rife, and to make matters worse, aliens are invading.

There are clear nods in *The Quanderhorn Xperimentations*, also a BBC Radio 4 series, to Nigel Kneale's highly influential 1950s *Quatermass* TV trilogy, H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, and the Eagle comic *Dan Dare* series.

The authors have stated, 'Our notion at the beginning of *Quanderhorn* was that we both adore sci-fi, and we were sort of lamenting the passing of that era, where anything was possible. In a way, scientific advances kind of constrain your thinking about what is possible, and we wanted to return to that golden age of science fiction where there were Martian invasions, and strange gases and inventions ... Here it's been 1952 for sixty-six years, so we were able to tap into that rich vein.'

The *Quanderhorn* team includes Dr Gemini Janussen, who has had part of her brain replaced by clockwork, which drives her emotions; 'Guuuurk the Magnificent', who, as Andrew Marshall has stated, 'is a Martian from one of the previous Martian invasions, of which there have been several, and they probably didn't want him back. Unfortunately, he's learned everything he knows

about Earth from Terry-Thomas films. So he has the identity of a rather bizarre English cad and bounder, smoking cigarettes in long holders and such. He is just a miserable coward whose one desire in life is to obtain a crisp white fiver. Oh, and have a date with an Earth girl, of course.'

Others of the bizarre team include the Professor's 'son' Troy, 'not so much a son as a constructed person, not quite a clone, with an element of insect to him which makes him fantastically strong, but he also has a giant dungball in his room', and Brian Nylon, who has lost his memory. They are all regarded with some animosity by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who has apparently recruited Brian as a spy. Churchill realises Quanderhorn's attempts to save the world may well end in its destruction.

Don't expect great characterisations or logical plotlines in *The Quanderhorn Xperimentations*. Rather just let yourself become immersed in a zany mix of British nostalgia and over-the-top, Goon-like humour.

**BY THE PRICKING OF HER THUMB**  
by Adam Roberts (Gollancz; \$29.99)

*By the Pricking of Her Thumb* is the sequel to **Adam Roberts'** *The Real Town Murders*, but can be read as a stand-alone novel. Alma is a private investigator who is hired to solve crimes in 'the Real', where relatively few people still function, in contrast to their virtual world in 'the Shine', although the long-term downside is that their physical bodies gradually decay.

Roberts has said in an interview, 'I've tried to do what I usually do, and work in some cool ideas, to use my extrapolated (near)-future to think-through some of the stuff that interests me. In *Real Town* that was a set of ideas about gender and bodies, physical embodiment and virtual disembodiment. In *Thumb* it was mostly stuff about money, crypto-currencies, exchange and so on. I'm thinking about writing a third, and so completing a trilogy, something else I've never done before.'

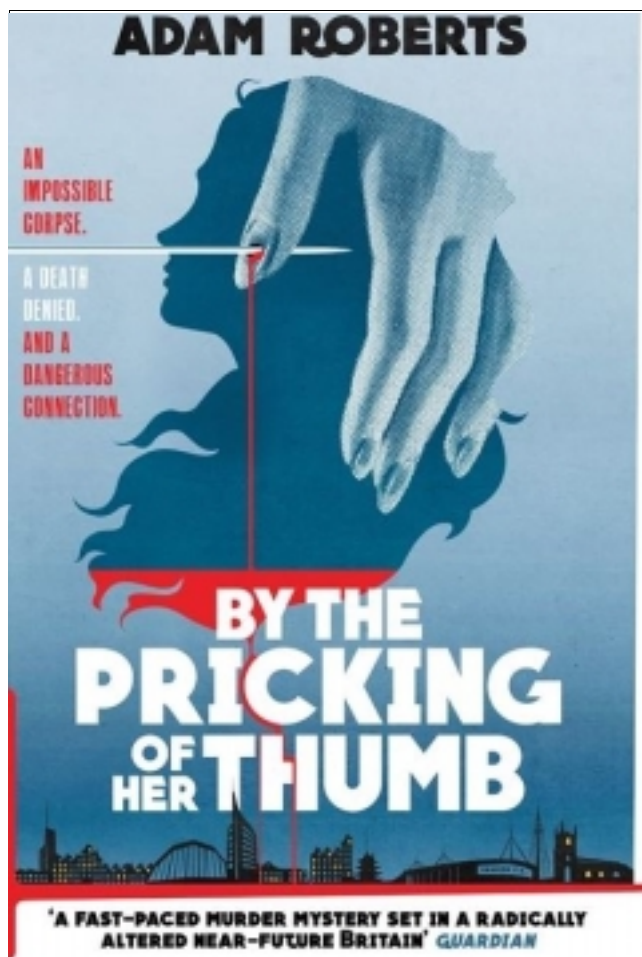
Alma operates in the physical real world because every four hours and four minutes she has to service the increasingly expensive medical needs of her bedridden partner Marguerite, who has an apparently incurable disease. This plot device, which was unusual in the first novel, seems increasingly unnecessary as there is enough suspense in the complex cases Alma deals with, without the reader being confronted with the plot idea as to whether Alma will be able to get home every four hours.

There are two major crimes that Alma has to deal with. First, the police want her to investigate a murder where a woman has been killed with a needle through her thumb, but no poisons can be detected. The second is even more intriguing as Alma is asked to investigate the alleged murder of one of a European super-rich quartet and his/her identity is stolen, but no one knows which of the four as all claim to be still alive. Gradually, the two plotlines are connected.

Alma's investigations are not helped by the attention of a deranged Stanley Kubrick *2001* fan and the suitably thuggish Kry Twins (Reg and Ron Kray, of course).

Themes that Roberts explores below the futuristic crime surface include the power of wealth, attitudes to





death, and artificial intelligence. Roberts, reflecting his academic background, again peppers the narrative with literary, philosophical, and cinematic allusions. Those looking for a clever crossover SF /crime novel will not be disappointed *By the Pricking of Her Thumb*.

### EARLY RISER

by Jasper Fforde (Hodder; \$29.99)

*Early Riser* is Jasper Fforde's first standalone novel, although some of his fans might have preferred him to continue his Thursday Next and Nursery Crime series. Nonetheless, everyone should celebrate Fforde's return with a new book, after what he has termed 'a creative hiatus' since 2014.

*Early Riser* imagines an alternate world where nearly all of humanity (although seen through the prism of Wales), hibernates through what are now severely cold winters. Their dreamless sleep is monitored by the Sleep Marshalls into which Charlie Worthing is recruited as a naive new recruit. The role of the Marshalls is to monitor the sleepers, but problems arise as viral dreams start to kill people.

The book blurb sums up the theme and Fforde's zany humour, 'Your name is Charlie Worthing and it's your first season with the Winter Consuls, the committed but mildly unhinged group of misfits who are responsible for ensuring the hibernatory safe passage of the sleeping masses. You are investigating an outbreak of viral dreams which you dismiss as nonsense; nothing more than a

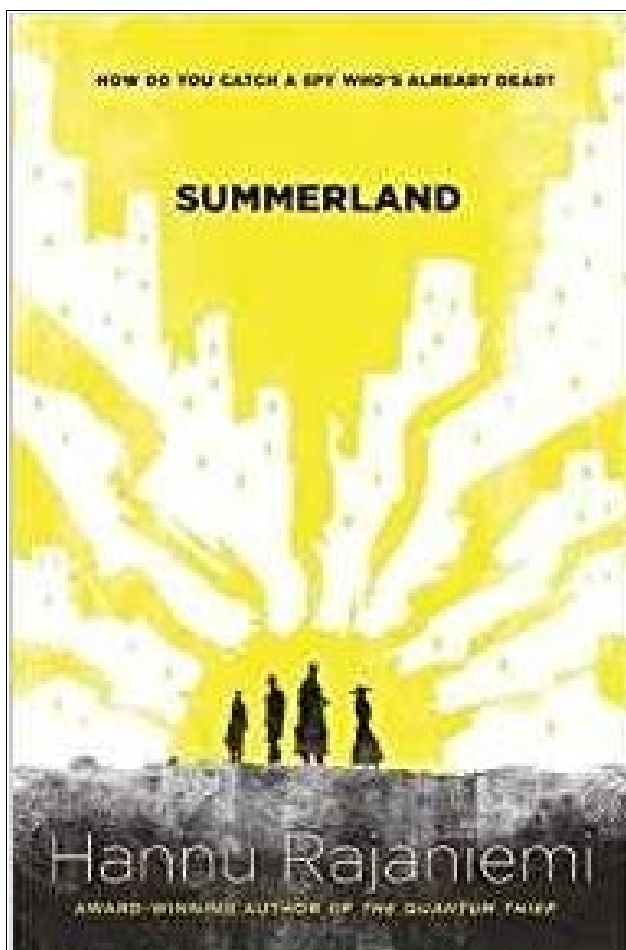


quirky artefact borne of the sleeping mind. When the dreams start to kill people, it's unsettling. When you get the dreams too, it's weird. When they start to come true, you begin to doubt your sanity. But teasing truth from winter is never easy. You have to avoid the Villains and their penchant for murder, kidnapping and stamp collecting, ensure you aren't eaten by Nightwalkers whose thirst for human flesh can only be satisfied by comfort food, and sidestep the increasingly less-than-mythical WinterVolk. But so long as you remember to wrap up warmly, you'll be fine'.

Fforde says: '*Early Riser* turned out more complex than I imagined and quite dark — it's winter after all — but it's weird, it's rich, it's set in Wales — and there are monsters, both real and imagined. Plus Carmena Miranda, stamp collecting, a painting of Clytemnestra and Tunnock's tea-cakes. How much more interesting could life get? For Charlie Worthing, my protagonist — very interesting indeed, and not always in the good way.'

It's certainly not a good way for Charlie as he has to combat some weird nightwalkers, notably Mrs Tiffen, and becoming the unwitting centrepiece in the struggle between radical group RealSleep and, HiberTech, that profits through their drug Morphenox, which is supposed to bring dream-free sleep. Charlie is a fairly reactive protagonist until he realises that his own life is in danger and he may not be able to survive until Spring.

*Early Riser* is a must for the many Fforde fans. For new readers, this is a humorous stand-alone novel with an underpinning message about unethical companies and



government surveillance. As with all Fforde novels, this is a very British novel with numerous local references, ranging from Beryl Cook to *Fawlty Towers*, After Eights mints and Wagonwheels, Val Doonican to Paul Daniels, problems with British trains and numerous references to the Welsh seaside village of Mumbles. Fforde seems to have moved on geographically from Swindon.

