

SF Commentary 99

50th Anniversary Edition

Part 2

July 2019 80 pages



Cover: Randy Byers: 'Morning Glory'. Photograph.

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The glittering prizes: Continuum 15, June 2019

Continuum 15 took place in June, long after most of the material was written for this issue of *SF Commentary*, which should have appeared on 1 January 2019. But the Continuum Committee got wind of the existence of a Fiftieth Anniversary Edition of *SF Commentary*. So they awarded me the **Eternity Award** for (I assume) a lifetime's achievement. It was a complete surprise, especially as the only other winner is **Mervyn R. Binns**, whose achievements in fandom make mine seem puny.

Many other prizes were given at either the Opening Ceremony (on the Friday night of the convention) or the Awards Ceremony (on the Saturday). Details can be accessed at either the **Continuum** website or the **Australian Science Fiction Foundation** site. I was particularly pleased to see that **Alan Stewart** won the **A. Bertram Chandler Award** for lifetime achievement, and **Kaaron Warren** won the **Peter McNamara Award**. The **Ian Gunn Award** for unrecognised efforts in fandom went to **Lucy Sussex** and **Julian Warner**, for keeping the Nova Mob going for 21 years. (The history of the Nova Mob appears later in this issue of *SFC*.)

Photo below taken by **Cat Sparks** (who also won a couple of awards at Continuum): (l. to r.): **Bruce Gillespie**, wielding the giant hourglass that is the Eternity Award; **Helena Binns**; and **Merv Binns**, the only other winner of this award.



50th Anniversary Edition, Part 2

I must be talking to my friends

Whence disappeared 2018 (and the first half of 2019)? It has seemed like a month to me. There have been a few highlights in 2018, especially the 50th Anniversary gathering for ANZAPA, the 48th Anniversary meeting of the Nova Mob, and Jean Weber's Big Birthday Bash in February 2018. I had more freelance indexing jobs than expected, but far fewer fanzines produced than I had planned. Only two issues of *SF Commentary* in 2018, whereas I needed to produce five issues to empty the folder of unpublished manuscripts sitting on disk. Still, I did catch up on ANZAPA Mailing Comments in December. That had seemed an impossible task in October.

So my life has been filled by work ... and fanzine production ... and reading books, listening to music, and watching films and TV series ...

and the 50th Anniversary Issue of *SF Commentary*. First

it was to be one magazine. Then the page length stretched to 160-plus, so it had to be divided into two. Then I found I had promised to include some articles that still didn't fit. So the 50th Anniversary Issue now stretches to three issues, of which this is the second. All three should have appeared on 1 January, but they haven't. I had little paying work in the first half of the year, but now have been offered some indexing projects. Someday this fanzine will be finished.

Almost all the rest of this column was ready by December 2018, so you will find very few letters written about *SFC* 98. Thanks very much for the recent letters that have poured in. Some people, such as Leanne Frahm, Gerald Smith, Jeff Hamill, and Gerald Murnane, have written actual letters — the ones you put in an envelope, attach a stamp, then flip into the pillar box.

Tributes

Gillian Polack pays tribute to Vonda McIntyre (1948–2019)

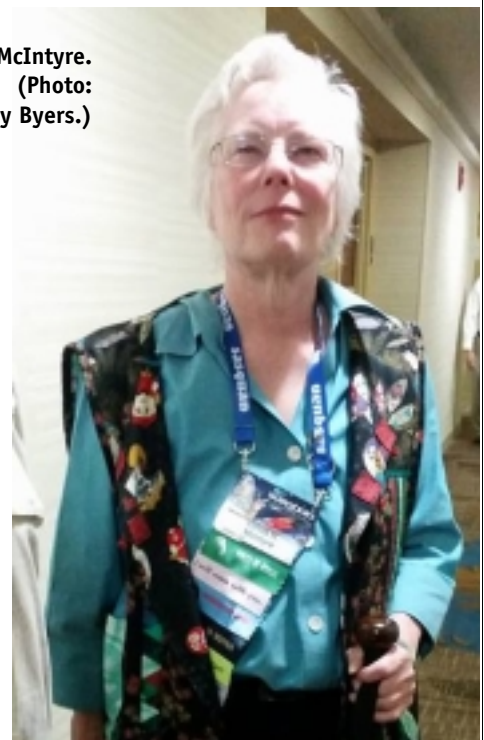
Every day a part of me is still looking for emails from Vonda McIntyre. I knew her through emails and through meetings online. We never met.

Vonda is one of a half-dozen writers (who include Sherwood Smith, Deborah J. Ross, and Judith Tarr) who reached into my life when it was bleak and ... made it make sense. I will talk about the others at other times: it's Vonda who has left a void, so I'll tell you how she, personally, helped restore balance.

Vonda read my writing. She didn't offer platitudes. She read my writing. She proofread it. She copy-edited it. She typeset it. Vonda knew that learning mattered to me, so she explained how to set up a manuscript to make it easier for typesetting for an ebook. I only had a year of this apprenticeship, but in that year I learned more than eight publishers had taught me. It's not that publishers don't want writers to learn: Vonda understood that I cared and took the time to teach me. She also let me know that I can write, despite my ten thousand self-doubts. The self-doubts return and return (for so many reasons), but Vonda's confidence will echo behind them and remind me that my doubts are not the reality.

Before then — long before I met Vonda in Book View

Vonda McIntyre.
(Photo:
Randy Byers.)



Café — was Vonda's writing. I grew up reading it. I won't stop reading it. I'll talk about that some other time in some other place. It doesn't surprise me a jot that Vonda saw the values I always put into my fiction, given that when I was a child I loved the politics she put in hers. I want to talk about these things. I want those emails and that calm voice and I want her generosity in my life again. Some people leave holes when they go. Vonda has left a void.

[Bruce writes: I met Vonda McIntyre only once, when

she visited Melbourne for the Monash Writers' Workshop at the beginning of 1977. She seemed a quiet, self-contained person. I didn't get to speak to her much, but her guidance at the Writers' Workshop was much valued. I didn't meet her in Seattle in 2005, and I'm pretty sure she did not attend any of the Melbourne world conventions. I value her fiction, and regret not having written much about her novels and short stories. Throughout the SF community, her work has always been greeted with awe. I'm glad that Gillian has been able to write such a precise and heartfelt tribute to her.]

Gene Wolfe (1931–2019) leaves us

'85 AUSSIECON 2 GUEST OF HONOUR



(Photo by Herve Rousset)

GENE WOLFE

I met **Gene and Rosemary Wolfe** twice. In late September or early October 1973, Jackie Franke (as she then was) drove me to their place in Barrington, about 80 miles north of Chicago. They were affable hosts, and we had a great time.

Twelve years later, in 1985, Gene Wolfe was Pro Guest of Honour at Aussiecon 2, the second world convention held in Melbourne. He gave a magnificent speech, which I must have in my collection somewhere (but where or where?). Gene and Rosemary were setting having a break, and I bowled up to them — and either they didn't recognise me or didn't want to chat. It was baffling. Gene hardly changed in appearance during the period from when he became a superstar of international science fiction (from the publication of *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* in 1972) to two years before his death. Between 1973 and 1985 I put on a lot of weight and my hairline was already starting to decline. Perhaps they simply didn't recognise

me. On the other hand, they had had some sort of dispute with the Convention Committee during Aussiecon 2, so maybe they thought I was a committee member.

I favour the former explanation, because Gene and I exchanged letters in the period after Aussiecon 2. From everything I've read, he became famous as a genial and amusing convention speaker and panelist, as well as a staunch defender of the importance of science fiction and fantasy.

So another of the very greatest of the great generation of SF writers (which includes Le Guin, Russ, Disch, Aldiss, Wilhelm, and Silverberg) has left us. My own favourite Wolfe novels are *Peace* and *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*; I've also greatly enjoyed many of his short stories and novellas, especially because they need to be read at least twice.

Please find below a few extracted quotations from some of the people who have written about Gene Wolfe's life and work since he died. Their contributions are followed by a masterpiece review by **Yvonne Rousseau**. Thirty-four years ago, her essay made a major contribution to thinking about Gene Wolfe's novel *Peace*.

Locus tribute, 15 April 2019

Grand Master Gene Wolfe, 87, died April 14, 2019 after a long struggle with heart disease. Wolfe was famed for his ambitious, challenging, and enthralling novels and stories, most famously the *Book of the New Sun* series.

Gene Rodman Wolfe was born May 7, 1931 in Brooklyn NY, and grew up in Texas, where he attended Texas A&M and the University of Houston, graduating from the latter in 1956 with a BS in mechanical engineering. (His most famous engineering feat is helping to create the machine that makes Pringles potato chips.) Wolfe served in the US Army in Korea from 1952–54 and received the Combat Infantry Badge, was a project engineer for Procter and Gamble from 1956–72, and a senior editor of *Plant Engineering* from 1972–84, when he left to become a full-time writer. He lived in Barrington IL with his family until relocating to Peoria IL in 2013.

**New York Times tribute,
Neil Genzlinger, 19 April 2019**

Gene Wolfe, a prolific science fiction and fantasy writer whose best works, full of inventive language, mysteries and subtly conveyed themes, are considered to be among the genre's finest, died on Sunday in Peoria, IL. He was 87.

His daughter Therese Goulding said the cause was heart disease.

Mr Wolfe broke through in 1972 with 'The Fifth Head of Cerberus', a novella (which he soon expanded to three novellas) whose narrator, an inhabitant of the twin planetary system of St Croix and St Anne, tells the story of how he came to kill his father.

His most acclaimed work was the four-novel series *The Book of the New Sun*, published from 1980 to 1983.

'The publication of his brilliant *Fifth Head of Cerberus* in 1972 earned him a place among the small band of accomplished stylists in science fiction, along with Samuel R. Delany, Thomas M. Disch, Joanna Russ and one or two others,' Gerald Jonas wrote in *The New York Times* when the final book of the series, *The Citadel of the*

Autarch, appeared. 'The completed *Book of the New Sun* establishes his pre-eminence, pure and simple.'

**Neil Gaiman's tribute
Tines Literary Supplement, 21 June 2019**

Gene Wolfe is not an unsung writer, but he is not yet as well nor as widely sung as he should be. There are awards to celebrate writers this good that Gene has not received: the big ones from the academies and the ones with National in the title. And he is as good as anyone who has received these awards in the past. Wolfe is, however, lauded and appreciated and has been given a cornucopia of awards by the world of Speculative Fiction. We know how good he is and how lucky we are to have had him. *The Book of the New Sun* is both the most remarkable SF work of the past five decades, and the nearest thing SF has come to its own *À la recherche du temps perdu*. It's a hymn to memory, a Borgesian labyrinth crafted into a whole world, a sequence of mirrors and reflections that allow us to travel the universe of a dying Earth that may live again.

Yvonne Rousseau's *Peace* review

**PEACE by Gene Wolfe
reviewed by Yvonne Rousseau
(Chatto & Windus, London, 1985;
hc \$26.95, pb \$8.95)
(Thyme 49, January 1986)**

Gene Wolfe's novel is called *Peace* — a word that is never used in the book itself. Slowly, if at all, the reader becomes aware that this 'peace' is the place referred to on tombstones: 'Rest In Peace'.

The narrator is dead. On his grave is planted an American native elm tree. Late in the book, he remembers a neighbour getting his permission to plant such a tree when he is dead; and the novel opens with the words: 'The elm tree planted by Eleanor Bold, the judge's daughter, fell last night'. Its fall brings an impression that 'the whole house was melting ... going soft and running down into the lawn.'

The narrator thinks of the house as a building in which, having suffered from a stroke, he moves in questingly from room to room. However, elsewhere in his experience, a book of necromancy describes a moving spark behind a dead man's empty eye-sockets: the spark is 'the soul of the dead man, seeking now in all the chambers under the vault of the skull its old resting places'. The narrator also describes how crumbling walls can be bound together by the roots of living things. With the elm tree fallen, the walls of the skull begin to break apart.

There are hints about the mechanism of consciousness after death. One character speculates that 'all mankind, living and dead, has a common unconscious'. He also stresses that all entities are composed of 'the same

electrical particles'. The narrator holds that 'whatever exists can be transformed but not destroyed' and that 'existence is not limited to bits of metal and rays of light': 'memories exist'. He sees no reason for his memories to be 'less actual, less real, than a physical entity now demolished and irrecoverable'.

The narrator doesn't wish to know that he is dead. But in the manner of a dream, giving cryptic messages, his awareness returns again and again to stories of unquiet graves and other Gothic horrors, such as men being turned into stone. He tells his story as if he were alive, in a house designed with 'museum' rooms — duplicating places from his past that he wants to keep remembering. He even reports going outside with his axe. But disbelief is unavoidable at some point. Readers are unlikely to believe his account of using a reconstruction of a doctor's surgery to intrude into the visit to a doctor that he made when he was four years old. In this episode, he consults the doctor about the stroke he has had when he is about sixty and the doctor has long been dead. The doctor in turn questions the four-year-old about the future.

The reader's problem is to decide where disbelief should begin — how far it should extend. Is the narrator's unconscious mind correct about him being dead? A similar problem is found in Wolfe's earlier work, *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*, which is about the shapeshifting aboriginals of another planet. A shapeshifter who takes on human shape will mimic a human personality so thoroughly that he misremembers — deceiving himself about his true origins. *Peace* contains a good deal about the deceptiveness of memory, and of evidence from the past: the evidence of origins. The forgery of ancient

documents is elaborately defended. Inaccurate memories are praised, because they approach nearer to a 'fundamentally artistic' ideal. And this is more than frivolity or cynicism. In Wolfe's later work, *The Book of the New Sun*, the protagonist claims that 'of all good things in the world, the only ones humanity can claim for itself are stories and music'. A story, then, will reveal more of the essential truth about human beings than would a mere accurate record of events.

Exemplary myths about the past are one form of evidence about the human psyche. *Peace* is about a small American midwestern town, where the country's aboriginal myths are simply not known. Instead, the book's mythic stories originate mostly from an Irishwoman, Kate Boyne, who arrived in Boston as a child, at the time of the potato blight in Ireland. In one story, she tells of Saint Brandon reaching the Earthly Paradise, when his boat fetches up in Boston harbour. Oddly, the potato blight that made Kate's family emigrate is repeated in the American midwest.

Mixed farming on small properties has been replaced by the unhealthy monocropping of potatoes, to supply the drink company that the narrator controls. The American small farmer's way of life has become extinct, like the earlier, Amerindian way of life.

In the narrator's imagination, ghosts from the small-farming community haunt Indianapolis thousands of years in the future, when the city is reduced to a mound. He believes that 'America is the land of magic, and ... we, we now-past Americans, were once the magical people of it, waiting now to stand to some unguessable generation of the future as the nameless pre-Mycenaean tribes did to the Greeks'.

These unguessable future generations are described in Wolfe's later science fiction, *The Book of the New Sun*. Anthropologists there have obviously had the difficulties

that *Peace* keeps imagining for them. One ancient fable that survives until the time of the New Sun is a mixture of the mowgli story from Kipling's *Jungle Books* and of the Romulus and Remus legend. But it has been sanitised, in the way that present-day anthropologists believe that primitive myths always are sanitised by later generations.

In *Peace*, the reader-anthropologist is confronted with a more immediate question of sanitisation. The narrator regards himself as representative of his time: 'an ordinary man. The most ordinary.' But he is unmistakably responsible for one death, and readers may suspect him of another three. Did he accidentally run over and kill his Aunt Olivia? Did he panic, and leave another worker to die in the freezer room? Did he shoot a librarian who planned to shoot him? His attitude — if so — is expressed in his remark to a forger: 'All of us do real harm, and most of us don't have your class.' He considers his actions ordinary. But the narrator is called Weer, and his author is Wolfe. Beneath the seemingly limpid surface of Wolfe's books — behind the perfect evocations of touch; of place and of weather — there are elements (like Weer and Wolfe) that keep linking themselves disconcertingly. To read Wolfe is like tuning your awareness to your unconscious patterns of thought. As a result, *Peace* will seep into your dreams; and what it does there won't be easy to isolate.

The above review was broadcast on the ABC's *Books and Writing* program on 21 August 1985. Before writing it, I told Damien Broderick of my 'discovery' that *Peace*'s narrator was dead, and a werewolf — and added that the elm's death was taking place about two centuries after Weer's death.

— Yvonne Rousseau, 1986

Ron Drummond: A dream narrative about Randy Byers

Last night I dreamt of Randy Byers. There was a square room, perhaps ten or twelve feet wide / tall / long, only it wasn't a room but a kind of elevated alcove, because there was no fourth wall. A broad staircase rose up from the much larger, higher-ceilinged living room below to the square room's open end. The alcove's three walls were filled with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves.

In the living room, Randy and I knew these were our last moments together. I dearly wish I could remember what he said to me. Our eyes were wells. At the last, he said he wanted to show me something, and led me up the broad stairs to the book-filled alcove. From the left-hand wall of books, near the back, from a middle shelf he took a tall, slender trade paperback, opened it to a particular page-spread in the middle, and handed

the open book to me. I remember the feel and weight of the paper, its heft and comfortably rough texture. Though I didn't recognise the volume it was in (a mixed-author anthology), the text that Randy had turned to was my own, a short essay or story or myth-telling. In the dream I instantly recognised precisely which piece of my writing it was; that it was that piece and not another was significant. [I can't help but wonder now if it was 'an open doorway on the sand'.] One passage, or perhaps the entire piece, had been translated into Spanish.

The feeling-tone of everything Randy said and did was a gentle cognate of affection, gratitude, and generosity. A giving-forth, an opening wide for a close embrace.

— Ron Drummond, 19 June 2018



Bruce Gillespie and Elaine Cochrane: Farewell to Harry (2002–2019)

On the morning of 3 May 2019, our black-and-white cat Harry, 17 years old, seemed a bit quieter than usual. He hadn't eaten much for two days. However, we had no warning that suddenly his whole body would go into spasm and he would have great trouble breathing. It seemed that he had suffered a heart attack. Elaine took him up the vet. He was barely alive when she reached there, with a slight pulse, but he was euthanased soon after.

Our grief is great. He was one of the few of our cats who has been very much my cat, although he had been very attached to Elaine as well. He leaves us with only one cat, Sampson, but the two of them had only come to put up with each other and share living space during the last few months. It seems very strange to have only one cat. Our household has had five cats for much of the 41 years we've been together.

Harry was the most adaptable cat we've known. To tell his story, though, I need to include material that Elaine and I wrote for *SF Commentary* 92, when our cat Flicker died three years ago:

In 2003, we were still living in Collingwood, but preparing to move to Greensborough in October. Elaine had spent a month or so taking care of five kittens found in the derelict old house around the corner, and finding homes for them. At the same time we gradually became aware a large, very timid black cat could be seen lurking in our garden. He would leap over the fence, then run, limping, along the back of our side garden. He was so timid that we could not approach him, but Elaine began to leave a lump of meat for him every night. He would hurtle over the fence, grab the meat, and jump back over the fence. We called him Flicker, because all we ever saw

of him was a flicker in the grass. He was very thin.

One night several weeks later I took out the piece of meat instead of Elaine. A black cat came and rubbed around my legs. I was amazed. When this happened the next night, Elaine said, 'That's not Flicker. This cat's got white feet.' Thus on 21 November 2003 we found we were feeding two cats, not one. We called the second cat Harry. Although he was not timid like Flicker, we only saw him at night, briefly. Strangely, our three resident cats, Sophie, Polly, and Violet, were not upset by these feline comings and goings.

Over the next months Elaine gradually coaxed Flicker closer with food, and in early February 2004 she was able to pick him up and take him to the vet for a check-up, neutering, microchipping, and formal adoption. When she released him from the box again he promptly shot over the fence, but he came back immediately when she called and did not leave the garden again. He realised that he really did have a home, but he was still very, very timid.

We also started to see a lot more of Harry. He was a puzzle, because although hungry he wasn't starved like Flicker. Enquiries among the neighbours brought no claims of ownership. A few days after Flicker's trip to the vet, Harry turned up during the day and was similarly boxed, snipped, and chipped. A few days later he turned up with a note attached to his new collar with the address of his owners, a family who lived on the other side of super-busy Wellington Street and several streets down. Harry had only been pretending to be a stray.

When Elaine went to see Harry's owners, she found that their name for him was Socks. He was never allowed inside the house. The bloke said: 'We thought old Socksie was putting on a bit of weight, but it was a bit of

a surprise when he turned up one morning wearing a collar and minus his nuts.'

They'd had him since a kitten, and said that his mother was a tiny torbie named Peaches and his father was a 'big black Burmese' (that is, Flicker). After some discussion it was agreed that Elaine could become his new owner.

At this stage neither Flicker nor Harry would come inside our house, but with further coaxing eventually both would come into the kitchen to eat, then scuttle outside again. Flicker slept in a protected spot under bushes in the garden; Harry slept who-knows-where. The weather turned wet and miserable, so one night Elaine picked Flicker up, brought him inside, and pointed him to a blanket she'd placed on the kitchen floor. Flicker looked very doubtful, as if he didn't really believe this was permitted, but he crept onto the blanket and from then on he began to sleep in the kitchen. And one night, when Elaine was sitting on the couch, Flicker leapt onto her lap. He had finally found a home.

Flicker must have had a very favourable beginning. As soon as he felt safe at our place, he became very civilised. He decided that since he could trust us, he could trust anyone who came into our house; every visitor's lap was his by right. He also became the top cat of the household. Harry, meanwhile, was not willing to stay in the house for more than a few minutes at a time. He had been taught that he was not allowed inside houses.

One night in May 2004 Harry disappeared. His previous owners had not seen him either, so when he had not returned for a week we assumed he had been hit by a car. (The cat owned by our next-door neighbours had been killed on busy Wellington Street not long before.) Flicker mourned. He sat in the back yard, and waited for his Harry to come home.

About six weeks after Harry disappeared, we received a phone call. The people from the microchip registry rang to say that 'your black and white cat Harry is in Werribee'. Werribee is a suburb 37 km from Collingwood, almost off the southern fringe of the city as you head down to Geelong. Harry certainly couldn't have walked there, so our guess is that he fell asleep in the back of a truck or van on Wellington Street, had woken up in Werribee, and had somehow survived.

Since we have no car, Elaine rang her sister Margaret, who happened to have a free day. Margaret took the cat basket down to Werribee and retrieved Harry. The woman who had phoned the microchip people said that she did not realise that Harry was a stray until he tried to steal her cat's food; she said, 'He's the only cat who has ever made friends with my cat.' Harry was a very cheerful cat, even when desperate.

When Margaret brought Harry home, he stepped out of the cat basket. Three cats looked up, as if to say, 'Oh. So you're back, are you?' Flicker was totally delighted. He rushed up the Harry, and started licking him. Harry was very hungry and very tired. He slept for most of two days, ate lots, and purred while Flicker kept licking him.

If the phone call from the microchip agency had been made a few weeks later, we would have already left Collingwood for Greensborough. In October, the five cats were put in cages and taken up to the vet's (the

ever-helpful John and Kerrie Sandford) to stay overnight. We finished packing at 3 a.m. Elaine let me sleep for two hours, while she kept packing. I got up at 5 a.m. as the removalist's van arrived. By mid afternoon we had moved to Greensborough. The next day John Sandford delivered the cats to their new home.

Harry was panic-stricken, and the others weren't too happy. Harry thought he had been taken to Werribee again. It seemed as if he would howl all night, so Elaine got up and slept on the couch, surrounded by all the cats except Violet. (Violet had her own story; she had to stay in the front part of the house to avoid being slaughtered by Polly, who was half her size.)

During the following days, Harry became used to the fact that this was his new home. The cats went out into the cat enclosure and made it part of their home. Harry's expedition had taught him that it was OK to be inside a house after all, but he never gave up his quest to find a way out of our house and go home to Collingwood ... or at least to explore Greensborough.

Harry acquired an enemy soon after we moved in. This was another black-and-white cat, who looked almost exactly like Harry. Harry, like the other cats, could not escape the Catmax enclosure that surrounds a section of our garden. The enemy cat, whose name was Victor, could come and go across the back fence. This would enrage Harry and Flicker so much they would scream and have fits of catty rage. On Australia Day (26 January) 2005, Victor appeared in the garden. Elaine went through the garage to shoo him away, but for a moment left the back door of the garage open. Harry shot through the door, and chased Victor over the fence. Would we ever see Harry again?





Flicker's gang: Flicker, Harry, and Archie, October 2008.
(Photo: Elaine Cochrane.)

The next we saw Harry, he had shot straight up the bare trunk of a gum tree in the garden next door. He sat there, unable to move, while next door's silent Rottweiler dog circled the tree. We had no idea what to do. We could hardly call the fire brigade, because all of Melbourne's fire services were battling bushfires around the fringes of Melbourne. We looked up the phone book. We found advertised there one only private animal catcher for the whole metropolitan area. He lived at Cranbourne, on the extreme south-eastern edge of Melbourne. Nevertheless, Nigel the Animal Rescuer was willing to travel out to Greensborough on a public holiday — for a large fee. We gathered together all our cash, and found we had enough to pay for his trip.

Nigel arrived equipped with tree-climbing equipment. Elaine had persuaded the people out the back to keep their Rottweiler in the house until Harry was rescued. Nigel climbed the tree. Harry, who had been refusing to climb down the tree, took off from his branch into a tree in another neighbour's yard, and kept running. All our neighbours were away (because it was a public holiday weekend), so Nigel leapt fences from one back yard to another to try to find Harry. And he failed.

Yes, we did pay him, and he gave us good advice. He suggested going back into the house and leaving the garage open, waiting for Harry to turn up. And that's what we did. Elaine stayed awake into the early hours of the morning. She heard wails of cats fighting, or squaring off at each other. One of them sounded like Harry. She went out into the garage door, called, and there was Harry. He didn't escape again, but he always had big plans.

Flicker became truly head of the house, and guardian of us all. Only five months after we moved to Greensborough, I disappeared for four weeks. I travelled to America, thanks to the Bring Bruce Bayside Fund. Elaine said that Flicker had missed me very much, and had spent the four weeks gazing mournfully out the front window.

From then on, Flicker was Harry's great leader. He could snuggle up to Flicker, but only when allowed. He could sit in his favourite spot around the house or

enclosure — but only if Flicker had not already grabbed it. When our fluffy black cat Archie arrived, he and the other two black cats became a merry band — but only as long as Flicker did not become irritated with Harry and Archie.

We had always thought that Harry would be distraught when Flicker, his daddy, died. We did show his body to Harry, and Harry did try to look for Flicker for a week or so. After all, Archie had lived only six years, then suddenly he had gone off to the vet's and hadn't returned. (Archie had died of congenital kidney disease.) Harry showed his adaptability yet again. His catty ego expanded to fill the newly created space.

He was now top cat. He didn't have to put up with Sampson, who was in the other half of the house. While Flicker had been alive, he felt that he was not allowed to sit on laps for long. With Flicker gone, he could hop on my lap or Elaine's whenever he wanted to. He could sleep where he wanted. Like Sampson, he did develop pancreatitis, and was placed on a very strict diet. But his life seemed very good during his last few years — for Elaine and me, as well as for him. Until he left us suddenly.

We can't do much about finding a successor to Harry until Sampson leaves us. Sampson, who is very much Elaine's cat rather than mine, would not put up with an intruder cat. He's on lots of pills for his pancreatitis, and his back legs are a bit wobbly, but he will probably live on for several years. After that? We don't feel confident in seeking a set of kittens, as Leigh and Valma, and Sarah and Jamie, have done. Kittens would outlive both of us. We will look for middle-aged rescue cats, preferably left behind after older people might have had to go into care. I will never be able to forget the horror of finding my favourite cat, Harry, suddenly dying in front of me. Harry enjoyed every minute of every day. His sudden ending reminds us to do the same.

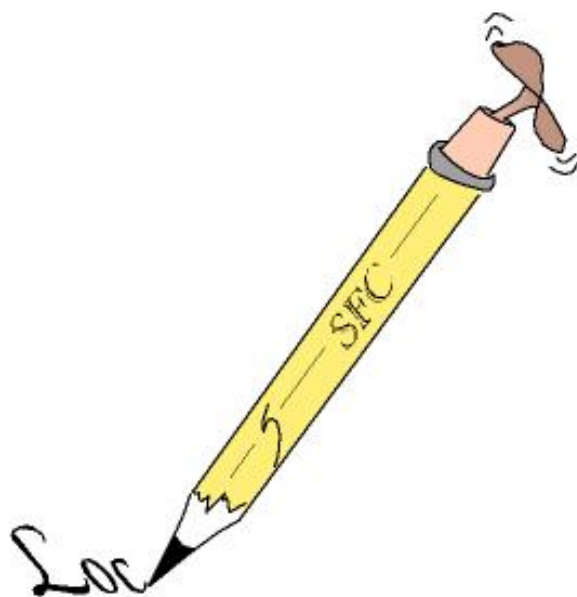
— **Bruce Gillespie and Elaine Cochrane,**
January 2016/May 2019

Letters about *SF Commentary* 96

ROBERT DAY

**Flat 2, Heatherlea, Station Road, Kirby
Muxloe, Leicestershire LE9 2EN, England**

SFC96: Since you wrote about the loss of Ursula Le Guin, Kate Wilhelm, and Peter Nicholls, we have had more losses. For me, the biggest surprise about Harlan Ellison was that he was 84. 84! I only ever thought of him as an



Angry Young Man; then as an Angry Slightly Older Man. His reputation probably preceded him; I saw him at a convention in Glasgow in the mid 1990s; for his GoH speech, the convention chair, Ian Sorensen, who is a multi-talented chap with thespian leanings, proposed to play Harlan into the con hall on the piano with Carly Simon's *You're So Vain*; but in the end he chickened out and only played the theme from *Rocky* ...

In the last week, we also lost Mike Scott Rohan. I don't know how well he was known down your way; he had a brief spell of success with some SF in the early 1990s and then switched mainly to fantasy, with occasional breaks for works on Anglo-Viking history.

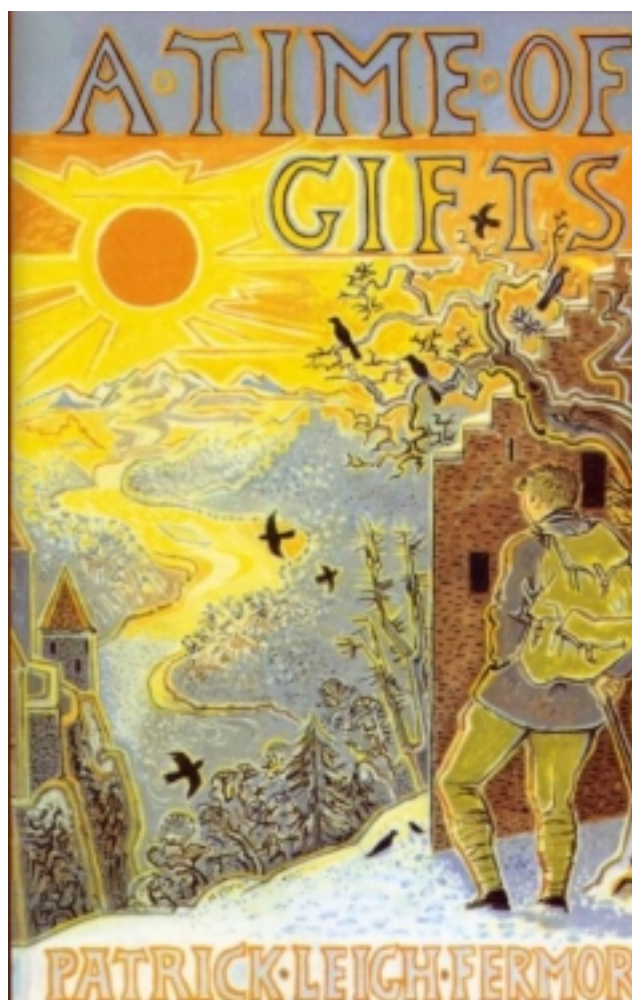
I suppose we are reaching the stage where our heroes pass away from us; it was ever thus. I for one get a bit tired of these intimations of mortality; still, one of the nice things about working with younger colleagues is that you get invitations to nice events, such as weddings and christenings, instead of always going to funerals. I have one such christening party next week, and it'll make a nice change.

My recent reading has alternated SF — some Charlie Stross short stories, Vernor Vinge's *Rainbows End*, and the Jeff Vandermeer *Southern Reach* novels (just about to start on the final one, *Acceptance*) — with a series of books by a British novelist of the post-war years, Patrick Leigh Fermor. Perhaps best known for his wartime exploits — he operated behind the lines in Crete and his most daring exploit was to kidnap the German commander of the island and spirit him away via speedboat to Cairo — before the War he dropped out of a middling good public school and got it into his head at the age of 18 to walk across Europe, from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople (as he insisted on calling it). His aim was to be the itinerant scholar, sleeping in barns or under the stars, conversing with and learning from those he came across on his way. This he did; but he also (through connections) fell in with the fading stars of middle

European nobility. The further east he went, the more poignant some of his encounters — with fading nobles, Roma, Jews, and ordinary people at all levels — became. Although he kept notes, these became lost over time, and it was not until he was well into his sixties that he decided to set these experiences down. He completed his first two books — *A Time of Gifts* and *Between the Woods and the Water*, which got him as far as the Iron Gates on the Danube at the Romanian border — but his last book was unfinished at the time of his death at the age of 96. It was completed by his biographer and his editor, and published under the title *The Broken Road*. It is this book I'm on now.

These books speak very directly to me, because when I first went to Europe some 25 years ago I had similar experiences, discovering places and people I'd never come across before, and I found the whole thing life-changing. I was older than Leigh Fermor had been when he made his travels, but I shared and understood his innocent wonder at everything he was seeing. 'Zu mir ist alles in Österreich neu,' I said to one lady I shared a conversation with on a train to the south of the country: 'To me, everything in Austria is new.' I get the sad feeling that my travelling days may be over, through restricted income and circumstance, but Leigh Fermor's books reawakened in me something of how it felt to see these places for the first time.

I commented in my last loc that the accepted wisdom on twentieth-century European history has a set narrative that hides a greater level of complexity; Leigh Fermor's



travels, especially in 1930s Transylvania, which had changed hands between Hungary and Romania after World War I, bear that out even further. In *The Broken Road*, he is travelling in Bulgaria, before fetching up in Constantinople and then moving on to Greece, for which he became a great enthusiast. Reading this book puts into perspective things that a former colleague who came from Bulgaria used to talk about or share online.