Ultimately, Fforde, as ever is his own voice, but if Terry Pratchett fans are still looking for somewhere to go for gentle satiric humour,

### SUMMERLAND

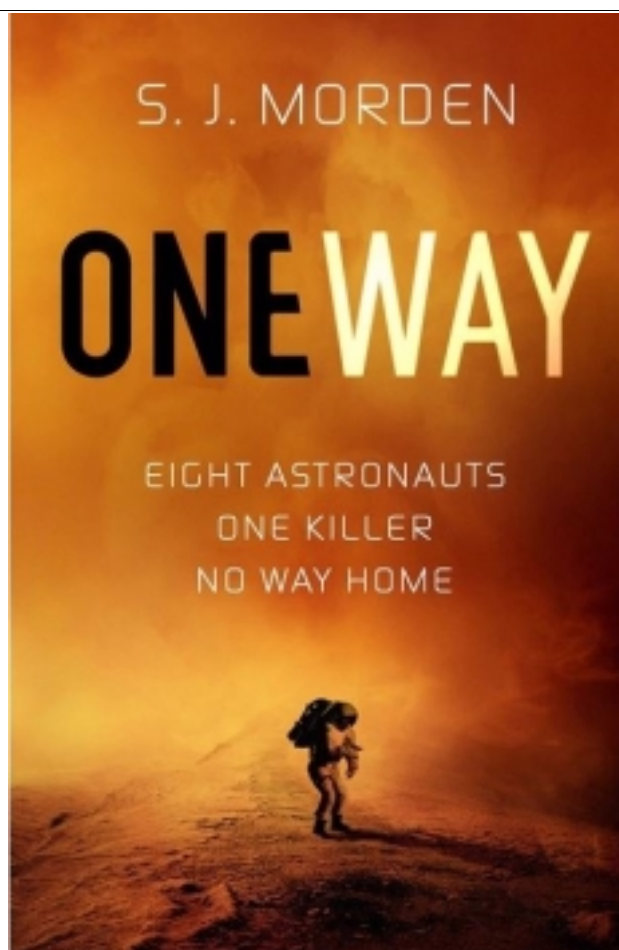
by Hannu Rajaniemi (Gollancz; \$29.99)

**Hannu Rajaniemi** won critical acclaim for his Jean Le Flambeur trilogy *The Quantum Thief*, *The Fractal Prince*, and *The Causal Angel*. In *Summerland* he comes back to earth in 1938, although in an alternate universe.

To complicate matters in this alternate universe, an afterlife world, Summerland, exists. It was discovered in the Victorian era, and is now an important part of the British Empire. Not all those who die get to Summerland, but those who do, via a 'Ticketing' process, can talk to the living via ectophones or through mediums.

British agent for the Winter Court, aka SIS, Rachel White, believes she has unearthed a 'dead' British Soviet mole in the SIS Summer Court branch. But, as the book's blurb indicates, 'How do you catch a man who is already dead?'

White is undaunted, but her revelation of all is, however, dismissed by the British old-Etonian male



establishment and she is reassigned from the case. Rachel, with some high-level assistance, goes undercover to expose the spy. The mole has used his close connections with the Prime Minister H. B. West, who has a remarkable resemblance to H. G. Wells.

Rajaniemi includes many real historical characters, such as Wells, Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt, Kim Philby, Victor Rothschild, and Sir Stewart Menzies as C, who was Head of MI6. Britain is also at loggerheads with Communist Russia, but Stalin is not helped by having continual advice from Lenin from the afterlife.

Add in some Lovecraftian occult and *Summerland* is a heady mix. Rajaniemi manages to bring it all together in a quirky enjoyable book, which also demonstrates his fictional versatility.

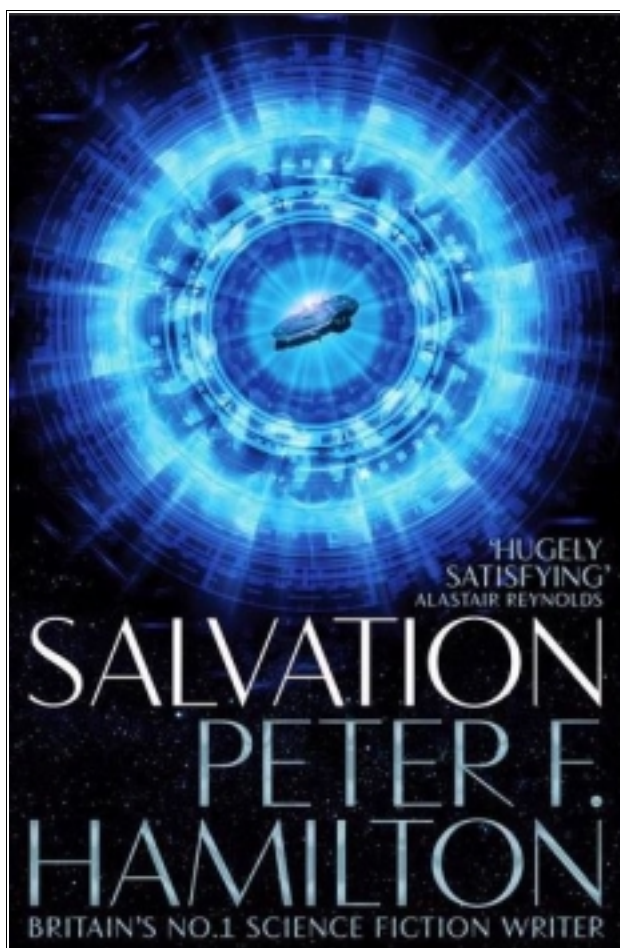
### ONE WAY

by S. J. Morden (Gollancz; \$29.99)

*One Way*, by Philip K. Dick Award winner **S. J. Morden**, is another in the increasing number of novels that combine the SF and crime genres. Mars is being colonised but, as in Australia in the late eighteenth century, prisoners, in this case murderers, are being transported to build the facilities for later astronauts. In the context of Mars, there is even less little chance of return than was available to the convicts sent to Australia, but they do have better accommodation and an element of freedom.

Frank Kittridge, in his fifties, is a convicted murderer and part of an eight-man team sent to Mars. Frank is slightly more palatable than his colleagues, in that his





murder conviction was for killing his son's drug dealer. The Mars project, run by an unscrupulous private company, skimps on budgets or loses essential material for the team. Morden is clearly commenting on the nature of contemporary privatisation and corporate capital.

There are echoes of the problems faced in Andy Weir's *The Martian*, notably in the underpinning hard science of survival. Dr Morden's scientific background in planetary geology is an asset here. Things on Mars become even more harrowing when murders start happening, but then we do have eight murderers in close proximity.

Can Frank find the murderer before he gets killed? There are also echoes here of Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*. Frank's character is well delineated, but there is a lack of back story about his colleagues and hence the impact of their deaths. Nonetheless, Morden is able to bring off a satisfying conclusion, opening the way for a sequel, *No Way*, in early 2019.

## SALVATION

by Peter F. Hamilton (Macmillan; \$32.95)

*Salvation* is the first in a new trilogy, 'The Salvation Sequence', by British author **Peter F. Hamilton**, well known for his multilayered dense space operas.

Hamilton has said in an interview, 'It's set in 2204, and things are going well for the human race. Several exoplanets around nearby stars are being terraformed, large space habitats are mining the asteroids, the sun is

being used directly to provide cheap clean power. It's looking like a golden age. Then an unknown alien ship is found on the edge of explored space. A team of experts is sent to determine if it's a threat, with the members chosen for their connection to various political factions. What they decide will ultimately affect our role in the galaxy.'

Humanity has benefited since 2144 from the arrival of the seemingly friendly alien race, the Olyix, who have helped scientifically and medically. This was given publicly in return for support for refuelling their galactic ark, in which they are seeking 'The God at the End of Time'. But do they have a hidden motive, which may play out in the search for the crashed alien spaceship in Beta Eridani, 89 light years from Earth?

Connexion Corp, which provides instantaneous travel via quantum portals, doesn't realise that the consequences of the voyage to the alien ship will change everything for humanity. Much of Hamilton's narrative is taken up with the back story of the crew on the voyage and their mixed allegiances.

This trip to Beta Eridani links into Hamilton's far-future second-narrative stream. Soldiers genetically engineered from childhood must confront a deadly alien enemy. This strand will undoubtedly play out in more depth in the second and third books of the trilogy.

*Salvation* ends on a cliffhanger. Like many first books in a trilogy, it spends a lot of time setting the scene. The split narrative between flashbacks and flashforwards restricts narrative flow, and scenes set in the far future are necessarily ambiguous, so as not to give away outcomes in the next two books, *Salvation Lost* and *Saints of Salvation*. Nonetheless, *Salvation* is always interesting and challenging, particularly in its world building, always one of Hamilton's strengths.

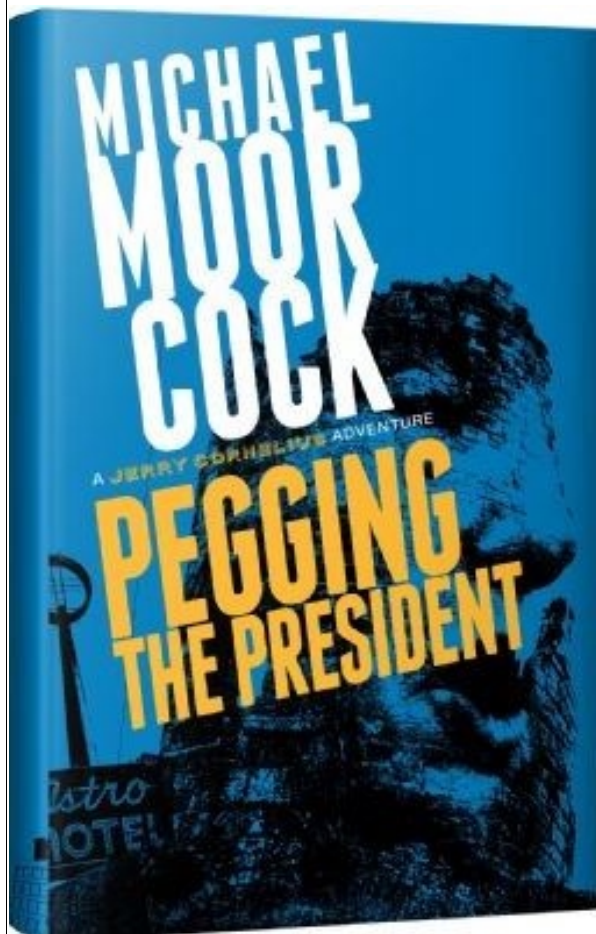
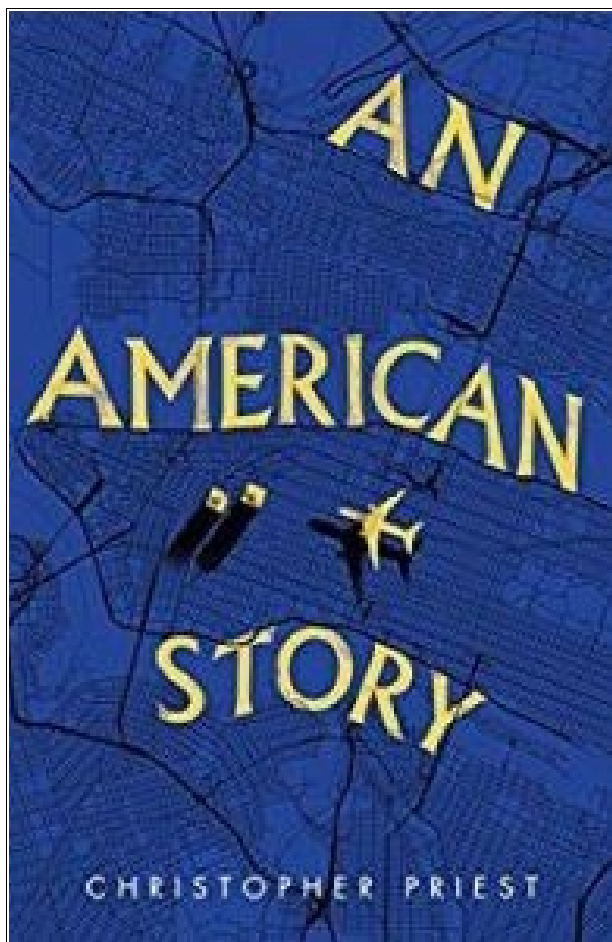
## AN AMERICAN STORY

by Christopher Priest (Gollancz; \$32.99)

*An American Story*, **Christopher Priest's** fifteenth novel, is set in the near future, but its crucial fulcrum is 9/11. Priest is always probing the nature of reality in his fiction, in this case, the reality of 9/11. Priest includes a bibliography on 9/11 and conspiracy theories at the end of the novel. In the acknowledgements, Priest stands aside from the 'crackpot conspiracy stuff', but concedes that 'some of the material is undeniably intriguing'.

Priest has said in an interview, 'It's a novel about two things: an event, and the consequences of the event. And it's based on something called the Thomas Theorem, which is a fairly little known proposition not in maths but in sociology. Which is that the events surrounding some incidents are so important, you tend to forget the incident and remember the events and the consequences of them. There are many examples, quite common ones. For instance, Brexit is a clear example where that's going on. No one's going to remember all this debate about No Deal — a year from now we're all going to be bankrupt. That's what's going to matter. And with 9/11, the event itself — awful, tragic, terrible as it was — then four and a half million people got killed in Afghanistan as a result of that. And that's kind of a big consequence to something where the Americans hold the





copyright to the story, and don't tell the truth.'

Ben Matson, the main character in *An American Story*, is a freelance science writer, living with his family on Bute, which is part of an independent Scotland after Brexit. Ben's then American girlfriend Lil was killed on American Airlines flight 77 on 9/11. Lil had told Ben that she was seeking a divorce from her husband, Martin Viklund, who seems to have a high level secret role in the US government. But was Lil telling the truth, not only about the state of her marriage, but also about her work?

Ben comes to wonder why his life revolves around 9/11. His wife's father, an underwriter lawyer, may have been murdered while working on compensation for the 9/11 victims.

Ben is reminded of Lil's death when he reads the obituary of a famous Russian mathematician Kyril Alexeyevich Tatarov, whom he had interviewed. Tatarov's research had focused on reshaping reality by changing our collective understanding. 'If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences. In other words, the interpretation of a situation causes the action.' In an era of social media manipulation and real or fake news, Priest's theme is topical.

Ben notes that Lil's name does not appear on any of the passenger manifests. When a wreck is discovered off the Atlantic American coast, which the authorities later denies is a plane, he subsequently finds a black bangle charm that he has given to Lil. Ben must, despite his family's concerns, continue his quest for the truth or what purports to be the truth.

*An American Story* probes the distinction between truth and fiction with panache, even if there can be no absolute conclusion.

## PEGGING THE PRESIDENT

by Michael Moorcock (PS Publishing; £15)

**Michael Moorcock**, one of the twentieth century's most influential figures in SF and fantasy writing and publishing, makes a welcome reappearance with *Pegging the President*, from the innovative PS Publishing in Britain.

It features his multidimensional figure, Jerry Cornelius, who has been termed 'an enigmatic anti-hero, physicist, rock star, assassin, time traveller, failure, society host, secret agent, and spirit of the age and (false?) messiah'.

Cornelius first appeared in print in the 'Swinging London' *New Worlds* magazine of the 1960s and Moorcock's settings of Ladbroke Grove and Notting Hill. Moorcock encouraged other writers to extrapolate the Cornelius myth, and a number did so, notably Neil Gaiman, Alan Moore, and William Gibson.

Moorcock has said the Cornelius stories are an attempt to 'liberate the narrative'. They are certainly far from conventional narratives, and perhaps sit best in the psychedelic framework of the 1960s and early 1970s.

Several Cornelius short stories appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, collected as *Jerry Cornelius: His Lives And Times*. Then in the novella, *Firing the Cathedral*, also published by PS Publishing, Moorcock responded to the 9/11 attacks on Amera, picking up concerns on global warming and global terrorism.

In *Pegging the President*, Moorcock is not only continu-

ing to highlight those concerns, but also reflecting on Donald Trump's America in the now familiar jumpy text and a lack of conventional narrative. Each of the 26 chapters is prefaced with numerous quotations from an eclectic list, ranging from *The Guardian* to *Weird Tales* and *The American Handgunner*. None seems to be dated later than 2016, but every chapter is prefaced with an extract from Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel, *It Can't Happen Here*, a novel that many have said foretells the rise of Donald Trump.

Moorcock reflects on a need for humanity to calm down and to seek a balance between law and chaos. 'It was a shame that the whole world had come down to base and drums. The gradually increasing beat of the instruments of war ... no relief now from chaos creeping in from the margins.'

In chapter 12, 'The Physics of Fear', Moorcock reflects on living in Texas. He sees Texas ceding from the Union, 'the first Libertarian State in history'. Chapter 13, 'The Brexiteer Bungles', reflects the Brexit chaos. Time unravelling is ever present in Moorcock.

Familiar Moorcock figures reappear, such as Miss Brunner, Major Nye, and Colonel Pyat, as well as references to real people, such as Brian Aldiss and J. G. Ballard. Moorcock recalls memories of the early sixties: 'We played skiffle and jazz and we wrote SF'.

If readers are unfamiliar with Jerry Cornelius, *Pegging the President* is probably not the best Cornelius book to start with. Rather, go back to the 1960s original quartet of novels. Nonetheless, it is good to know that Moorcock

is still able to jerrymander!

## US science fiction

### RECORD OF A SPACEBORN FEW

by Becky Chambers (Hodder; \$29.99)

Becky Chambers' 'Wayfarers' series, which currently includes *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet*, *A Closed and Common Orbit*, and now *Record of a Spaceborn Few*, has attracted a considerable fan following.

The Exodus fleet, comprising intergenerational starships, left behind a dying Earth centuries ago. The intention was not only to find a new home, but also to leave behind not only a severely damaged world but also promise to develop a more collegial culture.

'We destroyed our world and left it for the skies. Our numbers were few. Our species had scattered. We were the last to leave. We left the ground behind. We left the oceans. We left the air. We watched these things grow small. We watched them shrink into a point of light. As we watched, we understood. We understood what we were. We understood what we would need to do to survive. We abandoned more than our ancestors' world. We abandoned our short sight. We abandoned more than our bloody ways. We made ourselves anew'.

The Exodus Fleet eventually makes contact with the 'Galactic Commons', a technologically advanced interstellar community, which willingly accepts the Earth refugees. For some, however, a ground-based colony is less palatable, so their ship *Asteria* has become their home. To the Exodans, given the passage through space and their ship location, questions such as 'what do I need?' are replaced 'by what good can I do?'. Communal good is the overarching framework.

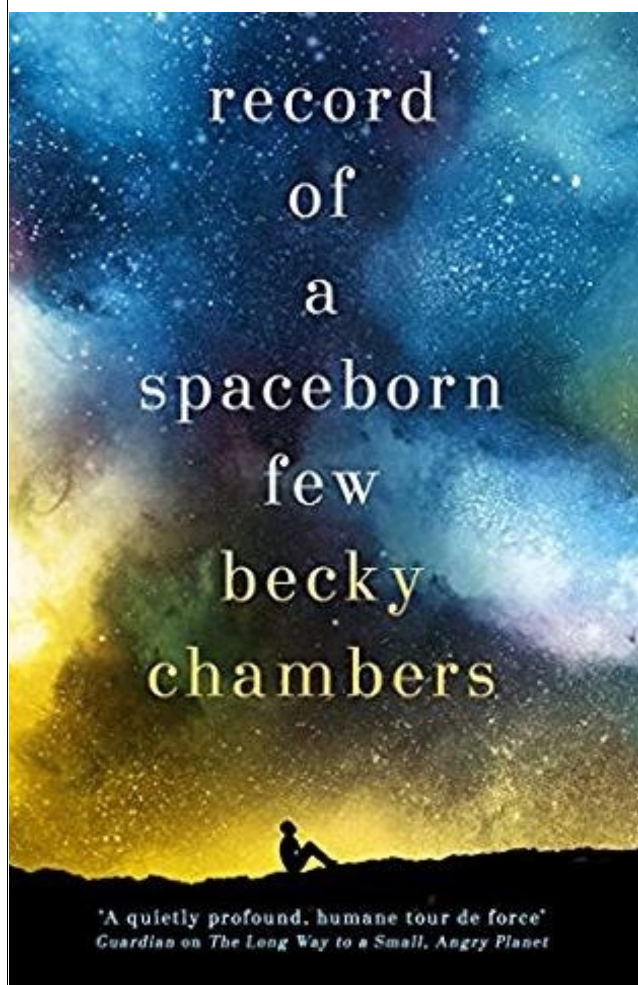
Chambers' novel focuses on a small number of characters, such as the *Asteria*'s elderly archivist who protects the heritage of the fleet, a reluctant young apprentice who wants to escape from orbit, an outsider, Sawyer, who comes on board looking for a place to belong, and an alien observer who allows for the interaction of cultures. All reflect on the need to accept change and to recognise each other's differences.

*Record of a Spaceborn Few* is decidedly utopian, and bucks the current dark dystopian SF trend. Chambers has said in an interview: 'The Exodus Fleet was successful. They made it. Their ships didn't fail. Their culture didn't break down into class war or ideological factions. So much of writing this book was just asking myself how they managed that, with the directive that it whatever that model was, it had to be something positive. There are dark means to achieving those ends, too, but that's not my style'.