I finished the model of the Tupolev 'Bear'; an account can be found at: <https://inshallowerwaters.wordpress.com/2018/06/16/tupolev-tu-95ms/>

The guys in my model club commented that I needed a fuel bowser to go with it — Bears are rarely seen on dispersal without at least one bowser in attendance, especially as the Russians tend to use these as towing tractors as well. So I dived into my stash and came out with something that looked as though it would fit the bill. Meanwhile, back at Christmas my other half had said, 'You can build all these complicated kits really well — let's see how you'd do with a starter kit' and produced a little Airfix Jet Provost trainer. I've now completed this and it's a bit of a gem. A blog post on that will follow Real Soon Now.

(19 August 2018)

The bestowing of the A. Bertram Chandler Award on Edwina Harvey illustrates one of the key differences between Australian fandom and other fandoms in other lands; your fandom is far more inclusive of what we tend to think of as 'fringe' fandoms, something a correspondent brought home to me many years ago. He said that the comparative scarcity of any sort of fannish activity made fans in Australia far more accepting of media fandom and the like than old world Fandom. Us old-time print fans have had, to a greater or lesser extent, a bit of a cultural cringe with respect to media fans, costuming fans, gaming fans, and so on; and so many of us have felt left behind as media, costuming, and gaming (to name but three) have seized the popular imagination. Of course, this is also reflective of changes to the nature of popular literature; printed SF is now quite difficult to find on what is left of the UK's High Streets. With the exception of Waterstones, the surviving High Street bookshop chain, whose shops have fairly good SF/fantasy sections (through the efforts of some of their dedicated booksellers locally and despite the dislike of SF by the company's CEO), science fiction and fantasy is quite difficult to find. W. H. Smith's, the railway station newsagents/books/stationary chain, has SF sections in many of its High Street stores, but they are variable and tend to be stuffed out with Stephen King, George R. R. Martin, J. K. Rowling, and Tolkien. Although our super-markets carry a selection of best-sellers, SF rarely makes it into those lists (and not much since the passing of Iain Banks), unless it is as a tie-in to a successful film or other media franchise. And not necessarily even then; *Star Trek* merchandising has almost completely vanished.

The loss of mass sales of SF books has even led to the remainder stores not offering much in the way of SF/F. Possibly a third of my hardback collection came from remainder stores in the 1970s, '80s and '90s — I even have a pristine first UK edition of Henry Kuttner's *Fury*, which had sat in the publisher's warehouse for some-

thing like 20 years and which cost me something like £1 or possibly less when all of Dennis Dobson's stock suddenly got dumped into the remainder circuit in the early 1980s. Nowadays, with print runs being so closely tied to very precise, computer-analysis-assisted sales forecasts, there probably aren't the overrun copies to be disposed of through the remainder trade any more.

I was intrigued with Colin Steele's reviews of various metafiction and similar writings. In particular, his review of Manguel's *Packing My Library* made me boggle. It was bad enough moving my 6500-plus collection out of my last place, and despite my best intentions over the imaginative use of my storage unit, I'd say that most of those books are with me in my flat, waiting in neat(ish) piles for my financial situation to recover enough for me to make the trip some 30 miles to the nearest Ikea to stock up on Billy bookcases. Fortunately, my current place is a flat converted from a Victorian villa, so the rooms are big enough to take some free-standing bookcases.

Vickers' *The Librarian* sounds as though it might resonate with me; I worked as a Saturday assistant in our local library from the age of 13, fell in love with (a) the sum of nearly all human knowledge on the shelves of an unremarkable north Midlands mill town, and (b) one of the other library assistants, who was well outside my league (I dated her younger sister for a few years).

Colin Steele's review of *Book Towns* reminded me to look up Wigtown as a possible holiday destination, despite the unshakable place of Hay-on-Wye in our affections for both the festival (with memories such as my other half shoulder-charging a retired Archbishop of Canterbury in the rush to get from one event to another, or Michio Kaku asking a tent full of middle-class English readers 'Who here reads science fiction?') About a third of the hands went up. His reply was 'That's great! The rest of you — *Get with the programme!!!*'. Wigtown's website still lists the bookshop *At the Sign of the Dragon*, run by Richard van der Voort, who with his late wife Marion were regulars at UK conventions for many years.

Many of your favourite things from your lists are on my TBR pile. I agree that *Senna* was not the blow-away transcendent film that the hype suggested. I recently acquired a copy and found the reflections of Brazilian society quite sobering in the light of recent political events there. I also recently came to *The Bridge*, but because I came late to it and the oddities of the BBC's on-demand player, I saw series 1, 2, and 4. Meanwhile, my classical CD collection keeps growing because of the availability of charity shops — there are four I regularly haunt — and although pickings are quite slim at times, equally one sometimes hits paydirt. Otherwise, you are reduced to scanning the shelves and skimming a lot of stuff that was popular with my parents' generation — Roger Whittaker, The Seekers, The Bachelors, Cradle of Filth, Val Doonican — wait, Cradle of Filth??? You really never can be certain what will turn up; for instance, I did acquire a two-CD set by the Persian International Philharmonic, an orchestra formed of pre-Revolutionary exiles in Vienna, with performances of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, the Khatchaturian Violin Concerto, and some short pieces by contemporary (exiled) Iranian composers. I also landed on a Mass by Prince

Joseph Poniatowski, cousin to the last king of Poland, in an amateur performance made in London but marketed quite lavishly by the Polish ex-pat community. The piece is competent and worth keeping an ear open for (<https://massinf.org/>).

Otherwise, I'm mainly stocking out my collection with alternative recordings by top orchestras, conductors, and performers at around £1 a time. Given that I only manage to get around these charity shops roughly once a month, I hardly think I'm hoarding all the classical music recordings in the north-east Midlands and not letting anyone else get a look in

I'm pleased it's not just me who has books that have sat on the shelves for very many years without my getting around to reading them. I've started making a concerted effort to put that right by changing my reading priorities slightly, though I'm also finding in the charity shops good, clean copies of Important Books that are not SF but that I ought to have read.

As with your favourite lists, so with Doug Barbour's reviews. I enjoyed *The Peripheral*, *Sevenses* (about which I hear conflicting reports), *Aurora*, *Poseidon's Wake*, and *Stories of Your Life and Others* are all on my TBR pile.

So I think I'll have enough to keep me going until you resolve the Anniversary Issue issues!

I am now looking forward to attending Novacon in Nottingham next weekend; it's the first convention I've been able to manage this year — and indeed, apart from a software-testing conference in Brighton in March, the only serious time I'll have had away from home this year. Just staying in a hotel and being fed and watered will be a bit of a holiday for me. The only problem is that, in line with the general decline in the availability of SF in the High Street, the number of specialist dealers is also declining, both for new and secondhand. I remember a time when Novacon was a major event in the UK SF calendar; now, those few publishers there are don't seem to consider it worth their while attending. Last year (when we went as walk-ins for one day), the book room was half empty, and most of the traders there dealt with either memorabilia, jewellery, or self-published stuff, most of which did not appeal. The one exception was Ian Whates' NewCon Press. I'd like to think that things will be different this year, but I'm not holding my breath.

The plan for next year is to see if my annual bonus will stretch to attending the Dublin Worldcon, or possibly even also the Belfast Eurocon the weekend afterwards. A chance to spend some more time in Ireland would be welcome — I've only ever spent one hectic weekend there some eight years ago, driving a minibus of climbers from Belfast, via Newcastle (County Down), to the Ring of Kerry for them to complete a charity ascent of the six highest peaks in the British Isles. That was after driving from Lancashire down to Snowdonia, then up to the Lake District and on to the Scottish West Highlands before making the crossing to Ireland, all in 72 hours. So my one glimpse of the Emerald Isle was just that, a glimpse; and it whetted my appetite for more.

(6 November 2018)

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

Marchettigasse 9/17, A-1060, Wien, Austria

[*brg* *The Snail on the Slope* has arrived. I'm really looking forward to reading this, although I'm afraid I became stuck around page 50 on the Strugatsky brothers' *The Doomed City*. I became baffled by that one (probably an inability to appreciate Russian humour), but will try to return to it.

It occurs to me that you should send review copies of all the Strugatsky Brothers books to Patrick McGuire in USA. (His address is in almost every issue of *SF Commentary* in the letter column.) He has written long pieces on the Strugatskys, and could possibly be far more useful than I am in comparing translations (1970s edition versus the new edition). (Or maybe you send him copies already.)

***SFC 97* was held up by need to work for a living — recently I've compiled indexes for five gigantic school textbooks.*]**

Glad to hear that you received *The Snail on the Slope*. I sent the Strugatsky books to you as a sort of compensation for *SFC*; I am not sending out copies to generate reviews. The Strugatsky books seem to do well enough, and I am quite content with the way interest in their books has increased. And I am glad to hear that you apparently still have work enough, although indexing seems not to be the most interesting job.

I have already found *SFC 96* and read parts of it. I wonder whether you would care to tell me how many copies *The Sea and Summer* sold in the SF Masterworks series? When I was with Suhrkamp, we did this novel in Germany, as well as another, but failed to generate many sales. We also failed with J. G. Ballard, although we published all of his short story collections (save *The Atrocity Exhibition*, which my publisher didn't like), and many of his novels. And Ballard's last novels never appeared in Germany.

(17 August 2018)

I hope you had a good start into the new year. I am still alive and mostly in good health, although some banal things of everyday life are getting more difficult. I could make journeys, but have no great enthusiasm for travelling.

I am afraid that I can no longer ship printed copies of *Quarber Merkur* overseas. The German postal services have abolished the reduced book rate for international shipments, and from what I hear to send a copy of *QM* would cost about \$18.00 (US). But I think that you can still download it from www.pmachinery.de/download/temp/QM119.zip.

German publishers don't even dare to protest, for they fear that the reduced book rate within Germany might also be abolished — as happened a long time ago in Austria.

I am still working a bit, although ever more slowly, and I will continue with *QM*. And the Strugatskys are getting ever more readers and publishers.

(24 January 2019)

[*brg* A few weeks after Franz's letter arrived, the latest edition of *Quarber Merkur* appeared in the mail, right on schedule! Please thank whoever kept me on the list.*]

STEVE JEFFERY

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

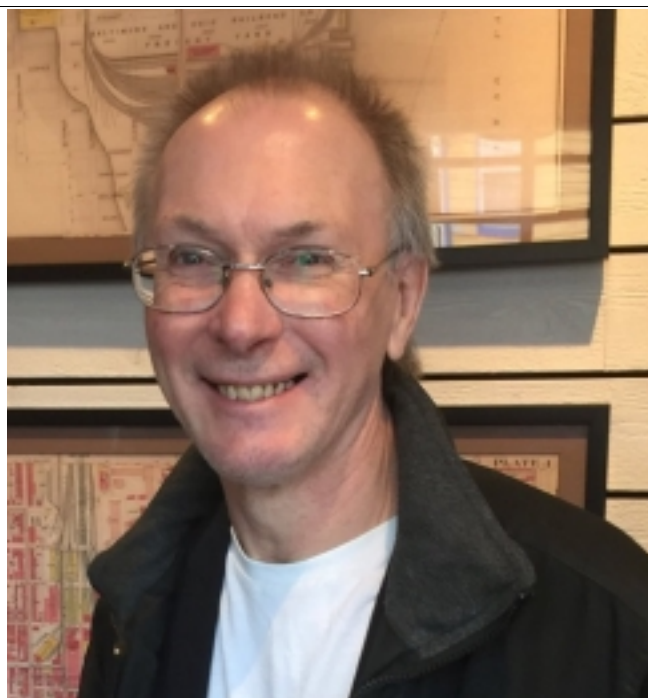
In *SFC* 96, I wonder if Andrew Milner [writing about George Turners's *The Sea and Summer*] has hit on a more general point when he describes how the use of new or relatively unknown territories (here Australia, but also applicable to worlds like the Moon or Mars) become increasingly constrained as settings for utopias and voyages of discovery as those territories become increasingly explored and mapped, providing fewer places where such a story could plausibly take place, after which it is the isolation of the setting, rather than the possibility of unknown places, cities, or communities, that becomes the main focus, as in Shute's *On the Beach*.

I'm not so sure about Andrew's idea that radical SF scholarship is generally antipathetic to dystopian fiction, although I'm not quite sure what he means by 'radical' in this context. I would have thought it was the opposite, and that dystopian fiction is currently having a field day, with the televising of not just the original story but now a second series spun off from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, or the current political climate in the US, which has already managed to outstrip any satire that Thomas Disch or John Sladek could have thrown at it. (I really must read *334* again. I suspect it will take on a whole new meaning than it had when I first read it in the 1970s, despite being set almost a decade too late.) There's no lack of current dystopian/disaster fiction. Kim Stanley Robinson seems determined to obliterate the world in every manner conceivable in recent books, while the TV movie channels seem to be flooded with films in which the world is threatened in different ways by increasingly spectacular CGI effects.

I would have thought that it would be quite difficult to get away with an unapologetic, non-parodic, or non-comedic utopia today. I'm struggling to think of one. (I should explain here that I'm someone who at the time read Robinson's 'Mars' trilogy as a utopia, not so much for the place, but for the idea of being part of a team of people engaged in and committed to a life-long, large-scale project. I also know someone who really, really wants to be one of the monks in Stephenson's *Anathem*. I'm a lot more jaded now, but I still get a twinge of the same feeling watch documentaries about the people in NASA's *Voyager*, *Cassini*, and *Galileo* missions.)

My b/w printout of this issue of *SFC* doesn't do justice to the subtlety of Randy Byers' *Ling-sized Pine Cones* compared to the version in the PDF copy downloaded from eFanzines.com.

Vikki and I are both readers of Steve Erickson but, confusingly, two different Steve Ericksons, which makes things a bit challenging when it comes to compiling Amazon wish lists for each other's Xmas and birthday presents. My shelf boasts *Tours of the Black Clock*, *Our Ecstatic Days*, *Rubicon Beach*, and *Amnesiascope* (but no *Days*



Steve Jeffery, winner of 2019's Corflu Fifty fund, designed to bring a deserving fan to Corflu each year.
(Photo: Laurraine Tutihasi.)

Between Stations, although I'm sure this was the first of his I read), so this is the same Steve Erickson of Ron Drummond's article rather than Vikki's Steven Erikson (who boasts one extra 'n' but no 'c'), author of some dozen fantasy works under the title of the 'Malazan Book of the Fallen' and a later set of prequels as 'The Kharkanas Trilogy'.

That's a really strange piece by Ron Drummond. Not having read *Arc d'X*, I assumed I'd missed a couple of quote marks or an indentation to mark where Drummond might be quoting a long passage from the book itself, and got to the point where the dead panther crumbles to dust and bones before I looked back to the top of the page and noted Stephen Brown's description of this as a 'critical fiction' first published in *Science Fiction Eye*. It certainly captures the dream-like strangeness of a lot of Steve Erickson's books, in which time, space, and memory are unmoored, in the same way they are in Christopher Priest's *The Dream Archipelago*, and with equally disconcerting effects both for the character/narrators and the reader.

Someone wrote that the essential difference between fantasy and horror is the possibility of resolution and escape. Randy Byers' explanation of why he doesn't like reading Erickson, quoted by Drummond at the end of this article, strongly suggest that Erickson's novels might be read as horror; a waking nightmare of perpetual entrapment. It reminded me of something I quoted for *Prophecy* from James Woods' *The Fun Stuff and Other Essays*, where in an extraordinary piece on writer László Krasznahorkai entitled, 'Reality Examined to the Point of Madness', he writes of that author's 'lava flow of narrative' ... that constantly 'turns back on itself like a lunatic scorpion trying to sting itself', echoing the mental paralysis of its narrator 'in which the mind turns over and over to no obvious effect'.

I sometimes wonder if having a memory that more and more refuses to retain more than a vague impression of a work after I have closed the covers and walked away might not be a mercy.

My eye has just chanced on Colin Steele's review of Susan Hill's *Jacob's Room*, which I want to compare with the same writer's *Howard's End is on the Landing*, because I have a sneaking suspicion from the shared subtitle that they are the same book, and wonder why the change of title?

Part 2: Hi again Bruce:

OK, so it turns out I should have actually read the first sentence of the review. Susan Hill's *Jacob's Room is Full of Books* is a follow-on volume (maybe not a sequel; can you actually have sequels to non-fiction books?) to the writer's previous and wonderfully titled *Howard's End is on the Landing*. And they do have very similar, but not identical subtitles. *Jacob's Room* is 'a year of reading' while *Howard's End* is 'a year of reading from home'.

Hill writes about obsessive collectors and cataloguers, as opposed to readers: 'I know people who own thousands of books and can tell you the exact spot where every single one is shelved. They colour-coordinate them, or arrange them by alphabet or author or subject. That is what collectors do, with books arranged like stamps in albums. Good luck to them. My father's sock drawer was like that.'