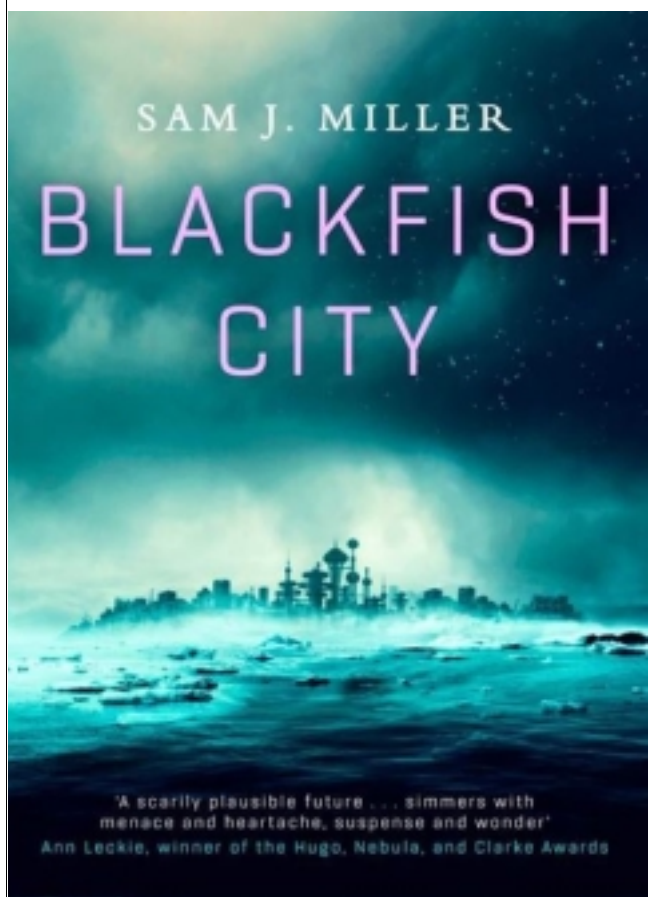
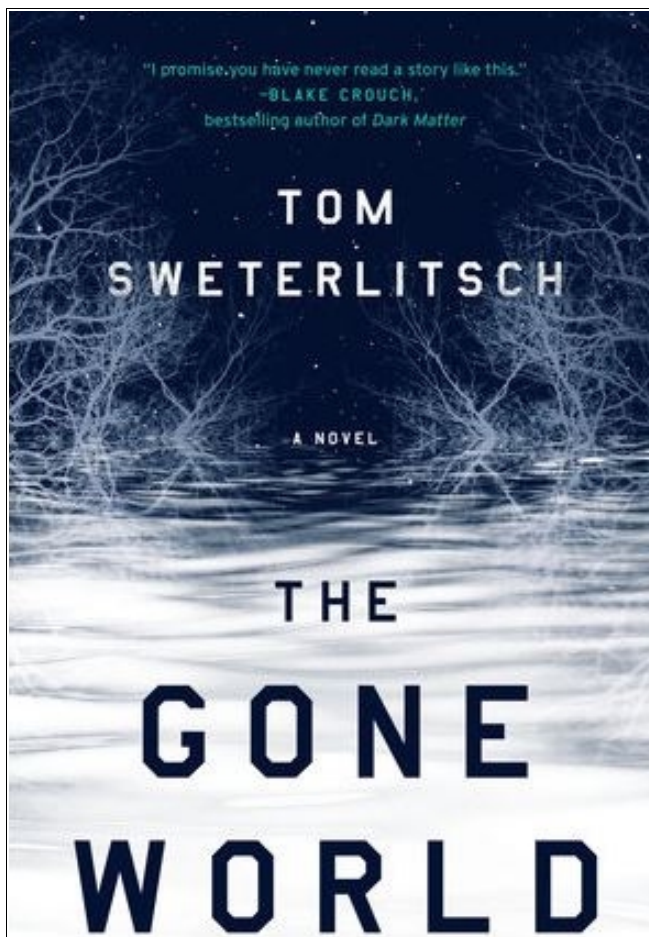
### THE GONE WORLD

by Tom Sweterlitsch (Headline; \$32.99)

*The Gone World* sees black-ops Naval Criminal Investigative Service agent Shannon Moss sent, from 1997, on a mission into the future to track down Patrick Mursult, a missing Navy SEAL, who may have murdered his family.







The problem is, however, that Mursult's spaceship, the U.S.S. *Libra*, has been supposedly destroyed, while at the same time, triggering quantum -tunnelling nano-particles, which cause the 'Terminus', which will destroy humanity. The Terminus is 'like the blade of a guillotine slicing towards us' and, in all futures, is coming closer chronologically to the present day.

**Tom Sweterlitsch** has said that his book is 'a murder mystery time-travel thriller about NCIS Special Agent Shannon Moss as she fights to prevent the end of Mankind ... The 'monster' in *The Gone World* is almost like a terrible natural occurrence, something that just happens — it's more like a disease than a monster, in a way'.

It is not, however, a straightforward apocalyptic narrative, as the loops of time take Shannon's reality and age in different directions. Sweterlitsch has called the novel a 'fractal-shaped narrative. There's like five sections and it's shaped angularly. Within those sections there's a lot of repetition and reflection of each other.'

On a personal level, it is Shannon's story as she navigates precariously through time and space, trying to prevent each future leading to the end of the world. *The Gone World* is a clever dark 'hard' SF novel, with deliberate literary echoes of both Philip K. Dick and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

#### **BLACK FISH CITY**

by **Sam J. Miller** (Orbit; \$29.99)

*Blackfish City* is **Sam J. Miller's** second novel, his first for adult readers. In a post-climate-change disaster world, the artificial Arctic floating city of Qaanaaq is a marvel of mechanical and social engineering. Nonetheless, it is a difficult home for many because of great economic inequality, political corruption, overcrowding, and a rampant viral AIDS-like disease.

'Qaanaaq is an eight-armed asterisk. East of Greenland, north of Iceland. Built by an unruly alignment of Thai-Chinese-Swedish corporations and government entities, part of the second wave of grid city construction, learning from the spectacular failure of several early efforts. Almost a million people call it home, though many are migrant workers.'

Miller has said in an interview, 'I wanted to imagine a future where our own mistakes have finally begun to hurt us. Rising sea levels and environmental decay has sort of flooded New York City, and so the protagonist is one of many folks who has fled from New York to a floating city in the Arctic. And so Qaanaaq sort of evolved as this natural response to thinking about how people will still find a way to come together and live together.'

The unstable politics of the largely AI-controlled city increase after a woman arrives accompanied by an orca whale and a giant polar bear in a cage. 'Whatever she had come to Qaanaaq to accomplish, her face gave no hint of whether it would be bloody or beautiful or both.' Miller then tells the story through four very different characters.

This narrative structure is interspersed by chapter info dumps under the heading 'City Without a Map'. They slow the narrative pace, but are essential for the background settings. Miller's conclusion does not tie up



everything neatly, although it logically reflects the messy nature of his creation of a flawed yet heroic world.

### HAZARDS OF TIME TRAVEL

by Joyce Carol Oates (HarperCollins; \$32.99)

**Joyce Carol Oates** is Professor of the Humanities at Princeton University, but is probably better known as one of America's leading novelists. Her forty-sixth novel, *The Hazards of Time Travel*, was apparently begun in 2011 and finished before the Trump 2016 election, but it fits perfectly in the post Trump dystopian novel explosion. It is not really about time travel, but rather an expose of authoritarian conformity and the need to assimilate rather than be exceptional.

A post-9/11, xenophobic, and racist 'Reconstituted North American States' is ruled by the Patriot Party where it's 'better to be a safe coward than a sorry hero'. History books have been rewritten and libraries have been destroyed to erase the past before 9/11. People are categorised by their skin tone. If you have a high IQ, it's better not to boast about it.

So when talented teenager Adriane Stohl speaks her mind in challenging Patriot democracy and history at a high school address, she is labelled a provocateur, given an immediate trial, and was sent back in time to 1959 Wisconsin for four years of 'rehabilitation'. She becomes an 'exiled Individual', one who must never mention her past or how she got there. For Adriane, 'The punishment of Exile is loneliness.' She is only allowed a ten-mile radius of movement and is forbidden to question, challenge, or disobey in any way the local authority.

Adriane assumes the new persona of Mary Ellen Enright, a freshman at Wainscotia State University, 'a hotbed of mediocrity', where she has to succumb to feminine norms of that era. Oates, who was 21 and living in Wisconsin in the late 1950s and early 1960s, is understandably good on the period detail and social norms. Adriane doesn't want to wear a girdle and hates the incessant smoking. She wonders if 'secondary smoke inhalation' is a further punishment.

Falling for her charismatic psychology professor complicates matters, as she has been forbidden to enter into any intimate or confidential relationship. Can she trust him, particularly if he is a fellow exile and there are spies in the class? Indeed, who can she trust? It's not going to be an easy life for Mary Ellen Enright. Oates' conclusion is suitably realistic and sobering.

*The Hazards of Time Travel* is not one of Joyce Carol's Oates best novels, but that would have been a difficult task, given some of the acclaimed, award-winning novels in her long career.

The book's subject matter is nothing particularly new to SF readers, but if it brings mainstream readers to discover the excellent dystopian novels recently published in the SF genre, that will be an additional plus to reading Joyce Carol Oates' nonetheless intriguing narrative.



### THE STARS NOW UNCLAIMED

by Drew Williams (Simon & Schuster; \$32.99)

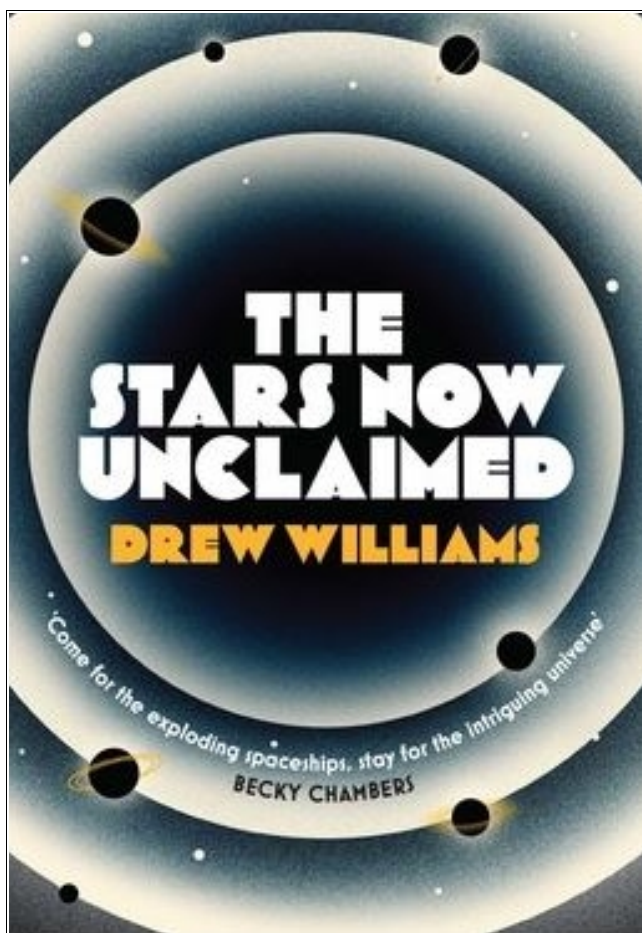
*The Stars Now Unclaimed*, **Drew Williams'** debut space opera novel, is set in a universe where an energy 'pulse' has devastated many planets. The pulse was a plan by 'the Justified' to bring a warring galaxy to its senses by neutralising planet-killing weapons of war. Unfortunately, the plan misfired in more ways than one, leaving many planets without technologies.

Now the Justified scour the universe for young people changed by the pulse and whom they believe will have telekinetic powers to reverse the impact of the pulse's technological damage.

Jane, a Justified soldier, is sent on a mission to rescue one such gifted teenager, fourteen-year old Esa, 'the girl with all the gifts'. Jane rescues Esa just before the arrival of a ruthless, fascist force, the Pax, whose aim is to 'conquer the whole galaxy'. With the help of an angry AI, Alexi 54328, a member of the Barious machine race, they are able to escape, but a deadly galactic war threatens.

Williams packs his novel with many battles, which occasionally threaten her narrative flow. Overall, however, this is a fast-paced novel, with empathetic characterisation, set in a galaxy of haves and have-nots, riven by power struggles.

Ultimately, Williams has hope. As he has said in an interview: 'Of course there's hope. Of course there is. There has to be; without it, there'd be no reason for anything. We, as humanity, have spent the last several thousand years (at least!) bettering ourselves. In the long



run, I have to believe we'll continue to do so.' That's the theme not just of *The Stars Now Unclaimed*, but of *The Universe After* as a whole: 'so long as parents struggle to not pass on their own sins to their children, the universe can get better.'

'That being said: my major technological bugbear is less some scary-advanced form of weaponry, and more "the Internet". To put it simply — we weren't ready. We weren't prepared for what the stew of anonymity, depersonalization, and ease-of-use would do to us. Nobody saw the more horrible corners of the Internet — and the way they'd leak out and infect the rest of our culture — coming. And I don't know that we could have. Did I purposefully echo the sectarian divisions and echo chambers of the modern Internet with *The Stars Now Unclaimed's* "sect wars"? Well no, I didn't, I'm not that smart. But as Freud almost certainly never said: "the subconscious wants what the subconscious wants".'

With two more volumes of the trilogy to come, Williams has made an impressive SF start.

## RED MOON

by Kim Stanley Robinson (Orbit; \$32.99)

At the time of writing this review, China had just landed a probe on the far side of the moon. **Kim Stanley Robinson** has said in an interview that 'China is really very likely to be the political entity or technological entity that will first inhabit the moon in a substantial way'. So, in Robinson's *Red Moon*, by 2047 the moon is largely dominated by China, although the book is less about lunar detail

than about global politics being played out on the Moon and Earth.

Robinson believes 'The moon is going to be more like Antarctica. Right now, there are scientific stations all over Antarctica. Well, how has that changed humanity? It hasn't at all. And the moon's going to be the same way.'

*Red Moon* begins with Fred Fredericks, an American technician working for a Swiss company, carrying a 'mobile quantum key' phone to the Chinese on the moon, but the handover to China's Lunar Special Administrative Region Governor, Chang Yazu, sees Yazu poisoned. Fred is seen as the assassin by the Chinese, and has to be smuggled back to the Earth along with a young pregnant woman, Chan Qi, a Chinese 'princessling'.

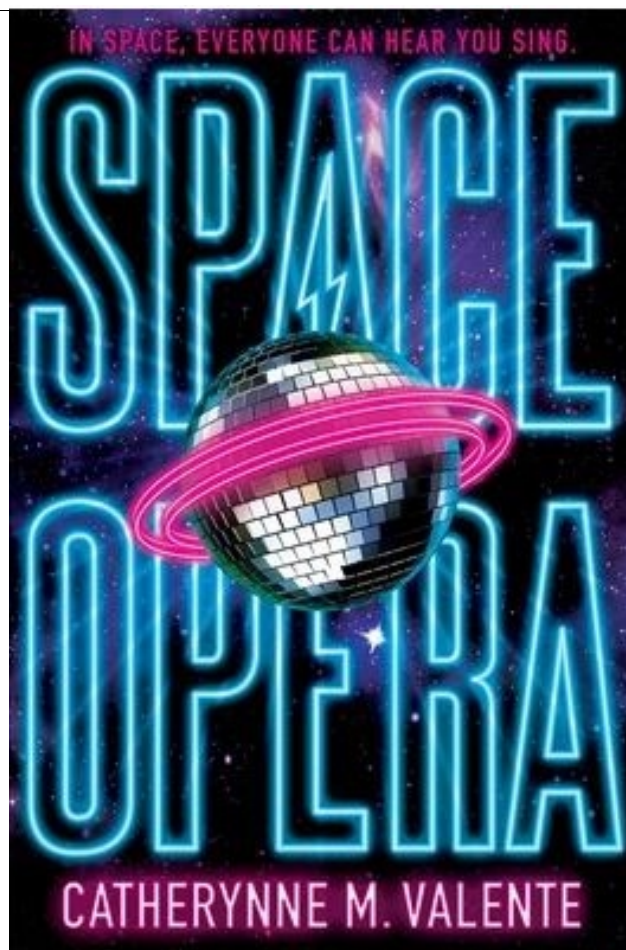
Qi is in trouble on two fronts, first for becoming pregnant on the moon, which is illegal, but more importantly, because she is the leader of a growing resistance movement in China. She and Fred go into hiding in Beijing, as both are sought by the Chinese secret security forces.

The rest of the book follows their attempts to evade capture and the increasing threat of the resistance movement to the Chinese authorities. Robinson is less concerned with narrative zest and deep characterisation than using the narrative structure for highlighting contemporary issues.

A significant voice is Ta Shu, an elderly poet, travel commentator, and feng shui expert, the focal point for Robinson's long info dumps, on topics as varied as the colonisation of the moon, quantum cryptography, and







blockchain currencies.

With Robinson, in recent books you know what you're getting. *Red Moon* is no exception. In this case, Robinson offers a serious reflection on social, political, and environmental issues and foreshadows the increasing influence of China in the twenty-first century.

## SPACE OPERA

by Catherynne M. Valente (Corsair; \$32.99)

**Catherynne M. Valente** spins off the Eurovision Song Contest in *Space Opera*, her latest zany novel. In a blog, Valente had to explain the Eurovision song contest to Americans: 'Eurovision is at once utterly absurd and over the top and not to be taken seriously, and capable of incredible heights of feeling and meaning. It is so very perfectly human. I am not even afraid to say I have cried during Eurovision performances ... America isn't part of it, and despite what's going on with Australia, probably shouldn't be. We wouldn't really get not being able to vote for your own country.'

Valente sets the scene herself: 'It's the near future, and we've just made first contact with an alien species. Rather a lot of alien species, in fact. And they aren't too impressed with us. You see, the galaxy has sent the last couple of centuries torn apart by the Sentience Wars, and only lately achieved a fragile peace. These days, they're very careful with new species, especially when they just can't be entirely sure whether the new war-mongering, highly prejudiced, kind of obnoxious, newly spacefaring kids on the block are entirely sentient. For

borderline cases, like Earth, the greater galactic community makes an offer freshly discovered planets are literally not allowed to refuse.'

So Earth is forced to enter the Metagalactic Grand Prix 'to sing their hearts out against alien punk rock superstars from all around the universe. Show us that you are intelligent. Show us that you know what it's really all about'. The trouble is, if you come last in the contest, your species 'will be annihilated — painlessly, of course — your biosphere reseeded, your planet quarantined, and you can try again in another million years or so with dolphins or something. No hard feelings. Can't be too careful.' So it's not singing for your supper, but rather for your survival of your species.

Earth's future rests rather precariously on 'weird London down-on-their-luck glam-punk one hit wonder ex-band' Decibel Jones and the Absolute Zeroes. Decibel, a 'leggy psychedelic ambidextrous omnisexual gender-splat glitterpunk financially punch-drunk ethnically ambitious glamrock messiah', has to cooperate with the remaining member of the band and reconcile differences before they can even get to musical square one. They will need all the help they can get, notably from a time-travelling super-intelligent red panda.

*Space Opera's* comic galactic extravaganza is never a coherent narrative, and is often absurdly over the top, but will certainly will appeal to the many fans of Douglas Adams, Charles Stross, and Tom Holt.

## British fantasy

### LIES SLEEPING

by Ben Aaronovitch (Gollancz; \$29.99)

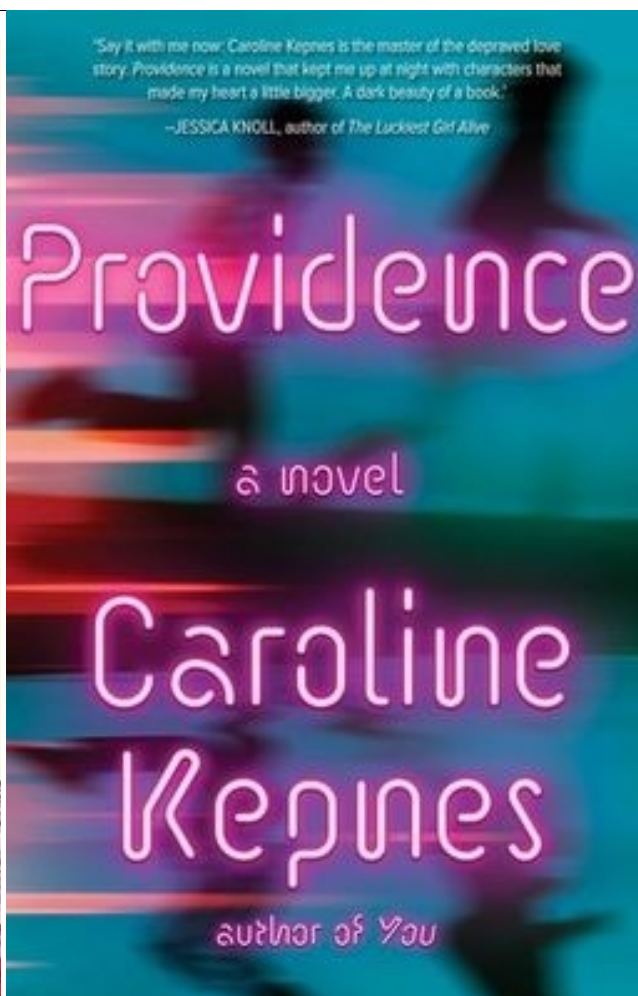
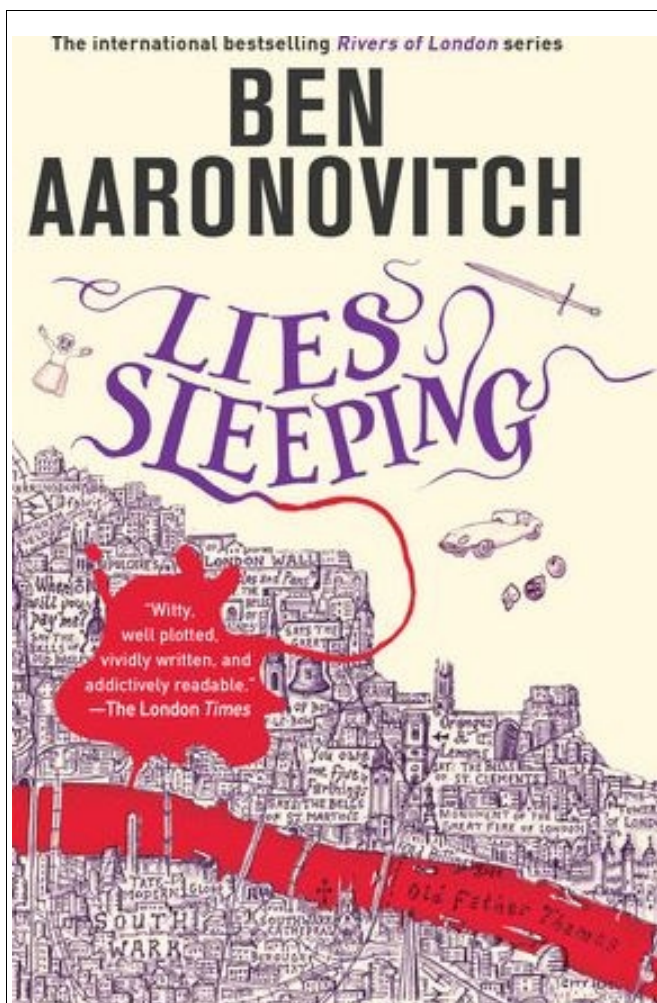
The 'Rivers of London' series, in which a small group of London Metropolitan police detectives investigate supernatural crimes in and around London, has now assembled a cult following. **Ben Aaronovitch's** main character is Detective Constable Peter Grant, also an apprentice wizard, reporting to Detective Inspector Thomas Nightingale, a fully fledged wizard.