I should also make a note to look out for Shaun Bythell's *The Diary of a Bookseller*, as I've come across a mention of Wigton as Scotland's National Booktown recently. This was in a podcast documentary by Ian Sanson titled *The Five Foot Shelf*. Charles W. Elliot, cousin of T. S. and himself President of Harvard, argued in 1909 that everything required for a complete, liberal education could be contained on a five-foot shelf. Sanson took up the challenge and had a five-foot shelf lovingly constructed and installed in The Open Book in Wigton, a combined B&B and bookstore, and invited customers to nominate which books ought to fill it. Given that the public's taste and selection criteria are not exactly those of a Harvard Professor, one suspects Charles Eliot would have been horrified.

Ada Palmer's *Too Like the Lightning* sound intriguing, as does Chris Brookmyer's *Places in the Darkness*, although I was far less taken with Pullman's *The Book of Dust* when it was serialised on Radio 4 last Christmas.

Ray Sinclair-Wood's observations on the changing direction of Children's and Young Adult literature towards 'relevant' and socially conscious subject matter and from 'imaginative story telling to towards psychological self-help homilies' is also evidenced over here in adult television programs where almost every drama that touches on difficult or upsetting themes seems to be accompanied by a closing announcement that 'If you have been affected by any of the issues in this program, you can contact X, Y or Z'. Now this sort of advisory notice isn't necessarily a bad thing in itself, but it's become more and more noticeable in the last few years, and I wonder if it has anything to do with an acknowledgment of the changing habits of accessing and viewing television programs outside of the scheduled 9 p.m. 'water-shed time zone' for adult drama.

I was going along quite happily with Ray's argument of poetry being a more heightened and perhaps more musical form of language than prose when I came to Ray's antithesis of poetry not as prose but as science. Oh dear. Soulless scientists again. Every time I hear this one I want to point the speaker to Richard Feynman's response to an artist friend on the beauty of a flower: 'I have a friend who's an artist and has sometimes taken a view which I don't agree with very well. He'll hold up a flower and say "look how beautiful it is", and I'll agree. Then he says "I as an artist can see how beautiful this is but you as a scientist take this all apart and it becomes a dull thing", and I think that he's kind of nutty. First of all, the beauty that he sees is available to other people and to me too, I believe. Although I may not be quite as refined aesthetically as he is ... I can appreciate the beauty of a flower. At the same time, I see much more about the flower than he sees. I could imagine the cells in there, the complicated actions inside, which also have a beauty. I mean it's not just beauty at this dimension, at one centimeter; there's also beauty at smaller dimensions, the inner structure, also the processes. The fact that the colors in the flower evolved in order to attract insects to pollinate it is interesting; it means that insects can see the color. It adds a question: does this aesthetic sense also exist in the lower forms? Why is it aesthetic? All kinds of interesting questions which the science knowledge only adds to the excitement, the mystery and the awe of a flower. It only adds. I don't understand how it subtracts.' Science is not without wonder. After all, it's the part of the reason we became science fiction readers at an early age rather than addicted to, say, westerns or historical romance novels. And Ray carries out a classic sleight of hand when he later substitutes the word information for science as if they were the same thing (like poetry and prose perhaps). Science, like poetry, is, at its most essential level, a process of discovery. And it can equally evoke a sense of wonder, even awe, whereas the small print of the list of ingredients on the back of a cereal packet might inform you (and may even save your life if you have a nut allergy) but I doubt it will routinely evoke a sense of wonder.

(26–27 August 2018)

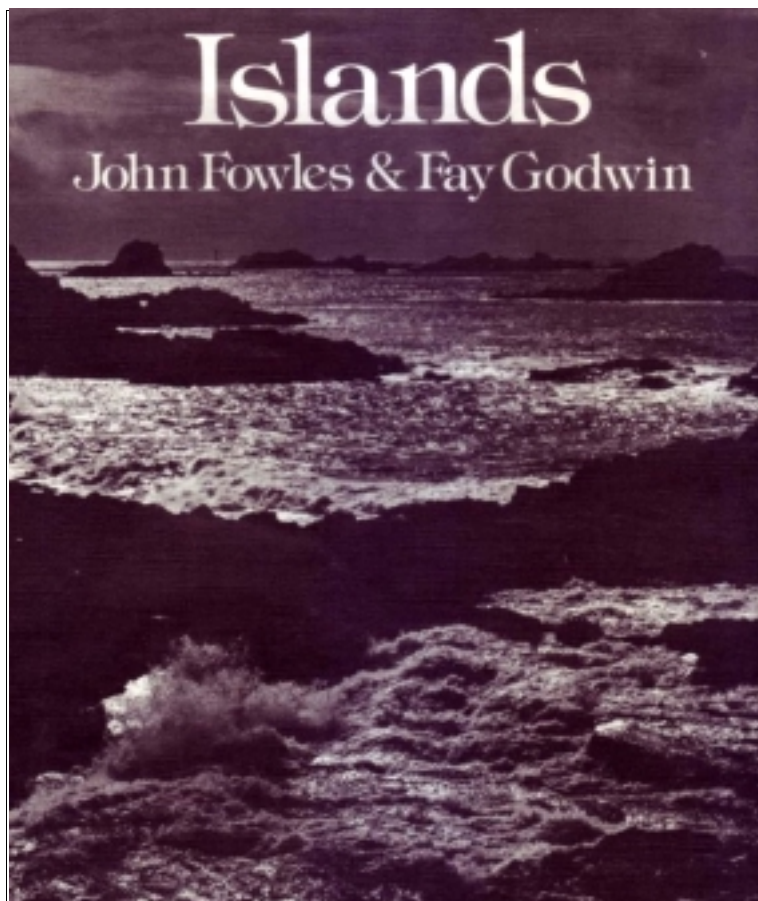
ANDY ROBSON

**63 Dixon Lane, Leeds,
Yorkshire LS12 4RR, England**

The dynamo rolls on! Thanks for *SF Commentary* 96.

Ray Sinclair-Wood's brave venture into the back-packer's deep dark forest of SF Poetry was interesting, especially as 'names' are beyond much of my own person territory. Obviously SF goes back to the very start of the twentieth century when the optics of the telescope and the mappings of astronomy were brought into the school curriculum.

Fandom must have existed in the 1920s and 1930s (long before my time), but my own introductions came with *Sputnik* because at the age of four I was keeping neespaper cuttings of what were called satellites. This was because newspaper phogographers that were not of people were of either of these or motor cars or ruined



buildings. (At that age you're *not* interested in people — unless they are very badly drawn in cartoons.) Also in the 1950s weekly magazines would travel hand to hand down the street, and I was allowed to read some (but not all) of these when I reached double figures. In among them would be *Mad* magazine, John Berry's fanzines with his world of 'ghoodminton', and *Reveille*, which some will only recall for its photos of bikini-clad Hollywood stars, but I remember for its regular pages of Fortean phenomena and exposures of spiritualist charlatans, Lobsang Rampa, and their ilk. In those days colour had not reached the weeklies — *Picture Post* was firmly black and white even for Royal visits.

Which brings me neatly around to the Ursula Le Guin photograph from the back cover of *The Altered I*. In 1966 we finally got full-colour weekly newsmagazines. *Everything* had to be photographed — including comedians sitting on the toilet — and the photojournalist was born. Fay Godwin was a photojournalist who worked freelance covering a variety of things, but specialised in articles on writers being photographed in their natural habitat (even if many had a mysteriously similar desk and typewriter). Later she became a 'name' for black-and-white landscape photography — an English Ansel Adams. Then around 1980 she disappeared — not so much retired as displaced by video and colour print libraries. I can find some secondhand stuff on her site and I'll send it to it.

Congratulations on the Ditmar Award. Sadly, these days you can't swank about them as much. In the past you have obscure references on your letterhead, such as 'Winner of JXQR 2017' or little brass plaques by the doorbell — 'Persistent Wearer of Odd Socks 1987', but

as nobody has letterheads or visitors (other than family) any more it's a bit redundant. All the fanfares go the givers rather than the receivers. I suppose there will be some Googleable list of records where you'll find yourself somewhere below the 'Joint Award for World's Worst Haircut 2017 — Donald Trump or Kim Jong Un'.

(16 June 2018)

SFC 97: Congratulations on the award. Fan societies are not yet as corrupt as government organisations, nor so box-ticklingly anal that the only person can qualify for an award is completely incapable of writing a word. Therefore the Lifetime Achievement Award does have some credibility.

Fanzines have a lifeform absorbed from the vegetable matter they're printed on. So they begin at 16 pages and grow infinitesimally ever afterward, turning into giant redwoods. (Digital fanzines, though, will have a maximum size. There is a limit to the amount of page and index sending that people are prepared to tolerate.) Presumably the nineteenth-century encyclopedias determined the maximum sizes for books.

Musically, it has been a year of disappointment. The only 'old stalwart' recording to please me was Chris Hillman, who approached his *Like a Hurricane* CD as a gig with old mates and an opportunity for a drink and a chinwag. Stephen Stills' CD was very listenable, as was that by the late Rick Parfitt, but the remainders are simply going through the motions as enthusiastically as a janitor cleaning toilets on a Monday morning. I would like to hear more of the group All Our Exes Live in Texas, but their CD disappeared here within a week. The Waifs' double CD has yet to make it over here. There was a release of the entire three-hour *Monterey Pop* on Blu-ray, but not on DVD, just to annoy everyone. Also difficult to get hold of (exceedingly difficult!) has been the extended-play Judy Henske/Jerry Yester *Rosebud* CD. This was worth the effort, although it was not to everyone's taste.

I didn't know that the Ian Carmichael *Lord Peter Wimsey* series was available again. I, too, disliked the Petheridge version, but the fault was mainly in the original books, where Lord Peter is unbearably smug and rather too conceited to be anything but irritating.

Harlan Ellison has always been a personality, rather than a writer, to me. I lump him in with people like Hunter S. Thompson and Martin Amis. Should you come across anything by them purporting to be on a topic of interest, you find that rather than being encouraged and intrigued by it your eyes merely glaze over.

The *Book Towns* volume, reviewed by Colin Steele, sounds interesting. Lots of places here have literary festivals (the government says too many!) but only a solitary book chain outlet. There are huge book printers in places 50 miles from the nearest bookshop. The book chains sell purely propaganda, and the few independent shops will order only the larger, expensive volumes. I

order direct from publishers wherever possible.

When I saw the heading 'Beethoven and Crumb' in Jennifer Bryce's 2017 round-up, I thought of Robert Crumb. The combination of Beethoven and 1930s hot jazz would have worked well. As for Robert Crumb's personal banjo playing — that would need a bit of working on.

I enclose some pennies for postage. Your upcoming 50th Anniversary edition ties in with other anniversaries, such as world financial disasters, prog rock, rainbow print newspapers, day-glo posters, and a friend's first heart attack. The first Apple Mac computers as well as the Moon landings. That was probably about the time I started getting into fanzines as well. American photo booths were cheap everywhere. Racy Grove Press stuff was around. Every newsagent had a copy chops for cut-and-paste zines of every kind, and you could throw them

together over a weekend.

(4 September 2018)

[*brg* At least you remember the best stuff from fifty years ago ... and also remember the SFC reference to the photography of Fay Godwin. Thanks very much for sending me the book of her photographs of *Islands*, text by John Fowles.*]

All of Fay Godwin's stuff is out of print, as she retired in the 1990s. Black-and-white photography was her thing, and she had no recognition for colour work. I doubt if she could have been bothered with filters and digitisation, which were coming in. If she's still alive, she would be well into her nineties, but I doubt it.

(18 September 2018)

Letters about *SFC* 97

JOHN LITCHEN

Box 3503, Robina Town Centre QLD 4230

Fifty years and counting...

What to do about a special 50th anniversary issue? That's an impossible question to really answer.

What do you do? Do you try to select the 'best of' articles? And if so, what articles? — those that are critical of published books, or those that tell stories of people's lives and experiences? Where do you start? Can you actually remember all the articles by all the many different writers that go over the 50 years without having to at least glance through every back issue? Do you ask your readers and contributors what they think are the best articles? And if so have they all the issues available to go through and select their 'best of'? (Otherwise their selections would be related only to the more recent issues. I doubt if many have a complete print run. I have lots of issues going back quite a few years, but by no means is it anywhere near a complete print run.)

And if they did you will find that there are so many different ideas of what is 'the best of' that you would still have an impossible task to ween the lists down to those that have been selected by the majority.

My suggestion would be for you to select some of the great artworks that have graced your covers and use those as interior illustrations to accompany a selection of your editorials that show your evolution as an editor of *SFC* and consequently the evolution of the zine itself, with perhaps a few comments from the well-known famous authors who have contributed over the years, along with the better known fan writers. If you make this an entirely digital issue, all the artworks can be in colour. In a print issue the artworks would lose impact by being printed in greyscale.

Personally I would love to see a collection of all your editorials and comment pieces that you have published across all your various magazines, since this would constitute a biography of sorts. It would also be a history

of your life as a person and of the importance being an editor of those publications, and well as a history of the publications across fifty years. But even then, there are probably too many ... and how do you select the 'best of' them?

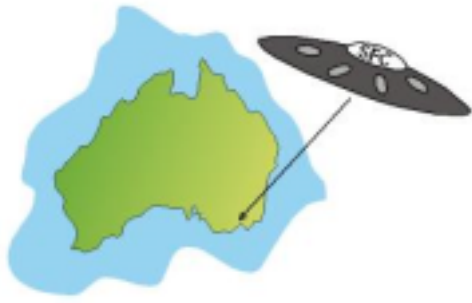
(22 August 2018)

[*brg* All of these are wonderful suggestions, John, but each would produce magazines of an impossible length, too costly to be published as print copies. I have been looking through the covers from the older issues, as you will have seen in *SF Commentary* 98, but I did not have enough room to publish more than small images. I thought of doing a comprehensive index to *SFC*, *Steam Engine Time*, and *The Metaphysical Review*, but that would have taken most of 2019. A collection of my editorial material — in effect, my diary/journal for the last 50 years — would have been hundreds of pages long. Likewise, a collection of the best letters and letter-extracts from past issues. Let alone an adequate collection of articles as a *Best of SF Commentary*! I do have a list of those, as you can see in *SFC* 98 — but it covers only the first ten years of fifty.]

LEIGH EDMONDS

Ballarat East VIC 3350

All the writing about Edwina Harvey was interesting. For me she falls between the cracks of when I went to Canberra and then to Perth to do a PhD and when I became 'interested' in fandom again a couple of years ago. Whole generations have come and gone and many fabulous things have been done and written in that period about which I know next to nothing. I had, for example, no idea of what happened to Jan Howard Finner. So I consider myself a little more educated. I get the impression that the writers' workshops that were held



in the second half of the 1970s reaped their reward in making the writing of stf a major preoccupation, along with the influences of media fandom. Somebody needs to give some thought to making historical sense of it all, but not me. Dealing with the period leading up to this flowering is quite enough work for me.

Talking of which, I seem to recall that I sent you a copy of my proposed chapter for the book *Australian Fandom*, which is to be published by the University of Iowa Press some time early next year I gather. I got back the referees' comments, which were basically that it was too fannish and undertheorised, but otherwise okay. So I wrote a couple of pages of theory to put at the front, including an explanation of the 'fannish' slant, and sent that off. I should find out in the coming few weeks whether or not that suits them. I hope so. I finally reached an agreement with Haileybury College to get to work on their history, then there is the civil aviation history which is coming along nicely, and then I'm looking forward to getting back to the history of Australian fandom in the same way that I was looking forward to getting home after a day in Melbourne doing other necessary stuff.

I don't know that I wanted to be reminded about the death of so many notables, as happened in reading thisish. It also put me in mind of the recent hints about Dennis Stocks and Paul Stevens that have come to us through the interweb. We are all mortal, but some days we'd like to think of more positive and cheerful stuff.

Yvonne is living in Reservoir these days! There's another thing I didn't know. You are a fount of information.

(9 August 2018)

I'm keeping busy with another history project which is seeing me travelling down to Melbourne more often, which gives me more reading-for-pleasure time. Travelling then from Melbourne out to Keysborough involves an additional train trip to Springvale and then a bus trip to the school campus, all of which more or less doubles my travel time. The folks there think I'm a little eccentric taking the train until I remind them that if I drove a car I wouldn't have all that reading time. I expect that they think I'm spending that time reading and thinking deeply about historiography, philosophy, and cultural theory, rather than reading fanzines, so let's not tell them otherwise.

Actually, I don't have much to chatter on about in this letter of comment, mainly because I have not consumed most of the cultural delights mentioned in this list laden

issue. Of all the delights you, Colin, Jenny, Ian, and Doug have written about I might have personally experienced half a dozen, so I don't have much to compare and contrast with you all about. I share your enthusiasm for Martha Argerich, but I've not heard the pieces you write about or list in this issue. I still think her *Goldberg Variations* is at the tip top of that particular pile. I think I enjoyed Jenny Bryce's reviews a little more than yours because they seemed to put me more in tune with her feelings about the works she wrote about. I was certainly envious of her having seen the Jerusalem Quartet and performances at ANAM. I managed to get to the South Melbourne venue for some session of the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition before last and thought it an excellent venue for that kind of music. However, I think I've reached that stage of life where the pleasure of attending concerts is counterbalanced by the effort involved in getting to them, and I congratulate Jenny for her energy in so much concert going. (Jenny also reminded me of the ineffable qualities of the middle and late Beethoven quartets, and I spent the rest of the day listening to them from my iPod. This made the tedious process of trawling old newsletters much more pleasant than it otherwise would have been.)