*Lies Sleeping*, the seventh book in the series, focuses on the activities of the 'Faceless Man II', now identified as Martin Chorley, who is wanted for crimes against humanity. Peter is initially unaware that Chorley's plans, and those of his estranged colleague, Lesley May, aim to use historically potent forces, possibly including the supernatural killer Mr Punch, to destroy London.

Peter and his Folly colleagues, such as DC Sahra Guleed, consult history and archaeological experts as the plotline weaves through British history from the Roman Mithraeum through Arthur to Tyburn. Aaronovitch writes that 'archaeology came in all shapes, sizes and apparent degrees of nickableness'.

As ever, dry humour in the Pratchett/Fforld style fills out the background detail. Guleed and Peter, early in the novel, are ensconced in the Cafe Casablanca monitoring the Whitechapel Bell foundry — a magical bells plays a significant part in the plot to reshape London. The cafe 'served a selection of Indian sweets made on the premises that were doing their best, through smell





alone, to convince me that type 2 diabetes was a small price to pay’.

The tension increases as Chorley always seems to be one step ahead, especially when Peter is imprisoned in a bleak basement cellar, with no moisturising cream or Wi-Fi and nothing to read but *The Silmarillion*. He shares the cellar with the mysterious Foxglove, who ‘with no discernible effort lifted me up and threw me over her shoulder ... I thought where was this one when I was carrying 10 tons of shopping back from the Ridley Road market’.

Aaronovitch sustains the pace and humour throughout a novel of just over 400 pages. One sincerely hopes that he is intending to continue the series now that this particular stream of the Rivers of London is concluded.

## PROVIDENCE

by Caroline Kepnes (Simon & Schuster; \$32.99)

American author **Caroline Kepnes** achieved significant success with her first novel, *You*, shortlisted for a CWA New Blood Award, and subsequently made into a TV series. This was followed by a sequel, *Hidden Bodies*.

Her third novel, *Providence*, is a lengthy stand-alone novel, mixing the romance, YA, crime, and supernatural genres. Kepnes has said, ‘The changes are me keeping myself engaged. I love so many different kinds of books, it’s part of my DNA to jump between all the genres I love.’ The novel revolves around the kidnapping of an intro-

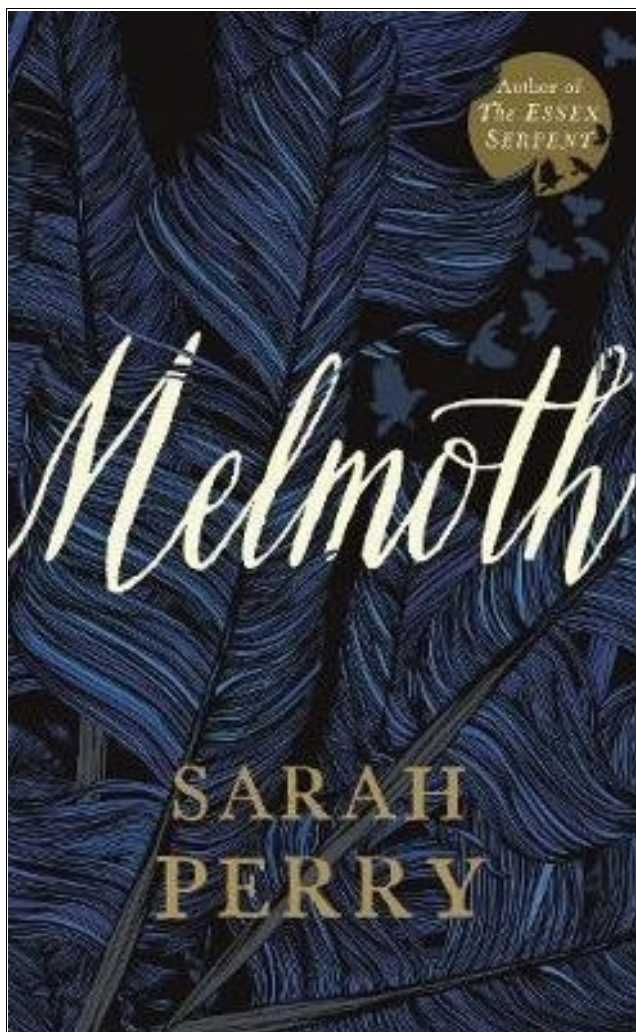
verted thirteen-year-old schoolboy Jon Bronson by one of his schoolteachers, on the way to school in Nashua, New Hampshire.

When Jon is released four years later, with no memory of his captivity, he finds that inside the cover of a battered paperback of the H. P. Lovecraft classic *The Dunwich Horror* his teacher has inscribed the words, ‘You were in a medically induced coma. You are fine. You are free ... You have power, power that will present itself to you slowly, so as not to overwhelm you.’ That power may initially be unconsciously impacting those around him in terms of sickness and possibly even death.

The story is told through the voices of Jon, his only true friend Chloe, and Detective Charles ‘Eggs’ DeBenedictus, who wonders about the increasing number of cardiac deaths in apparently healthy college students in Providence, Rhode Island and Jon’s involvement.

Chloe, now an artist in New York, and Jon, the quintessential outsider, communicate via social media. Chloe remains puzzled by his inaccessibility and remoteness. Kepnes reflects, ‘As far as Jon and Chloe not having sex — I was very interested in that. We so often judge people who don’t physically come together, but I wanted to explore love and the online world, where people are together without being together.’

Kepnes exposes the angst and the sacrifice of love, both real and repressed, including those of DeBenedictus and his troubled family. But the essential passivity of the characters detracts from the overall effectiveness of



the novel, although this could have been intentional by Kepnes, a Lovecraft fan, given the isolation and lack of self-determination of Lovecraft's characters.

## MELMOTH

by Sarah Perry (Serpent's Tail; \$29.99)

British author **Sarah Perry**, with a doctorate in gothic history, spins off Charles Maturin's 1820 influential gothic novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, in a feminist revision. In Maturin's original, John Melmoth, like Faust, sells his soul to the devil for 150 years of extra life. After realising, however, this was a bad deal, he searches the world desperately for someone to take his place.

Perry's *Melmoth* is a much bleaker novel than her bestselling second novel *The Essex Serpent* (2016). It is a story of interwoven fates, notably of Melmotka, the female Melmoth, and Helen Franklin, a lonely 42-year-old woman, working as a translator in Prague. Helen is 'small, insignificant, having about her an air of sadness whose source you cannot guess at; of self-punishment, self-hatred, carried out quietly and diligently and with a minimum of fuss'.

Helen meets Karel, an academic, at the Czech National Library. Karel is convinced that Melmotka, a woman observing humanity's violence and cruelty, is also watching him. Karel passes his Melmoth files to Helen, whose reading of them brings the reader into the dark

testimonies accumulated by Karel.

Perry has said that she wanted to make her 'monster' a woman because most of the monsters in literature are male. Secondly, she wondered, 'what sort of monstrosity a female monstrosity would be. There is something seductive about this Melmoth. You don't know whether to go with her or not.'

Melmotka observes the worst atrocities of human-kind, which include the Armenian genocide and the Nazi Holocaust. She is 'always seeking out everything that's most distressing and most wicked, in a world which is surpassingly wicked, and full of distress. In doing so she bears witness, where there is no witness, and hopes to achieve her salvation'.

Perry began writing the book in 2016, when her health was bad and world politics were grim with ISIS, the Syrian refugee crisis, and the Orlando massacre. She has said in interview: 'I remember thinking that I wanted to give up writing because it seemed so futile to just be making up stories when the world was burning.'

Perry's rewrite of *Melmoth* was therefore timely for her, and to remind the reader of the need for individual and communal responsibility of global atrocities. Perry concludes the real monsters are ordinary humans. There are glimmers of hope, however, in Perry's conclusion, a small cry of faith amongst encircling darkness.

## US fantasy

### THE BOOKS OF EARTHSEA:

#### THE COMPLETE ILLUSTRATED EDITION

by Ursula K. Le Guin (Gollancz; \$65)

I remember reviewing an **Ursula Le Guin** book for *SF Commentary* in a literary galaxy far, far away and she wrote a letter in saying 'Who is this Colin Steele?' That led to an occasional letter conversation with her over two decades, a file of which is now in Sydney University's Fisher Library with my SF and fantasy signed collection.

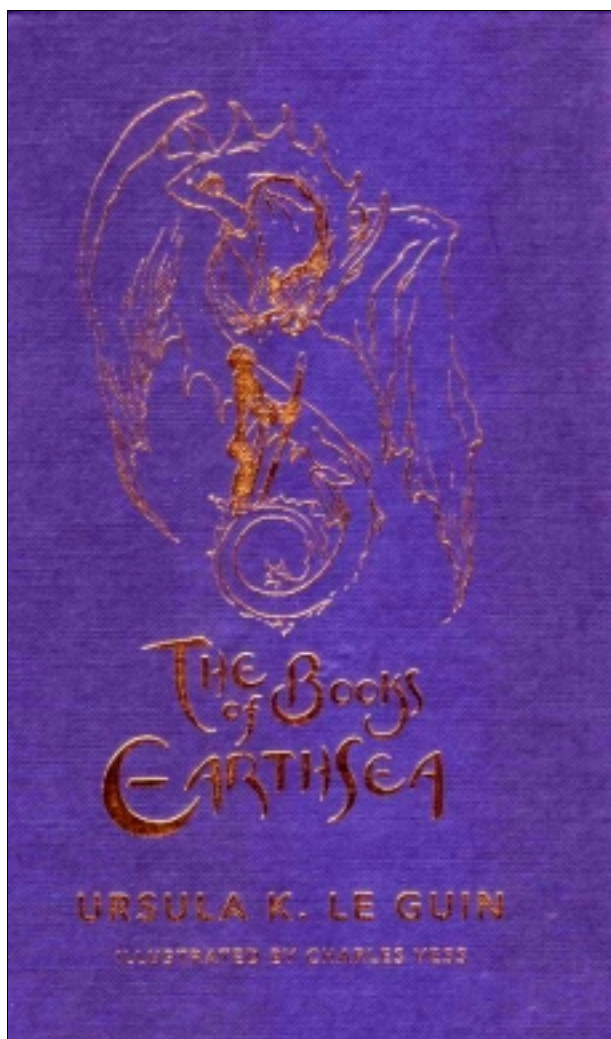
I shared the global sadness when Ursula Le Guin died in January 2018. She won many awards, including the National Book Award, the Hugo and Nebula Awards, and a Newbery Honor.

Her six books of Earthsea have attained classic status, and it's wonderful to see them collected in a blockbuster hardback book, *The Books of Earthsea: The Complete Illustrated Edition*, which totals nearly 1000 pages, although of relatively small font. The 'Earthsea' books comprise *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Tombs of Atuan*, *The Farthest Shore*, *Tehanu*, and *The Other Wind*, as well as the collection of short stories, *Tales from Earthsea*.

In the Afterword, Le Guin writes that the reader can find at last, for the first time, Earthsea, in English, all together in the right order: 'It took me thirty-two years to write Earthsea and then sixteen more years to get it published as what it is, a single story from beginning to end ... Authors and wizards learn to be patient while the magic works.'

Welcome additional material includes 'The Word of Unbinding', 'The Rule of Names', 'Firelight', which has been posthumously published, 'The Daughter of Odren', never before in print (it was published only





digitally) and 'Earthsea Revisioned', a lecture Le Guin gave at Keble College, Oxford University in 1992.

To add to the appeal of the commemorative publication, there are over 50 illustrations, in both colour and black-and-white, by renowned illustrator Charles Vess, who worked with Le Guin over many years to illustrate the Earthsea world as Le Guin imagined it. He says, 'She kept me on my toes.' Some illustrations, for example, as to what the dragons looked like, went through six or seven versions before Le Guin and Vess were both satisfied with the end result.

Though Le Guin did not see the final version of the book, she did see the final illustrations before she died. Le Guin writes in the Introduction, 'With this first fully illustrated complete Earthsea, I can let Charles Vess's art speak for itself.'

Margaret Atwood has said, 'The Earthsea trilogy ... is a memorable exploration of the relationship between life and death ... Ged, its hero, must face his shadow self before it devours him. Only then will he become whole. In the process, he must contend with the wisdom of dragons: ambiguous and not our wisdom, but wisdom nonetheless.'

Le Guin preceded J. K. Rowling's 'Harry Potter' series by decades. In her Oxford lecture, Le Guin ponders issues of race, gender, and colour in fantasy, and reflects how her attitudes to how these are represented in the Earthsea books changed over the years. In the Afterword,

Le Guin explores their conception and the changes within the series, and in a 'Description of Earthsea', their peoples and languages.

Le Guin has said: 'My color scheme was conscious and deliberate from the start. I didn't see why everybody in science fiction had to be a honky named Bob or Joe or Bill. I didn't see why everybody in heroic fantasy had to be white (and why all the leading women had 'violet eyes'). It didn't even make sense. Whites are a minority on Earth now — why wouldn't they still be either a minority, or just swallowed up in the larger colored gene pool, in the future?'

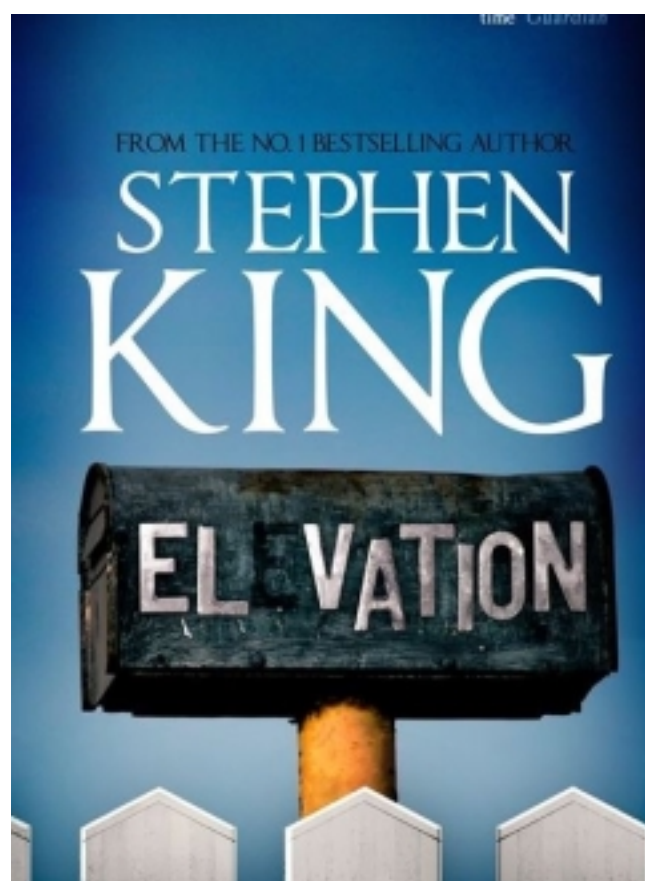
*The Books of Earthsea* is an essential purchase for Le Guin fans, and should be in all major libraries. The stories are as iconic as *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of The Rings*. As David Mitchell writes on the back cover: 'Drink this magic up. Drown in it.'

## ELEVATION

by Stephen King (Hodder & Stoughton; \$29.99)

*Elevation*, a slim novel, takes place in Stephen King's familiar setting of Castle Rock, a small town in Maine, which now has a TV series named after it. King's main character Scott Carey, lonely after a divorce, finds himself losing weight alarmingly. He's not the amazing shrinking man, however, as his body wise looks exactly the same, despite the constant weight loss.

Not wishing to become a national medical curiosity, Scott consults Bob, his retired doctor friend, who can find no logical explanation for what is happening. Meanwhile, Scott is having problems with his neighbours, Deirdre and Missy, especially over their dogs





fouling his lawn.

While Missy is receptive to Scott, her partner Deirdre is decidedly prickly. Missy and Deirdre run Holy Frijole, a Mexican restaurant in town, which is facing significant financial problems as the conservative majority element of the town is boycotting the restaurant run by the married 'lesbeans'.

Scott tries to take on the conservative bullies, but resolution is not reached until an incident involving Scott and Deirdre in the town's annual 12 km Thanksgiving run. This brings an uplifting tale to a conclusion in more ways than one. *Elevation*, which can be read easily in one sitting, sees King effectively fictionalise the need to find common ground between differences, clearly a message intended for Trump's America.

### FOX 8

by George Saunders (Bloomsbury; \$21.99)

American author **George Saunders** won the 2017 Man Booker Prize for his first novel, *Lincoln in the Bardo*. Presumably on the strength of that success, his 2014 ebook short story *Fox 8* has now been published as a handsome small hardback, illustrated with line drawings in red and black by artist Chelsea Cardinal.

Saunders has written, 'I tried to publish it as a story in my 2013 collection *Tenth of December* ... It just didn't want to go there. Maybe it's a little too performative or maybe it's because it has an animal narrator. When it was

published on Kindle, I noticed there was a small but very passionate set of people who were moved by it. I started wanting it to have a life between hardcovers.'

*Fox 8* is narrated by Fox (8), who is not able to spell very well, 'First may I say, sorry for any werds I spel rong. Because I am a fox! So don't rite or spel perfect.' Saunders says, 'The main fun writing Fox, at first, was discovering the inner dynamics of misspelling.'

The narrative comes in the form of a letter to the 'Reeder'. While this is not intended as a children's book, it will also appeal to many children because of its story and its unusual spellings. The narrative follows the story of Fox, whose environment has been destroyed by developers building a shopping mall called FoxView-Commons. As a result, there is little left for the foxes to eat, so Fox decides to steal food from the 'fud cort', which he believes is a 'fare deel'.

His belief in humanity is shattered, however, when his friend Fox 7 is brutally killed by 'Yumans' in the Mall car park. Fox concludes to the Reeder 'if you Yumans wud take one bit of advise from a meer Fox? By now I know that you Yumans like your Storys to end hapy? If you want your Storys to end happy, try being niser: I awate your answer.' Saunders thus ends his dark comic morality tale with a sentiment of hope.

Saunders, of course, has a number of messages to contemporary society. *Fox 8* is an environmental story, as forests are continually destroyed for human habitation or agriculture. It also reflects on contemporary politics, particularly in America, so it's a plea for accepting cultural differences and allowing immigration and coexistence. As Fox 8 says at one stage, 'I wuld like to know what is rong with you peeple.'