The main thing I took away from this listathon was the sheer amount of beauty there is in this world. Books and music are mentioned in abundance and all of it great — beautiful — stuff. You really need to find a reader who goes to plays and art galleries to add to your benison that reminds us that there is so much to take pleasure in this world.

Most thought-provoking this issue were Colin Steele's reviews. I particularly enjoyed his writing about books about books. Having a rather utilitarian attitude to books myself, I enjoyed his commentary on Henry Wessells collection and the book about it. This reminded me to mention to Colin, through you, that I spent a few days in the Fisher Library last year and even though I did not plumb the depths of his collection now residing there, I became aware of it and did call out several of his books on stf as it related to fandom, which I found very useful. I am very happy that he has made his collection available for wider research through Sydney University and I will be availing myself of more of it in the future. (I should add that I will always be in Colin's debt because he lent me his copy of *Neuromancer* all those years ago when cyberpunk was new.)

Colin's comments on *Telling It Like It Wasn't*, about counterfactualism, did make me pause to think about the nature of history and historiography. This book is something that I will have to chase up. The interesting thing about counterfactual history is that it can only be written when the history of a particular topic is well known so that, for example, it only makes sense to write about a world in which Germany won World War II if one happens to know that, in fact, Germany lost. Most history is written to create historical knowledge about things that happened in the past, and until they become 'historical fact' there is nothing to write counterfactual history against. I'm delighted to reach this conclusion because it means I won't be out of a job any time soon.

(20 September 2018)

You have my sympathy about travel problems. I imagine that in many ways it would be easier for me to get to events in Melbourne than you, because I can at least drive from home to the railway station and park with relative ease. Perhaps it is advancing years that makes me less keen to get out of my comfortable chair and go out into the real world. A week or so ago Valma and I took in a sumptuous performance of the *Nutcracker* ballet from the comfort and privacy of our home on a big screen from YouTube. It was a Russian performance, and while seeing it live would have been a real experience, neither of us now have the time, resources or energy to get to Moscow to see it live. What an amazing world we live in.

Which reminds me that I was going to mention in my previous letter that I noted you had listed *Death in Paradise* as a TV program of some value. Valma and I caught it when it first turned up on the ABC many years ago and liked it then. We're currently binge watching it on Netflix and enjoying it again. The first Detective Inspector was murdered in one of the episodes we watched last night, and we quite liked the new one who turned up to solve that murder. For some reason we stopped watching in when it first appeared on the TV at about this point in the story, so we're looking forward to seeing episodes that will be new to us. Though, after having enjoyed the great quality of *Grace and Frankie* we are finding it difficult to settle for what is otherwise very good quality television. I don't know that everyone thinks as highly of that TV show as we do but the effortless acting and sparkling script writing set a very high benchmark. Even the plot lines are interesting, but this may be because the various plot points are relevant to people of our age rather than most programs we see which are aimed at a younger demographic. If I was making up a list of my top ten TV shows *Grace and Frankie* would be at the top of the list and *Daylight* next.

[*brg* I haven't heard of either *Grace and Frankie* or *Daylight*. Even if I had a fancy TV set that could access YouTube or Netflix, I would probably select the same small number of TV shows that I currently watch on DVD/Blu-ray. My favourites this year have been Seasons One and Two of *Counterpart*, which was shown originally in Australia on SBS.*]

I'm afraid that I might be giving the wrong impression about the business of doing history by talking more about the creative side of the process than the research side. Finding out what happened and when it happened is fundamental and I tend to take the research side of the process for granted. For example, I spent Monday scanning a stack of old Haileybury school magazines — say about 600 pages — and spent half of yesterday at the school photographing another 550 pages of fortnightly newsletters. It will take at least a month of non-stop work to pull the necessary historical evidence out of that lot. I will have to do that much again just to collect the basic research material for the school for the entire decade. Then there are the Council papers, Principals' newsletters, and other bits and pieces, before I begin the interviewing program, which has about 40 names on it. Having done all that — at least six months solid work — then it's time to get on to the creative stuff, which might

take a month, at the most. The reason I talk mainly about the creative part of the process is because if I don't get that right most of the value of the research side of the process is lost. I don't want to sound flippant about this, but the research side is largely a matter of technique, and that's something I've been practising almost every day for three decades, so it just comes as second nature. Perhaps it's a bit like playing a musical instrument; if you don't have sound technique then sounding good when it comes time to perform is awfully difficult.

Leaving aside that little history lesson, I sympathise with you about trying to pull together the historical evidence of the Nova Mob because, I guess, there is actually little physical evidence of the meetings and what was said at them. This is the problem with the social side of fandom (if you will allow me to call the Nova Mob 'social') — there is little or no physical record of its activities. There may be write-ups of some of the meetings scattered around in various fanzines, but unless you have the time and resources to do a wide-ranging trawl of all the available evidence, you'll be reduced to saying when the meetings were held and what the topics of conversation were. Good luck with it. I'd be glad to have whatever you come up with and, if you don't mind, I'll add it into the data base of fannish events I'm building up and from which the Annotated Chronology is constructed.

(25 September 2018)

JUDY BUCKRICH **Gardenvale VIC 3185**

Here's a summary of the year so far:

The year began well — my *Acland Street* book was in every bookshop and apparently selling well — I was still riding high about the book launch and the lovely Brian Nankervis being so generous hosting it and getting my mother so involved.

I had begun swimming in the sea every morning in December and continued this until the end of April with great enthusiasm and joy. The habit has brought real changes physically and spiritually. I began again in October.

Writing the Greville Street book has been a strange challenge, trying to come to grips with the first Melbourne Aboriginal Mission being on the land, and what that meant to the beginning of the Victorian colony — the speed of change from open country to farms to tents and houses on little blocks of land with no water, no sewerage or even night men to take away the 'soil' — I became obsessed with water and cesspits and food — what did poor people eat, how did they live?

My own home life has been mostly routine, doing reading and writing at the PMI library, swimming in the sea, hanging out with friends at the cinema and dinners, coping with my mother's inability to accept that her life was coming to an end. Her horrible phone calls and self-absorption have been my constant challenge.

In March I took on the task of publishing my friend Julia's book about her aunt, the poet Anne Elder, and a new anthology of her poetry. This brought me further into contact with her family, her sister who would be the

book's editor, her cousin the collator of a new anthology of Anne Elder's poetry.

In April Julia and I took off for our second long road trip together to visit my friend Barbara who shares 1000 acres of curated bush on the Murray River at Walwa and Julia's cousin's naturally regenerative cattle farm further east on the same river. These were revelatory places for my understanding of the land, which connected with my writing about pre-European settlement Melbourne.

I kept writing and hoping for grants from local and government funds for the Greville Street book, but these never materialised. I had to pull my belt in and forge ahead, having decided three years before at age 65 that I had no more time to waste hoping for money or the kind of approval I had never really received from 'the establishment', people who were more or less within the fold of approval from the Professional Historians and the Royal Historical Society. Not that these organisations were 'against' me; after all, I had surprisingly won a Victorian History Award for my little book about Ripponlea Village (funded by an extraordinary local shopkeeper and the Port Phillip Council); they were just not really 'for' me either.

In the meantime the book distributor for *Acland Street* went out of business — so we got no money from book sales apart from Readings and The Avenue Bookshop, where we had delivered the books ourselves.

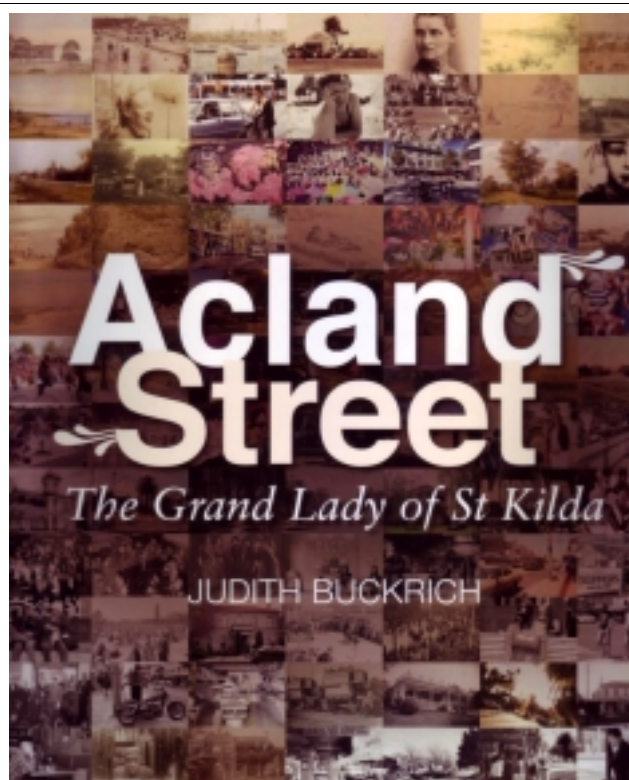
From May to August, various combinations of my friends Julia, David Tiley, and Jenny and my daughter Laura read aloud Emily Wilson's translation of *The Odyssey* on Sundays.

At the beginning of June I was elected president of the Prahran Mechanics Institute Victorian History Library, a challenging task with staff problems and conflict between members of the committee — but it could have been worse, for years before I had been the only woman on the committee. Thankfully in 2017 I had invited a woman archaeologist who was working at the nearby Cato Street dig to join; she quickly became a true ally. The institute is going through a period of growth and change that has required a lot of care and scrutiny.

On June 22 my mother died. I was largely unaffected by her death — feeling mostly relief at being able to divest myself of duties and emotional engagement that had become more and more intense and draining over the previous ten years. Laura was in Europe, so we did not hold the memorial until the beginning of August. We both spoke — me about Mum's life and Laura about her personality and their relationship. It was a cheerful ceremony at the PMI library, which many of mine and Laura's friends attended — including my first husband and my old family friend George Biron who had known Mum since our childhood. My deceased much-loved cousin Eva's children, Brandon, Ellie, and Jess, attended, as did my cousins Edith and Mary and Edith's daughter Emma and her daughter.

At the end of August I went to hear Masha Gessen talk about her book *The Future is History*. This had a profound affect on my grasp of Russia's history, my father's life and, in the long run, my inner life.

In September I won the Fellowship of Australian Writers (Victoria) award for Non Fiction for the *Acland Street* history. I was not grateful enough for this —



thinking there was probably not much competition, which turned out to be inaccurate. Also I had hopes of winning another Victorian History Prize. But this was utterly foolish. As I dressed to attend the event I thought to myself that things never worked for me if had expectations. Still I could not imagine that the book would not get a mention, if for nothing else, for production values. But that is indeed what happened. Then I remembered the nasty review that had appeared in the Royal Historical Society journal. My colleague Carolyn Rasmussen had warned me about it: she had written to congratulate me about the FAW award: 'I am especially gratified since I kept meaning to send a note commiserating about the gratuitously slighting review by David Dunstan. He specialises in those — I would blacklist him from reviewing myself. And if you didn't see it — don't bother to go looking for it.' The Victorian History Awards are given by the RHSV and the Public Record Office.

Missing out on the History Prize and the lack of any financial support for my work through 2017 and 2018 made it hard for me to keep up my usual optimism. But having been an 'outsider' and often evoking jealousy and resentment from the history and literary establishment for my successes, I kept on. I had been writing non-stop for the best part of 30 years.

Also in September my dear friend Erik Guttman visited for just one night — I had not seen him in years. We were very happy to see each other.

October brought the worst blow of the year. My daughter Laura's much-loved friend Lachie, who had gone on holidays with us and been part of our 'family', committed suicide. His death broke our hearts. The funeral was attended by hundreds of people who had loved him throughout his short life. Laura and other friends spoke profoundly and movingly.

Finally at the end of October I started reading *The Future is History*. There is no way back from this book for

me. I had through thick and thin maintained a view that my father's continued belief in communism must have meant that there were good things about it. But that was only true for the communists who lived outside communist countries and who could bring pressure to bear on capitalism by invoking the ideals of a system that was (and is) utterly terrifying to live under. I had been brought up so strongly with this belief system and used it as a framework for the feminist and humanist ideas that have informed my writing and thinking and my activism. Now everything is under emotional review and I am sure that my writing and my life will be different.

I am sure that the state of world politics and my mother's and Lachie's deaths have also played a part in my suddenly feeling vulnerable and exposed and yet again having to readjust internally. Julia's books will be launched later this month.

(4 November 2018)

As of January 2019 I started work on a comprehensive history of the Yarra River — something that has never been done, though a few colleagues began and gave up at various times. I anticipate it will be the work of several years. I have a team on board: a historian who will do the oral histories, an archaeologist, a natural historian, a fluvial geomorphologist, a photographer, and a film maker — phew!

Also my history of Greville Street, *The World is One Kilometre*, will be out in July.

(14 May 2019)

DICK JENSSEN

PO Box 432, Carnegie VIC 3163

Just a few comments on *SFC* 97:

Page 12 — the review of *A Conversation Larger than the Universe* by Colin Steele: I gave you a copy of this wrapped in clear plastic, together with a large card from the seller (Colophon Books). Did you get around to reading it? Unless I missed it, I didn't see it in your book lists. Or was it read this year? Maybe it was a bit of a disappointment?

[*brg* I enjoyed Henry Wessell's book greatly, but since Colin Steele sent me his review at the time I was reading the book, his review precedes mine, which has been bumped to *SFC* 100.*]

Page 30: When we spoke earlier today I asked if you'd seen *The Laughing Policeman* (with Walter Matthau and Bruce Dern), and you said no. But on this page (page 30) you list it as an 'other four-star contender'. So, as a long-time member of 'Oh no! my memory', I welcome you to the club ...

[*brg* Gulp! And even though you've reminded me of this incontrovertible fact, I still can't remember much about the film, even if it did feature Walter Matthau.*]

Page 40 — item 4 in 'seen again': the film directed by

Peckinpah is *Ride the High Country* and not the *Wild Country*...

[*brg* And that is unforgivable, because *Ride the High Country* is one of my favourite movies, both as a Western and a revisionist-Western movie.*]

(16 August 2018)

ALEX SKOVRON

Caulfield North VIC 3161

[*brg* I was going through saved pages from *The Australian's* weekend literary review and found two fine poems by you: 'Carousel Days' (9–10 December 2017) and 'Antietam' (9–10 June 2018). I was glad to reprint 'Carousel Days' in *SF Commentary* 98. It's a statement of aspiration for all people who want to see beyond the ordinary into the extraordinary.*]

Thanks for the latest *SF Commentary* — and for again mentioning my book, as well as two of the stories. I was also pleased to receive an interesting email from Ray Wood, so thanks for facilitating that as well.

When you last wrote to me (and we spoke) I was in England. This is just a follow-up to that conversation, and I'm confirming that you're most welcome to publish 'Carousel Days', if you decide to do so. I hold full copyright, and no charge will apply. (You might, however, add in small type that the poem was first published in the *Weekend Australian*.)

I suppose the indexes are still keeping you churning. Stay well — and keep warm!

(19 August 2018)

JENNIFER BRYCE

Box 1215, Elwood VIC 3184

Thank you so much for *SF Commentary* 97: what a pleasure! Beautifully produced, as always. I particularly like Stephen Campbell's 'Dear Diary' on the cover. We didn't coincide in any of our 'Best ofs', but it's a consoling fact that we'll never run out of something to read. I must say that this year I've read Jane Harper's two books, *The Dry* and *Force of Nature* — I do like her writing.

(22 August 2018)

CY CHAUVIN

Detroit MI 48213, USA

I just thought I send you a few lines about the 2018 worldcon, because Robin Johnson and Murray Moore mentioned you there, and it seemed nice to do.

My two favourite program items were (1) the panel on *The Astounding Story* by author Alec Navetta-Lee, his biography of Campbell, Heinlein, Asimov, and L. Ron Hubbard. He has written fiction, and thought that as an outsider, he could do biography best. There was a full house (some people standing), and he asked who the youngest one was in the room, and did find someone in their twenties. Campbell is the one he was most interested in. His publisher asked him to include the others

to broaden the appeal. Sounded interesting, and I hope there is enough new material to be interesting for me when it's published.

Also good was (2) the film about Chesley Bonestell, called *He Brushed the Future*. I never knew that he did so many matte paintings for the movies, including *Citizen Kane*. Gregory Benford introduced the film; he had met the man, and visited his studio. Others in the audience knew him, including someone from the Golden Gate Bridge Authority, who had some of his paintings in the office.

Of course there was much more. I especially enjoyed meeting F. Brett Cox, who was an old apa-mate, and some I never expected to see there.

(28 August 2018)

DOUG BARBOUR

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Alberta T6G 0B9, Canada

I noticed that you bought the Martha Argerich CD boxed set. I replay them a lot, though I have found a few more sets along the way. I do a lot of re-listening.

I will comment a lot more later, but am still taken up with my bladder/prostate problems. I'm still on the catheter, as the first TURP operation didn't do the job. I am going in for another, to widen the passage further, later in September. Before which I will do my best to get down to Calgary, wearing the damned catheter, for a Book Publishers Association of Alberta gala awards night. NeWest is up for a bunch of awards, and I, for some strange reason, have been awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award, so want to be there to receive that honour.

Otherwise: Getting old. Rereading a lot, for pleasure and escape, but have bought some new books over the year. Including the new Michael Ondaatje novel, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

I hope you and Elaine are doing fine as your summer nears (although your politics seem almost as toxic as the USA's).