## Canadian science fiction

### AN OCEAN OF MINUTES

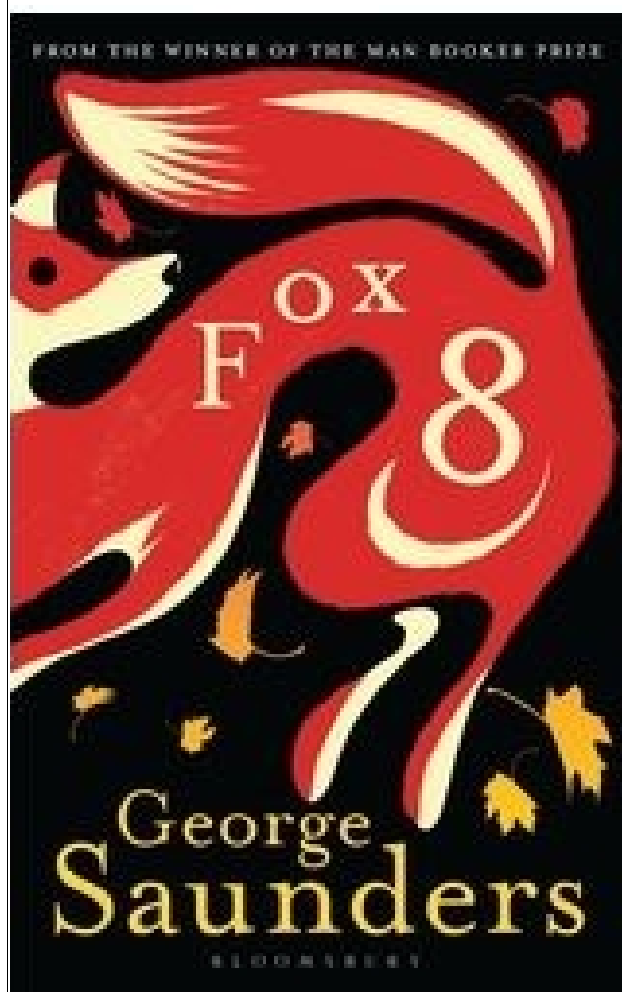
by Thea Lim (Hachette; \$29.99)

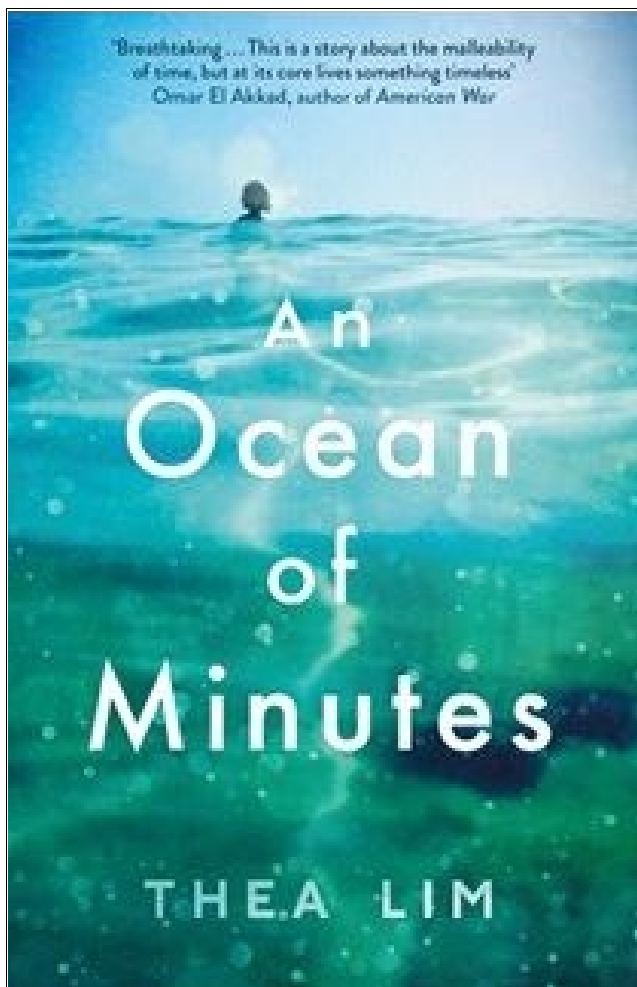
**Thea Lim**, who grew up in Singapore, is Professor of Creative Writing in Toronto. Her debut novel, *An Ocean of Minutes*, shortlisted for the Canadian 2018 Scotiabank Giller Prize, is a dystopian time travel novel.

In early 1980s America, people are dying from a massive pandemic. Twenty-three-year-old Polly Nader takes the risk of time travelling forward to the 1990s to help save her fiancé Frank. The government will fund the treatment for those left behind if a family member takes the time travel option.

If Frank survives the pandemic, they hope to meet in 1993. Polly arrives, however, in a geographically and socially divided America of 1998. Polly arrives in the South, where time travellers are virtually prisoners. Polly is told, 'You're not a citizen anymore. You left before the formation of America, ipso facto you can't be a citizen.'

The narrative switches between flashbacks of Frank and Polly's pre-pandemic life in Buffalo and Polly's difficult life in 1998 Galveston. Polly must find a way to try to find Frank, assuming he has survived the intervening years. Crossing the border to the North requires money and a special visa, no easy task for a bonded citizen. Their eventual reunion, in common with the





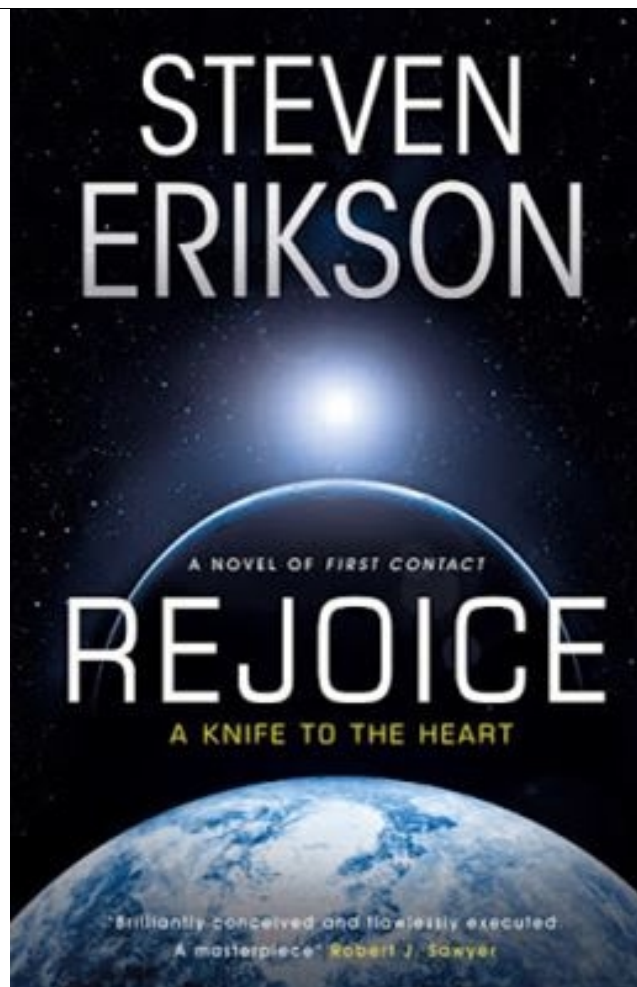
overall tone of the novel, set in an America cut off from the world, will not offer a simple solution.

*An Ocean of Minutes* is a compellingly dark debut novel, reflecting contemporary concerns of societal inequality and refugee displacement.

**REJOICE: A KNIFE TO THE HEART**  
by Steven Erikson (Gollancz; \$32.99)

Canadian author **Steven Erikson** is probably best known for ‘The Malazan Book of the Fallen’, a bestselling ten-book fantasy series. *Rejoice: A Knife to the Heart* is listed on the title page as a ‘novel of first contact’. SF has a long tradition of such novels, of which Arthur C. Clarke’s have provided numerous examples. Perhaps there hasn’t been one that so firmly believes that SF writers can save the world.

In the opening pages, Samantha August, a well-known Canadian SF author, is uplifted from the streets of Victoria, Canada in a pillar of light, to find herself on



an alien AI-controlled spaceship. A triumvirate of alien nations have decided to enforce an ‘Intervention Protocol’ to bring sanity on Earth. The natural environment is thus forcibly protected — for example, fracking is stopped and humanity can no longer indulge in violent activities or warfare.

The AI ultimately persuades the chain-smoking Samantha to become its spokesperson to Earth. Before that, however, there are lengthy discussions between Samantha and the AI on the state of the Earth, especially the lack of climate policy and international cooperation and the nature of capitalism and corporate power.

Samantha addresses the United Nations: will world leaders, especially the caricatured US president, allow the world to be saved from itself? Will they accept the aliens’ promise of world peace, even if it includes the slight caveat of a galactic job to come.

— **Colin Steele**, August 2018–March 2019

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# The 800: Fifty years of friends

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Fifty years ... many thousands of pages ... *SF Commentary* ... *Steam Engine Time* ... *The Metaphysical Review* ... *Treasure* ... and many others. More than 800 friends and acquaintances have contributed to these magazines. If I've left out your name, apologies. Thanks to everybody who has taken the trouble to be a friend.

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Justin Ackroyd	Greg Benford	Anne Brewster	Michael Cameron
Jae Leslie Adams	Goran Bengtson	Maureen Brewster	Steve Cameron
Phillip Adams	Ron Bennett	Claire Brialey	James Campbell
Joseph Adekambi	Richard Bergeron	Martin Bridgstock	Scott Campbell
John Adkins	Bernie Bernhouse	Sheryl Brikhead	Stephen Campbell
Jim Adriano	John D. Berry	Damien Broderick	Marty Cantor
John Alderson	Frank C. Bertrand	Ned Brooks	Douglas Cariou
Brian W. Aldiss	Larry Bigman	Kevin Brophy	Ian Carmichael
James 'Jocko' Allen	Lizbeth Billinger	John Brosnan	Jane Carnall
Geoff Allshorn	Paul Billinger	Brian Earl Brown	Avedon Carol
Cy Anders	Helena Binns	Charles N. Brown	Vivien Carroll
Brenda Anderson	Mervyn R. Binns	Charlotte Brown	Terry Carr
Paul Anderson	Phillip Bird	Lawrie Brown	Ian Carruthers
Bill Andresen Jr	Michael Bishop	Molly Brown	Annette Carter
Neville J. Angove	Jenny Blackford	rich brown	Jim Caughran
Joe Aquilana	Russell Blackford	Simon Brown	Michael Chabon
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(McGowan)	Robert Bloch	Nick Buchanan	Graham Charnock
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Vardis Augstkalns	Michael Bolden	Harry Hennessey	Peggyann Chevaliere
Don Ayres	(Hailstone)	Buerkett	Chris Chittleburgh
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Phyrne Youens Bacon	George Bondre	Joanne Burger	John Clark
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Lee Battersby	Bill Bowers	Andrew M. Butler	Tom Cobb
John Baxter	Boyd Don	Randy Byers	Elaine Cochrane
Greg Bear	A. Philippe Boyer	Jeremy Byrne	Hal Colebatch
Allan Beatty	Richard Brandt		Phil Collass
Adian Bedford	David Bratman	Ed Cagle	Paul Collins
Zoran Bekric	Allan Bray	David Cake	Tom Collins
Harry Bell	Paul Brazier	Denis Callegari	Ed Connor
Anders Bellis	William Breiding	James Cameron	Neil Cooper



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Giampaolo Cossato	Ron Drummond		Vera Heminger
Leigh Couch	Steve Duffy	Chris Garcia	Howard Hendrix
Buck Coulson	Mike Dunn	Geoff Gardiner	Jack Herman
Ian Covell	Martin Dunne	Joan Gaskell	John Hertz
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