(6 September 2018)

I've been busy, with operations, recovery, reading tons of manuscripts, and other stuff, so haven't read through your two zines yet. Good news: I've been off the catheter for a few months now, and if I must wear diapers, and I must for the time being, it sure beats a catheter!

I did look through your Best Of's, not as completely as I intend to, but was pleased to see all the Martha Argerich CDs, from the big box set, turning up so often. Argerich is one of the supreme greats of her generation, also a star in her way. I was listening to her and Gidon Kremer's Prokofiev's Violin Sonatas the other day, which are fantastic. But I also have a rather large collection now of James Ehnes CDs, and consider him one of the very top violinists of his time.

[*brg* Thanks to friends of ours who gave us tickets, James Ehnes is one of the very few concert violinists we've seen in action over the last 20 years. He and members of the Australian Chamber Orchestra performed Vivaldi violin concertos: a

concerto for solo violin, followed by one for two violins, one for three violins, and one for four violins.*]

I have a two-CD set of all of Prokofiev's violin works, including the two concertos as well as the sonatas, with his long-time accompanist Andrew Armstrong. Here's the thing: Armstrong is a fine accompanist, but on Ehnes's performances of these sonatas the violin is the centre of attention, and oh so beautifully played. On the Argerich/Kremer recordings, the piano is the centre of attention; but it is a true and full collaboration. It's good to have both sets.

So now it's time for you to try to track down, if you haven't already, the box set of 20 CDs of Maria Joao Pires's solo recordings, containing her highly praised Mozart and Chopin recordings, though there are some fine Schubert recordings as well. How I went so long without really knowing of either is testament to a big lack in my classical knowledge. It's interesting that these too are among the greatest pianists of their generation, with extraordinarily fine solo recordings, but both desire to perform in various chamber settings with others.

I am also enamoured of Andras Schiff's great recordings for ECM, the Janacek (which I picked up because it was Janacek), Schubert, and Schumann. (He has done or is doing the complete Beethoven sonatas, but I'm not sure on what label).

Even younger — the next generation — is the Canadian Angela Hewitt, whose Bach recordings are stellar, and she too is doing the Beethoven sonatas, and others. I have four of her Bach recordings, along with her complete Ravel: all more than worthy, and delights to listen to. From an earlier generation, I have the box set of Richter's first US recordings on Columbia and RCA, most of them the Carnegie Hall concerts where he made such a splash, as well as the complete recordings for Warner Classics.

I would recommend to you the Pacifica Quartet, especially their box set titled *The Soviet Experience*, containing the compete string quartets by Shostakovich, with quartets by his contemporaries Miaskovsky, Prokofiev, Weinberg, and Schnittke. It makes me want to track down more by those composers. The Shostakovich quartets are one of the great masterworks of twentieth-century music, and, for me, more striking and important than his symphonies — but I am more into chamber music than orchestral. In Shostakovich's case, I think he put more of his deepest self into the chamber music and the piano sonatas. They have also released a three-CD set of all of Mendelssohn's string quartets: a delight.

I do listen to classical music more than ever now, plus a lot of ECM 'chamber jazz' (it might be called), which is still intense as jazz can be, but not overwhelmingly loud. Everything by the Polish Marcin Wasielewski Trio, including others' CDs they play on as the rhythm section. Others, including Todd Gustavsen, are the fantastic pianists that ECM finds and nurtures. That's the music I find most satisfying now, so I'm not listening to much rock/blues/etc. I did buy the latest Cowboy Junkies CD — but I love Margo Timmins' voice; it's the voices I pay most attention to now.



(22 December 2018)

I'm spending a lot of time resting. I had another operation last week, a parotidectomy, so still am recovering from the anaesthetic, and wearing a huge bandage and drain on my face. Not going out until I am relieved of it tomorrow.

I have been listening to a lot of Mozart. The Maria Joao Pires boxed set of concertos includes Chopin and Mozart piano concertos, with the other half being the Schumann. They're all delightful, but her touch on the Mozarts is very subtle and graceful. I first found out about her through the Chopin Nocturnes, simply magnificent.

Among my other Christmas gifts was a two-CD set of James Ehnes, with the Mozart Anniversary Orchestra, playing all the violin concertos, so I have been listening my fill of Mozart lately.

(24 January 2019)

WILLIAM BREIDING
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I came across a book of Larry McMurtry's essays, *In A Narrow Grave*, for 25 cents at a thrift shop while waiting for an oil change for the Honda Fit. (I stopped doing my own oil and filter change when I reluctantly got rid of my 1968 Dodge Dart.) These are very readable essays, formed with candid precision, about McMurtry's home state of Texas. It was published in 1968. Had he not been such a fantastic fictioneer (*Lonesome Dove*, *The Last Picture Show*, *Terms of Endearment*, *Desert Rose*, *Horseman*, *Pass By* [the novel upon which the film *Hud* was based] and

oodles more) I think this jaundiced but sentimental book about the places and peoples of Texas should have been far better known.

SFC 96: The opening trio of letters was satisfying, the example of the sercon and the personal taken to the letter column. I enjoyed studying the photos (as I had in *SFC 95* of you and the Aldisses) and discerning the different personalities; even in goof-mode it reveals much. For instance, the folded arms of Stephen, Merv, Lee, and Leigh — a posture I've long associated with both defence (Lee and Leigh) and strength (Stephen and Merv).

I've been enjoying Yvonne Rousseau's reviews-within-a-letter. (Maybe this is a quick and dirty way to get published in *SFC* — embed your review in a loc!). I loved Aldiss's 'Helliconia' trilogy; the deep texture of the world building is nearly unmatched and the man was a genius for tackling the project and succeeding so brilliantly. I admit I was disappointed in the final volume (*Helliconia Winter*), but even that book has great and terrible unforgettable imagery. I tend to prefer Aldiss' dark, shorter novels (*The Dark Light Years*, *Greybeard*, *Hothouse*, etc.), and his short stories are magnificent, but I still have so much more of his work to read!

It did not surprise me that Aldiss may have disliked Roger Zelazny's work.

[*brg* I didn't say that. All I noted was the awkwardness that occurred when two such distinguished writers were invited to the same Australian convention.*]

Forgetting about the 'Amber' series entirely, all of Zelazny's best work has been at novelette and novella length, and frequently features a nonchalantly smarmy, smart-ass protagonist, steeped in stories of neo-noir plotting and atmosphere. All of this brash colour seems to me to be the opposite of the work of Aldiss, though Zelazny had his own brand of metaphysics, existentialism, and humour. (I like Zelazny's work, but he became a strongly faulted writer.)

Ray Sinclair-Wood, for all his protesting to the contrary, is a fan, with all its earmarks — fandom was just waiting to discover him, and you conveniently arrived to usher the way in.

Thank you for the profile of Peter Nicholls. I'd known nothing about the man behind *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. He was, it seems, a force of nature — you can see that, even in the featured photograph. His family's obituary is honest, which reflects a reality-based love that encompasses the whole man. Often adulatory death notices serve nothing but the egos of the surviving. My brother Michael placed a novella-length obit of my dad in two regional papers explaining all of the accomplishments of this wonderful man. My brother had not been on speaking terms with dad for at least a year prior to the time of his death, but in his death had he had become a figure to sentimentalise.

The rundown of all the great books your friends have been sending you was a pleasure to peruse. I had been unaware of the other two volumes of the best of Van Ikin's *Science Fiction* (*Xeno* and *Fantastika*) and will likely

order them at some point. Your paragraph on *The Rose Motel* was very much appreciated. Thank you.

From your list of favourite books (*SFC*95) I was moved to purchase both the memoirs by Harry Harrison (which I am reading at the moment) and Frank M. Robinson. I also picked up Michael Dirda's *An Open Book*, as well as Paul Theroux's latest travel book, *Deep South* (not on your list), a book I expect to be deeply dyspeptic and amusing.

We are in the countdown to the 50th anniversary and I look forward to seeing what has been sitting in your files!
(7 July 2018)

You might want to throw Leigh Edmonds' suggestion back into his lap. He would be the perfect person not only to write an overview of *SFC*, but also provide the historical context out of which it came. It would fit right into his current *iOTA* project.

Our summer up here has been very hot and I've suffered late-onset allergies this monsoon season (this year very little rain but a whole lot of humidity) making things uncomfortable, even effecting hearing loss.

You still might want to consider actually going *all-electronic*, Bruce. Then all your publishing conundrums would be moot. You could publish frequently and solicit new material to boot! I know you are a man of honour and want to be fair to the remainder of your subscribers, as well as contributors, but it is my belief that everyone would accept it gracefully. All they have to do is look at the postage on the envelope.
(23 July 2018)

[*brg* Thanks very much for these comments. I've rediscovered the comments you made on *brg* 98, which also comment on some material in *SFC* 95, and I've included them in *brg* 101.

Meanwhile, I've been compiling indexes on gigantic textbooks, and also, with much help from Carey Handfield, organising the 50th Anniversary Gathering for ANZAPA in central Melbourne. (ANZAPA now has more members than FAPA.)

People don't read electronic fanzines, I suspect, even though they are sitting there all ready to go. And I still have obligations. If I had any assurance of a large continuing income, I would go back to mainly print zines, but that's also impossible.*]

I'm not sure I agree that no one reads efanzines. Robert Jennings tracks hits on *Fadeaway* and gets an extraordinary amount of them. I expect that many people read his fanzine but do not write letters of comment — his main gripe with efanzines. I'm sure, you'd agree with that gripe since *SFC* is response oriented. If I were a millionaire I'd buy a cabin in Montana and send you a yearly printing stipend.

[*brg* Elaine and Sampson the cat would object to that suggestion. Besides, our house in Greensborough is, for most Melbourne fans, as isolated as a cabin in Montana. It would be nice to retire, though.*]

I find it extraordinary that ANZAPA has more members than FAPA! Apparently ANZAPA is a happen-

ing place. If I had more energy I'd consider a spec copy and probably join, but alas!

Meanwhile I try to be serious in my own way. I've gotten stuck on the essay, but am determined to get it finished before the summer is out. Writing is not easy for me. The draft starts crude, then becomes refined over generations of drafts, both in words and in mind.

(24 July 2018)

SFC 97 has been spinning about the house waiting for attention. The 'best of' lists are always fun and arcane. I frequently glean from your own lists, the others not so much. I have already read the Harry Harrison and Frank M. Robinson memoirs because of your mention, and much enjoyed how very different they are from each other. I knew Frank M. Robinson only from a distance. While he was friendly and kind he always kept a part from our local San Francisco group, though he most certainly would have been a boon to our bar meet-ups and monthly parties, and had a connection to a handsome young man who was integral to our group. Perhaps he felt out of place, as he seems to have felt most of his life. I am always deeply saddened by the difficult narrowness of our culture that cause men like Frank and another friend of mine (now nearly 90 years old and still in the closet) to disguise their sexuality. Having grown up around gay men in San Francisco (all of my longest standing and best friends are gay) from age 11, I have never quite understood the seeming visceral threat so many men feel, nor the societal fear.

I used to subscribe to the *Washington Post's* 'Book World' when it could be had separately from the Sunday paper, and was a huge fan of the Michael Dirda column, but I have never read any of his book-length works. Therefore I also ordered his *Open Book* upon your recommendation.

Douglas Barbour's interest in mammoth epic fantasy series puzzles and piques. Barbour has always seemed quite erudite, so I have to wonder what exactly he's getting from these books. Perhaps it is just secondary world-building, intrigue, and getting away from it all.

I was happy to see Jeff Nichols' *Midnight Special* make it up near the top of your 2016 viewing list, though it was my least favourite of his five films to date. I recommend all of his other films, in chronological order: *Shotgun Stories*, *Take Shelter*, *Mud*, *Midnight Special*, and *Loving*. The ever awesome Michael Shannon appears in every one of his films, though he has starring roles only in *Shotgun Stories*, *Take Shelter*, and *Midnight Special*. Shannon has only the briefest of appearance in *Mud*, Nichols' bid for the big time, starring Matthew McConaughey, Sam Shepard, and Reese Witherspoon. Shannon's cameo in *Loving* is brief, but shining and pivotal. I'm tempted to give a synopsis of each film, but you would fare far better by simply heading to the interwebs and watching the trailers for each film. *Shotgun Stories*, his first film, is a favourite, and comes highly recommended. If Dick Jensen has any other these films in his archives you must borrow them immediately.

(14 October 2018)

I still make lists of both my reading and viewing. Gail, my wife, a nonfan, can't fathom why I do so. Only on the

rarest occasion do I actually make more than a list. Some years I may be in the mood to write my reactions, but that hasn't happened in a long while. Too frequently I am dissatisfied. I think you might have gone through a period like this, where you said you kept looking for the gold. Of course, compared to many fans I read very little on a yearly basis, because I am a slow reader and have little spare time for either reading or writing. What little writing I do comes in stolen moments between work, domestic duties, maintaining a new marriage, hiking, and sleep. I look forward to the possibility of some sort of retirement, even if it means just working part time, for that will give me some extra hours to read and write. Full retirement will likely never come, as it won't be affordable; I've lived a peripatetic life with little thought of saving for my old age. Now that it is here I don't necessarily regret the way I've lived my life, but wish I had been just a tad more forward looking where finances were concerned. But you won't find me bitching and moaning about it. If a moment is found to hike the beautiful Sonoran desert ... to take it all in, and I can think one more time, 'Who needs an alien planet? This one is fantastic enough!', I am happy.

I agree with you that Jeff Nichols would have fit nicely into the cinema scene of the 1970s and early 1980s. His themes are small and intimate, and sometimes difficult to express (*Take Shelter*). Apparently after Sam Shepard saw *Take Shelter* he contacted Nichols and said he'd like to be in his next movie and would take whatever role Nichols handed him. That was how he ended up in *Mud* as the eccentric river rat. Nichols is about my favourite director at the moment, and I hope he continues to find funding for his work. *Loving* was a minor hit on the art-house circuit here in the States so I hope that makes it easier for him to find financing.

While it's true that there has been a great amount of social change regarding gay and lesbian acceptance, there is still far too much irrational knee-jerk reaction here in the States. Among my grounds-keeping co-workers at the University of Arizona it's still prevalent to casually denigrate gays in conversation, and because of my background I just don't get it, and I have to say something to that effect every now and then. I don't think this kind of thinking is restricted to blue collar workers, either. But yes: come out, come out, wherever you are!

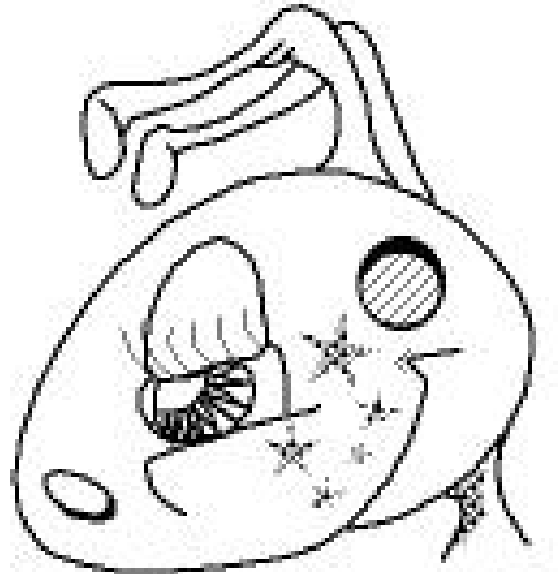
I am anticipating your history of the Nova Mob. I recently ordered a hard copy of Rob Hansen's *Then*, which I am also looking forward to reading when it comes in.

(15 October 2018)

GREGORY BENFORD

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(This letter also published in *Locus*)

Appropriately, I met Peter Nicholls in a London pub. He was holding forth with grand generalisations on genre gradations, back to the bar, pint in hand, booming voice



filling the room. He quickly asked me what it was like to work with Martin Rees at Cambridge's Institute of Astronomy, correctly guessing that I was working there on theory for jets emitted from black hole accretion disks. In his brusque Aussie way, Peter kept up with science because he thought it seminal to SF — unlike any critic I know. Quickly, Peter always leading the conversation, we got into his latest category used in the Clute-Nichols *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*: Big Dumb Objects. I didn't see why they were dumb, meaning don't need management. Like planets? No, like *Ringworld*. But even that needed managing because otherwise it would fall into its star, right?

So began our discussion across decades. It culminated in my writing the 'Bowl of Heaven' novels with Larry Niven, with Peter kibitzing (a word I learned from him) all the way. He held, with C. S. Lewis, that vast, strange landscapes writers should use ordinary characters. Gulliver had to be a common little man and Alice a common little girl, in her Wonderland. I learned much from such instruction. He was like that: sailing through vast seas of genre knowledge, generous with his ideas, often opinionated and often right, moderating John Clute's aversion to hard SF with a science fan sensibility. He was also Australia's first outright Hugo winner — a bright man as well as the gruff-voiced life of the party. Visiting his and Clare's house was the high point of my 1999 WorldCon GoHonorship. Peter aged well. He held up strongly against Parkinson's, keeping it at bay for eighteen years — and it never defeated his stubborn spirit. I shall miss him terribly.

(5 April 2018)

[*brg* Thanks for the memories. But was Peter Nicholls Australia's first Hugo winner? As I recall, Don Tuck, with an earlier encyclopedia, beat him by some decades.*]

GILLIAN POLACK
Chifley ACT 2606

**[*brg* The following is very much a late letter,
being intended for *SF Commentary* 94.*]**

My life is doing its fast-forward thing. Early this year (as you know) Satalyte closed, putting four of my books out of print. We talked about it when I saw you last, I think. I don't remember if I told you the next bit of news, though, or if there simply wasn't time. I'm the newest member of Book View Café, and *Wizardry* will be out again next week. The other novels will follow in due course.

I'm loving being in BVC, for I'm working with some of my favourite writers and getting to learn so very much about a whole range of things my life had only touched on before. It's a part of publishing where the nasty edge has been got rid of. I'm trying to think of ways to explain it, and the best I can come up with is that competition has been replaced by community.

I'm also in Patreon now, because several people persuaded me to give it a go. My kind patrons have enabled me to get to Helsinki, which was not something I was expecting! They're also encouraging me to try writing projects I merely dreamed of before. One of the reasons some patrons were interested in my work was because of what I teach writers, so I'm finally pulling together some of that teaching and giving it written words. Other were interested in the alternate history I was playing with, so I may well do something with that, in the medium to long term.

It fits with me-the-historian, for I can question more publicly how we'd interpret things if we had a slightly different set of assumptions to interpret them from.

All this and somewhat more is why I've been quiet and why I was so busy at Continuum. I'll be in Melbourne for the Historical Novel Society's conference in September, so if you've time to catch up properly, that would be a good time to consider. The HNSA event is in Hawthorn, but I was thinking of spending time in the city on either the Friday or the Monday, just to catch up with friends.

(May 2017)

Shooting Star Press read about those missing stories of mine that were found. They'll release a retrospective of my short fiction along with new stories. June (Continuum) is the launch month. Two of the stories were accepted by Aphelion before it folded, and with their finding came the letter, which moved me muchly. I never knew Peter McNamara and yet I have a letter from him. He liked two of the stories and accepted them for publication but I wrote three. The third he said was descriptive and not really a story.

Book View Café is bringing out the books published by Satalyte. I love working with these people. It's changed my writing life. They're so generous and knowledgeable. My moment of great learning was when Vonda McIntyre copy-edited *The Time of the Ghosts*.

I have a new novel out next year. *The Year of the Fruit Cake*. Given the title, what else could it be but SF? Here's the announcement: <https://ifwgaustralia.com/2018/01/21/new-book-signing-the-year-of-the-fruitcake-by->

[gillian-polack/](https://ifwgaustralia.com/2018/01/21/new-book-signing-the-year-of-the-fruitcake-by-gillian-polack/)

The health side of life is wildly exciting, and I've been back to full-time work for a while. Alas, there are no jobs (I've been interviewed for a bunch of uni jobs, but missed out very narrowly on all of them), so my research might have to fade into nowhere so that I can put more time into paid work. I find this ironic, for my research is what makes my teaching important for writers, but the Writers' Centres are cutting down on interstate teachers because they've had funding cuts, so I can't make that link anymore. I've applied for funding where I can, but I'm between the university world and the writing world in a way that's been hit badly by our current economy. That's the bad news. If I weren't getting published, I'd give up and get whatever job would take me, but fiction is the centre of my universe, so I don't want to!! This is why it meant so much that you have work of mine and about me and want to publish it.

(3 April 2018)

The Year of the Fruit Cake is open for pre-orders, but is being released a bit later than June. It's all ready to go, and the cover is gorgeous. My novel following that will be a blast from the past: my New Ceres novel has found a new publisher. It has a long and tortuous story, so I'll be relieved to see it in print.

(14 May 2019)

SHERYL BIRKHEAD
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I have been having severe back pain. Of the last few bouts one was diagnosed as only soft tissue injury, but took months to resolve — and just as one was resolving I had to muck around the back of the computer between the bookcase and the wall, and as soon as I went to stand up I knew ... ouch! I had been without internet capability for a week and really wanted to get things going.

So, I haven't done much — not even reading or logging. *Sigh* And then the following happened.

In Maryland if a tree falls — even a healthy tree that falls, say, in a storm — it is considered an act of God, and wherever it causes damage *that* person pays for repairs. I did my homework back in 2012 when I had a tree removed and got a free look over the property and was told (I already knew ... it was obvious) a (nasty) neighbour's tree was going to fall and hit my fence/garage/house. I called my insurance agent to ask what I could do, and he repeated the act of God issue, with the caveat that if the owner knew, was informed, or should have known the tree(s) were a hazard, it became negligence, and the owner is responsible for any damage. I did as he suggested and sent a photo and a certified letter (they declined it the first time, but ...). I was being very nice in the letter, and that came back to bite me in the nether regions. I told her that one tree needed to be examined because — thinking she would have an arborist out and look at all the trees in the groups. So, for six years they did nothing at all. All the other neighbours (everyone but this one is nice) came over and asked me when the neighbour was going to take down that dead tree? Heck



**Left: The tree falls at Sheryl Birkhead's place.
Right: The log cut up.**



if I knew. She was informed and that was the best I could do legally do to cover myself.

So, about a month ago that tree came down. It did damage to my new gutters, etc, but since I had only mentioned the one tree, she maintained that her insurance company told her it was an act of God so she has no liability. I bet she neglected to say the tree was dead and that she had received a certified letter asking her to look into the situation back in 2012. If any of the remaining trees come down it will pretty much destroy the house. I need to cobble together another letter, which she will continue to ignore, and then it will be going to court since my house will be leveled. Here are some photos.

The first pic shows most of the height of those trees and how close they are to me. In the storm my own blue spruce came down and blocked my driveway — not that I was going anywhere. The nice neighbours came over and did a 'professional' job, leaving only the huge root-ball that I need to deal with. One of the men came over to me. I felt like a fifth wheel and just leaned against the house watching. He asked if I were aware of the unhealthy areas up in two of the remaining pines. I told him I had been watching them over a few years ... so yes. He asked if the neighbour knew ... um, I have no idea. She argued with me, after the fact, that the downed tree was dead. 'What dead tree?'

So, situation normal all, um, mucked up. You may or may not know that an Amazon delivery truck smashed in my garage door. When I heard/felt that tree come down I just hoped it had missed the door, which it did.

Just behind the pines is a huge pin oak ... not in great shape, but it got damaged with the pines falling. I had two arborists out. They cannot go onto the neighbour's property, but it is obvious from my side that the two pines (one has two trunks) are both dangerous and hazardous and need to come down. But, I cannot (even if I had the \$\$\$) do anything. What would the bill would be? One arborist said the oak should come down because of its

condition and its location along with the pines. The other said that the oak needed a lot of work if it were not taken down. The differences in the root systems are marked. So I sit in a permanent state of anxiety wondering when these pines, at least, will smash the house. If she refuses to do anything, I will get another letter to her to cover my butt ... much good it did last time. All I will be able to do is have the house destroyed and then show proof she was notified and go to court. I was told by a lawyer who does a lot of tree cases (retainer of \$3500) that even if I win, my court and attorney fees are not paid.

Such fun?

Glad to see Steve Stiles on the fan artist list. No comment on the other 'fan' artists.

(11 April 2018)

DALE SPEIRS

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I was interested to read Pete Young's article on the Internet Speculative Fiction Database, as I have been tilting at windmills on subject indexes for fanzines.

It is said that all knowledge is contained in fanzines, to which I reply 'Just try and find it'. Some so-called fanzine indexes have been published, but they are actually checklists, very rarely a proper bibliography, and occasionally title or author indexes.

When I began publishing my zine *Opuntia* in March 1991, I also indexed each issue into a cumulative subject index. Originally it was on index cards, but for years now has been computerised. *Opuntia* is available as free PDFs from either www.efanzines.com or www.fanac.org. Those two sites also have the cumulative subject index to *Opuntia*. Inside the zine, I have many continuing columns on

a particular theme, which are headed with the issue numbers of previous instalments should anyone be interested.

At one time I decided to prepare a cumulative subject index of every Canadian zine in my collection. Eventually I gave it up when I realised that no one would ever bother using it.

For all that the few remaining trufans gush about the old days, the majority of modern fans not only don't care; they don't even know we exist. They tweet or blog, go to 60,000-plus-attendance comic cons, and think Trekkies invented zines.

I carry on in the hope that after I am dead and gone there will be the occasional reader of *Opuntia*. Perhaps a graduate student writing the history of Canfandom, or someone idling away the time.

SF fandom is mainstream these days. The difference, as many others have pointed out before me, is that they blog instead of pubbing their ish, and are media fans who love cosplaying.

(5 May 2018)

[*brg* One of the best pieces of news for 2019 is that Joe Siclari and Edie Stern have placed on the fanac.org website copies of most of the issues of *SF Commentary* from its classic days — the days of duplicated fanzines. This alleviates the problem that no copies of the magazine are now held by American libraries.*]

MURRAY MOORE

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Hurrah for you, Bruce.

Earlier today, during Corflu 35 in Toronto, Bruce Gillespie was announced as the newest recipient of the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award. Bruce alas was in Greensborough or vicinity, and not in Toronto.

This evening I ate in a Swiss Chalet with Corflu's Guest of Honour, Alan Rosenthal, and the 2018 Past President, Fan Writers of America, Taral, and the esteemed Jim Caughran of this parish. Followed by the tossing of twinkies in the Dead Dog party. Just the tip of the iceberg of fun that was had during Corflu 35.

Next year, first weekend of May, Corflu 36 will be in Rockville? Rockland? Rocksomething (it's nearly midnight on Henley Road).

(May 2018)

I galloped through the new *SF Commentary* in an afternoon and an evening. I read every word. Comparing the text to a meal, some of the portions were more nutritious than flavourful, but I ate it all (unlike, I expect, your Stockport correspondent).

The addition of the initials of a degree following your name, additional to BNF and pp fwa (past president, fan writers of america), would be appropriate, considering only your Hugo Award nominations, your Ditmar wins, your Worldcon GoHship, your Chandler and McNamara and Atheling awards, your FAAn awards, and *pant* your Lifetime Achievement FAAn award.

Surely you are qualified, by your record of work and by your achievement, and by your international recognition, for an honorary degree? Hon. Litt.D. (Honorary Doctor of Letters)? Hon. D.A.H. (Honorary Doctor of Arts and Humane Letters)? Hon. IMBTTMF.D. (I Must be Talking To My Friends)?

Ian Nichols and Leigh Edmonds, your degree cheerleaders — set them the task of finding a program in which an issue of *SF Commentary* can be your thesis.

Or perhaps they can find for you a fellowship with an attached six-figure grant. You need to travel, for research, of course; off the top of my head, countries: the United States, the UK, Austria (Franz Rottensteiner), Italy (to visit your Italian correspondent Giampaolo Cossato who only coincidentally lives in Venice); conventions: Worldcon and World Fantasy; and conferences: Readercon and the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts.

As to you instead spending your time scanning your *SF Commentary* opus, I hope not. Obviously, Bruce, your time is best spent writing, and publishing your writing, and publishing the writing of others.

Onward to your 50th Anniversary Issue.

(27 May 2018)

[*brg* Murray, you were the first person to suggest publishing a 50th Anniversary Issue, let alone a Doctorate in IMBTTMF. I enjoyed your tale of my romp through an alternative universe. These days I'm not sure I feel like getting on a plane, let alone visiting all those lifetime friends. I don't even have a current passport.*]

MARK PLUMMER

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Surrey CR0 1ES, England

[*brg* Any idea how many people were actually at Corflu? From the photos, it seems to have been a lot more than were at the last Toronto Corflu, although hardly as many as the one that you, Claire, and I went to in 2005.*]

There were 58 listed members, but 14 of those were supporters and at least 3 no-shows, so I reckon about 43. Some stalwarts — Ted obviously, Andy and Carrie, Jerry and Suzle — and a few more surprising presences such as Joe Siclari and Edie Stern and Mark Olson.

I just checked back to the website for 2005, and they list 96 members, but claim 120 present. It wasn't quite as depressing as I feared, in that I think fewer than half a dozen have died since, but several names there that I haven't seen for a while.

But back to this year: 43 doesn't sound like many but in fact it felt comfortably well attended. Diane Lacey is a local fan, not really a fanzine person *per se*, who ran the con suite complete with hot food, which was welcome. And there were a couple of good drink-tastings: Geri Sullivan's on-program beer tasting with thirty different variants from a local-to-her micro brewery, and Spike's off-program wine tasting, which was where I was when I saw your email. Several of us arrived at the hotel to find

we'd been given upgrades to mini-suites, with a small separate sitting room as well as the bedroom/bathroom, but Rob Jackson actually got a full-on suite, so he offered that for the Spike-led soiree.

Program items weren't that engaging, although Pablo Vasquez had some interesting stories on a panel about SF fandom and political activism. A few nice items in the auction, including some pretty scarce older fanzines and some art items from Mike Glicksohn's collection, donated by Susan Manchester.

Pete Young gets the record for epic trip. He flew in from Thailand via London on Friday, but because of strong winds his plane was rerouted via Detroit, and he didn't arrive until quite late. He then left at the same time as us on Sunday, having been in Toronto for under 48 hours.

You're familiar with the concept of the elephant in the room, the glaringly obvious thing that nobody talks about? I wonder if we need a term for the glaringly obvious thing that *everybody's* talking about. This year of course it was Randy Byers, and so I think I'll encourage the use of the phrase 'Turtle in the Room'.

Your lifetime achievement award was well received, I think. Andy Hooper made the announcement and reeled off a long list of your various publications and fanac, and I think surprised even himself with its extent.

Much as we'd like to be at the ANZAPA 50th Anniversary celebration, I fear there's no prospect of us making it in whatever form it takes. I'm afraid I'd completely missed your warnings of imminent cash shortage in the last mailing until Spike pointed it out (I still haven't read Mailing 301, let alone Mailing 302). Let us know what action we need to take.

(9 May 2018)

STEPHEN CAMPBELL

2 Aitkins Road, Warrnambool VIC 3280

Seeing you and Elaine yesterday was ultra brief, but it was good to thank you personally for the printed copy of *SFC* 96. I have spent the last few days reading and cogitating upon this brain food that your fanzine supplies.

Carol Kewley once again displays a composition of classical proportions offset by a naif application and deceptive simplicity.

Ursula Le Guin has always held a special place in my heart, for her writing contained a spiritual compassion that I found unusual in tales of science fiction, and especially fantasy, where more materialistic notions are explored and more gross emotions are relied upon. Ursula's view of the human condition struck resonance with my own.

Peter Nicholls seems familiar to my memory. Would I have known Peter during those years I was closer to fandom? I seem to recall a dark and dense intelligence that expressed reluctantly.

[*brg* I can't remember Peter ever being reluctant to express himself. He was at Aussiecon in 1975, and then in 1999 and 2010, but I can't remember you attending those conventions.*]

Thank you for Andrew Milner's article on George Turner. I remember George vividly for his sympathy for the proletariat and the downtrodden and his fearlessness in expressing this sympathy in his fictions, SF and not SF.

I found Ray Sinclair-Woods' article 'SF Poetry' the most stimulating piece in this issue. I have read (aloud) and listened to thousands of lines of poetry; not all at once; both modern and ancient classics; unknown pieces by personal companions; and epics (but in translation) by masters — and I have noticed something about poetry can only approach for me. Listening to poetry and its important rhythms can produce in my senses an exaltation that that music does because it is heard through an organ in my head that resonates with sound. The poets are wordsmiths, not just on paper but also in the air itself, and they are bards who use words and rhythms to express a *philos* (truth). e. e. cummings used not just words but also the sounds of vowels and consonants isolated only by rhythm, and his poems somehow contain a resonance of reality. This resonance is an exaltation caused by the truth of beauty, and this beauty is a recognition of truths that can terrify, enchant, puzzle, mystify, and confuse the emotions and even cause you to cry. Poetry tends to be an honest expression that that many lovers of fiction may shy away from. I witnessed a local poetry reading recently. It resurrected my interest in not only reading poetry but also writing it. Ray states: 'just as SF stories are a subgenre of stories in general'. I think SF stories are closer to being a subgenre of poetry, not stories. I also don't believe the moon landing poem by Alex Skovron is an SF poem. There is no fiction involved.

Thanks to Colin Steele for keeping us updated with his thoughtful reviews. *Diary of a Bookseller* was worth reading.

I've loved every Brian Aldiss story I've read, especially *Barefoot in the Head*, which clanged at me as a true impression of those semi-hallucinogenic times when I read it. Do we really believe that LSD development and research no longer exist in this society? Vale, Brian.

The letters of comment in 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends':

To Ray Wood: the impact of a dog being sent in a capsule to outer space (beyond Earth's atmosphere) to test the effects of the experience seems to be a more science-fictional idea than the splitting of the atom, which was just an example of primitive humanity's fascination with big bangs, and not a true enquiry into the nature of the universe, which is where I see science fiction attempting to reach with the same sort of seriousness as philosophy.

I was sorry to hear of the passing of David Lake. I liked him, despite his deep melancholy, and I enjoyed doing the illustrations and covers for Anne and Al's Hyland House edition of his *The Man Who Loved Morlocks*. David goes to a happier place, I hope. For a writer hoping to evoke a previous master, David did a good job, but, as will all sequels, *Morlocks* lacked the original power of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. Wells explored concept, and not just style. As we alienate ourselves further from our humanity with out marriage to our machines and our expectations of behaving with their streamlined efficiency, we find that we are capable of emulating our

inventions with some verisimilitude because we are endlessly adaptable, but I can see the point where our ability to create myth through story-telling will become redundant, to be replaced by our ability to create currency through story-telling, and the truly important messages of story-telling will become lost in seas of data that define what used to be called ideas. Mythology doesn't care about the speed of light; only that light exists and can emanate from anywhere; even from the hands or eyes of higher beings. We used to be a steam engine to be worked and laboured with, and now we become a computer of facts and figures with thought processes that rival those of mythic figures that used to inspire our dreams as children. The twentieth century examined and discarded myth as unnecessary to modern rationalisation or education for the new order of psychological adjustment. The twenty-first century turned myth into data that can be retrieved by the push of a button to activate a program that tells you that Thor is a popular character who features in a series of films made by the Marvel Corporation. The real science fiction world is not the atom bomb or *Sputnik*; it is we humans with our access to more information than perceived by the gods of Olympus, but still not knowing what to do or believe other than what our masters tell us.

Well, reality is only what happens, I suppose, and I thank *SF Commentary* for its part in it; a fact that explores fictions and reminds us of the importance of telling stories.

(7 May 2018)

SFC97: I am privileged to receive not only your excellent fanzine but also my painting gracing its cover. Thank you to David Russell for the idea, and his sister Leanne for the photograph. The original is 5 feet high, but Leanne has managed to capture the detail for use in an A4 format. Thanks, Bruce, for the cover design and inclusion of the title, which is very important to know when viewing the work, much as the title of a book needs to be known before exploring its interior. The image is now owned by you as part of the history of *SF Commentary*. Please use it as you will.

For Rob Gough, a friend in Melbourne, I am working on a painting that has the title *Widow of Ephesus*. That's the title of a play Rob has written, inspired by Satyricon, a play by Petronius and the film that Fellini made from it. This has required a fair bit of research into antiquity, which I have enjoyed.

Colin Steele covers the field with his usual lucidity, and offers more than just precise, and his reviews provide more information than just a mirror of the books. Pierce Brown says in *Iron Gold* 'the inspiring dream of liberty has been hijacked by politicians' and Colin Steele says, 'As noted many times before, SF provides a window into the contemporary world'. It's a grim thing when we recognise the contemporary world in the horrors of science fiction. The establishment of clinical science has not just been in technologies but also in the functions of collective impositions of power, functions that gain in effectiveness as while they shed the humanity that put them there. Thank goodness we have a genre of writing that can point a real finger at reality on a cosmic level as well as at a local level.

Your lists of pleasure treasures always leave me with the feeling that I'm missing out on some wonderful reading, watching, and listening. Jennifer Bryce reviews music as if she were playing it, and we enjoy the tune of her words as she describes the music. Her reviews of books show her care of people and her curiosity about existence.

Douglas Barbour's reviews interested me enough to want to acquire some of the books. *Sevенеves* fascinated me, with its first of hard science of volatile particles, but I could not relate to the seven Eves or their psyches, and could not believe Neal Stephenson's ideas of human growth and development becoming limited to seven ideas.

I'm currently reading *D.O.D.O.* because I like the pace and knowledge of Neal Stephenson, but the complications of establishing a 'startup' in the American fashion (based on truth, I suspect) overwhelmed the fiction of the witches that could transcend time in the past, but could only do it in the present time by using a vast amount of computer power based on the fear that another country was working on the same thing. How does data isolate time?

I'm sorry to hear of the passing of Lucy Zinkiewicz. I seem to remember meeting her many moons ago at one of the conventions. As happened with most of the female fans at that time before empowerment, it was a bit difficult to get into a conversation unless you knew a lot about *Star Trek*. Anything approaching the personal or the romantic was verboten. SF fandom seemed to form a cloister then, with fans as cautious acolytes who came together in the sanctum of a convention to discuss with each other ideas that were either frowned upon or greeted with derision by the mundane world. The children of that world now flock to conventions and exhibitions, not discussing anything much except the latest product to be acquired or the personal life of their favourite writer. A sanctum of ideas has turned into a circus for media consumption and mundane panel discussions flogging dead horses. There is a freedom of speech as long as the speech is mundane and will offend nobody. Life without agitation is numbing. Art without agitation is lifeless. Science fiction is an art enterprise.

Ian Mond's contemplation of *From the Wreck* impels me to read it, and I will.

(21 August 2018)

LLOYD PENNEY

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I have had work since early September 2017, but transit time is close to four hours every day, and work and transit eat up my day, nearly every day. But lately, my part-time job, which had pretty full-time hours, is now very part-time, so I've had a week and a bit off, unwillingly. That goes for tomorrow, too. Well, that doesn't make me much money, but it does allow me to catch up on a huge number of zines, including *SF Commentary* 95.

Some people who may cut communications with you because your zine is no longer a paperzine. It has never mattered to me; communications is the most important

thing here, no matter the medium, Marshall McLuhan notwithstanding. I hope you enjoy your retirement.

[*brg* I'm not sure how I gave the impression that I had retired. I would love to be able to retire from paying work so that I could work on *SFC* and other fanzines. But I still must take on any freelance indexing jobs that are offered to me.*]

Yvonne's retirement party was great, and very well attended. She is happily retired, although she still admits to a little bit of guilt at not going into an office every day. It is tough to kick a 50-plus-year habit. Yet, she is job hunting, in order to keep saving for a planned return trip to England in 2019.

I am still at the mines. I am working for a mystery shopper company, editing the reports that come in so the company's clients can better understand the horrible English most of our shoppers have. I usually have a pile of reports to work on, but not lately, not entirely sure why. If I am worried, I am sure my bosses are. In the meantime, Yvonne's savings and investments should keep us going for some time, and what little I have been able to save up in my own spotty employment history will serve as a much-needed supplement when I retire in about seven years.

As I go through many zines, there is the theme of lost friends. *Ansible* has huge lists of lost contributors to our SFnal interests each issue, and it is depressing. It certainly depresses Dave Langford. Randy and Milt, Tom Petty, Brian Aldiss. Losing folks like Joyce Katz, Milt Stevens, Ursula K. Le Guin, Randy Byers, and so many others does get depressing.

Brian Aldiss — just one of many I wish I'd met. We recently weeded our book collection, and all the Aldiss books stayed right where they are. Too much enjoyed to be consigned elsewhere. Fortunately for us, there is a chain of stores in Toronto that will buy our unwanted books. We assembled 10 boxes of books, and got \$100 for them all. Not as much as we had hoped for, but they are books I will probably not miss, I suspect.

Well done to Bill Wright! Bill, new issues of *IRS* are much missed.

Martian fiction has its days, and may yet have it again. I think I read a little while ago that Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Mars' trilogy (*Red Mars*, *Green Mars*, and *Blue Mars*) was sold for a mini-series. That always raises hopes that the story line won't be too heavily sacrificed, but we shall see. I have a copy of *Beren and Lúthien* at home, a wondrous last and fresh look inside the world of Middle-Earth.

I certainly agree with Doug Barbour about *The Murdoch Mysteries* — it's quite enjoyable, the plots do make you think, and the bit of anachronism here and there makes us smile. This program is now on its eleventh season.

(4 February 2018)

Yvonne and I celebrated our 35th anniversary, I marked my 59th birthday, and we had a very lucrative weekend a few weekends ago, hawking our wares.

More tributes to those we have lost lately. I am sure there are cases of survivors' guilt out there somewhere.

And now, we must add to that list the loss of Gardner Dozois, a grand editor and author, and party animal. Also, just a day or two ago, the sudden passing of Lucy Zinkiewicz, and my condolences on Australian fans who knew her. I remember Peter Nicholls' passing, but didn't react, having not seen the *SF Encyclopedia*; and of course, the passing of Steven Hawking. We plan to return to England in 2019, and pay our respects to him.

Congratulations again on the Ditmar Award, and on your Lifetime Achievement Award from Corflu. I finally did get the chance to attend another one of those conventions, although I doubt there will be any more for me. Still, it is great to be there and participate a little.

I had the pleasure of meeting up with and chatting with Pete Young while we both attended Corflu in Toronto just last month. That's dedication, for him to travel all the way from Thailand to go to a fanzine convention here. It's possible that Pete may have been responsible for my own ISFDb listing, which is substantially bigger than last time I saw it some years ago. I will admit that what is listed is probably only 10 to 15 per cent of what I've actually had published over the years. I certainly haven't kept track of what I've had published, but I can say that I have ready access to any locs I've written over the past 20 years, which may total about 4000 to 4500 letters or so.

To judge from the description of Chris Beckett's novel *America City*, it may not be science fiction for every much longer. The heads of the G7 countries are meeting in Quebec City as I type, and the US president has already insulted our PM and the French PM, stating that he will not be working as closely with American allied countries in the future, is demanding that Russia be reinstated to the G7, and will be leaving the summit early so that he can avoid any discussions of global climate change. He is also making renegotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement very difficult. That novel may be more history book than near-future writing.

I still want to get my hands on Pullman's *The Book of Dust*. I so much enjoyed the movie *The Golden Compass*, and I had hopes for sequels, but I was disappointed. Now, I read that the BBC will be making the *His Dark Materials* books into a mini-series, which is where I think all will be treated better. I look forward to that series.

Yvonne is away at a costuming seminar today, as she is the newest member of CAFTCAD, the Canadian Alliance of Film & Television Costume Arts & Design. In her earlier years, she'd often compete in convention masquerades, and would make costumes for others, but now that she is retired, she's stepping up her game, and joining the pro costumers in local film and TV, and seeing if she can make her mark there. I wouldn't put it past her.

(9 June 2018)

Thank you for *SF Commentary* 97.

Congratulations on your awards this year! Well deserved. I was lucky enough to be the audience when Corflu awarded you the Lifetime Achievement Award. It was a nice gathering of fans there, but the only reason I was there is that it was local. I doubt I will go to more.

And, congratulations to Edwina Harvey on her Chandler Award. A. Bertram Chandler was one of many

authors I wanted to meet, but was either too poor or too far away to go and see. Edwina, I don't think we'd ever met, but I knew of your name in our own *Star Trek* Welcommttee days. I produced a list of *Star Trek* books that made the *STW Yellow Pages* a financial nightmare to produce. Yvonne was the French-language Welcommttee rep, in case anything came in to Shirley Maiewski in French.

I hate the fact that many zines I get, especially newszines, there are so many reports of the passings of our friends and heroes in the science fiction industry we are all involved in. I never met Ellison either, although I did see him grope Connie Willis at the last LA Worldcon's Hugos. There's so much positive and negative about him, so all I will say is that of all of his writings, I enjoyed every word.

The Catherine Gallagher book on alternate histories: I admit I haven't enjoyed them in the past because the tales were mostly military in nature, but I am assured of the purpose of the tales, to tell a good story. Unfortunately, these days, there are so many people who are attempting to rewrite history, and so few people with the smarts to resist this rewriting; we need to know our histories, and resist any politically motivated retelling.

I did not know about Brian Aldiss' book on the passing of his wife. May we all have the presence of mind to be calm and accepting when our spouses pass, as they eventually will. A depressing thought, but I think the calm acceptance that it will happen is the first step in dealing with that harsh idea.

I think I have met Madeleine Ashby once, but she is married to SF author David Nickle, who also happens to be the lead reporter with the local *Etobicoke Guardian* newspaper.

We've been busy all summer with shows that allow us to sell steampunk jewelry and Hawaiian-style shirts, and make some money as we enjoy the day or weekend. It's what we can afford these days. Because I can't seem to find work, Yvonne has gone to back to work, in the accounting department of the casino and racetrack complex to the north of us.

To finish all this up, I've just learned of the passing of Gary Kurtz, one of the producers of *Star Wars*, of cancer at age 78. Another name that comprises our personal fandoms has gone away.

Happy 50th anniversary in advance!

(24 September 2018)

JOHN HERTZ

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Congratulations on your Ditmar Award and Lifetime Achievement FAAn Award. The span of 46 years between your first and most recent Ditmars also represents a feat, in the applause for which I join with gratitude.

[*brg* If you check any list of the Ditmar awards, I think you'll find that my magazines have won quite a few during the last 47 years. But it was amazing to win in 2018 a Ditmar for a real print fanzine. Most winners of 'Best Fan Production' during the

last ten years have been blogs or podcasts.*]

I'd not say the productions overwhelming the fan-category Hugos have been dominant. I've exclaimed e.g. in *Banana Wings*, that we have been making ourselves recessive. We don't nominate, and then the ballot is sad. Perhaps tragic. I've said we, spade in hand, cry 'Why doesn't that hole get dug?' People boast they don't nominate; angels and ministers of grace defend us. Similar work has been overwhelming the fan-category Ditmars; I haven't seen nomination statistics: your most recent Ditmar is encouraging for that reason too.

I haven't seen the 2006 *Annotated Archy and Mehitabel* (M. Sims ed.) and don't know if it or anything is fuller than *the lives and times* (1940). I have naturally, but thank Roscoe not unstopably, been putting off this letter to look harder.

People seem to keep thinking More meant *Utopia* (1516) to portray an ideal world. Yet I find even *Wikipedia* perceives it's a satire. He indeed entitles it 'Of a republic's best state', but if we take that at face value we're down the primrose path.

If you use 'google' as a verb, and I'm not sure you should — it may well be you have the power but not the right to do that — at least capitalise it. Then there's 'attendees' for 'attenders', grr.

By custom of the LASFS (LA SF Society) a little money is raised by auctioning the privilege of naming the previous meeting's minutes. For the minutes noting the loss of Ursula Le Guin (d. 22 Jan 18), I won the auction, and named them 'Ged'. Still it would be hard for me to call her 'Earthsea' novels the best in fantasy. That would place her above Tolkien — or do you join my only-half-in-jest theory that *The Lord of the Rings* is science fiction about lost technology (think how the Elves answer 'Are these magic cloaks?', bk. 2, ch. vii)? I like the photo of her on the back of *The Altered I*.

[*brg* I'm a prickly customer when it comes to reading fantasy. I first read *The Lord of the Rings* when I was 27, not 17 or 7, and didn't much like the mock-heroic style and sheer endlessness of the whole thing. I would have enjoyed *LotR* a lot better if Tolkien had written it in the take-no-prisoners style of the Icelandic epics. I grant that Le Guin does adopt some of Tolkien's approach to language in the 'Earthsea' books, but at least she knew the story-value of compression. *The Farthest Shore* is still my favourite fantasy novel, although Alan Garner's novels and some of Peter Beagle's short stories are clawing at its feet. John Crowley's *Little Big* has been promoted as the best fantasy novel. Sentence by sentence, it is astonishing, but I took a dislike to the story itself. I'm way behind reading Crowley's novels, and expect to find one of his later novels that can be compared to Le Guin, Beagle, or Garner.*]

Randy Byers' photo 'King-Size Pine Cones' is superb.

This 'relevance', as it's come to be used, is a lot of primrose. Pushing people off the path, Nabokov used to say the worst thing a reader can do is identify with a character in a story. Rabbi Leo Baeck said 'The

command in Leviticus, which Akiba (lived 50–150; in English ‘Akiva’ and ‘Akiba’ both appear) called the determining sentence of the Bible, and which is usually rendered ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’ (Lev. 19:18), means in its truest sense, ‘Love thy neighbour for he is as thou’ (*The Essence of Judaism* (2nd Shocken pr. 1965, p. 191). I’ve dared to suggest, ‘Love your neighbours for they are not as you.’ Forming acquaintance with something one doesn’t know is a pillar of civilisation.

I’d missed Trevor Quachri’s saying he liked Dryden, Pope, and Johnson. Now that deserves three cheers — not least because these three great writers of a few centuries ago are so alien today. Thanks much for Ray Sinclair-Wood’s essay on poetry. Look, another Don A. Stuart!

(20 June 2018)

CASEY WOLF

[New address]

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How long has it been since I announced my new home? Six days? Well — surprise! I’m moving somewhere else.

I had some regrets about the new place, mixed in with the relief and happiness I felt at finally putting my search to rest. I was happy about the mountains, and the sky, and the light. I loved the people at Anavets, Beth especially, who runs the office, and Ruby, her boss, but even the residents seemed sweet to me. I was thrilled that I could have an animal, if I chose to. But the size of the place was yet smaller than my own, with no balcony or patio, no garden, and reduced privacy. I was ready to make that compromise, and knew I could be happy there, but I was sad to say goodbye to my plants and the ability to fling open my door and just be outside. (There is only a small window to open there, though there is a larger non-opening window.)

I was very unexpectedly offered an apartment at the place I have been going back to every two or three months, pestering the manager and over time discovering what a lovely woman she is. The new place is a small one-bedroom, with lots of cupboard and closet space, more privacy, spacious kitchen and bathroom (compared to most you’ll find in tiny apartments, that is), a patio, and my own private garden. It is run by an Italian organisation and is reminiscent of the Roman villas, with a courtyard in the centre — not a paved, desolate courtyard, but a grassy, treed yard with a small gazebo for barbecues and vegetable plots for the residents. And it is joined to an extended-care home, so once we get too rickety to take care of ourselves, we can move next door and not be separated entirely from our homes once more.

Before I left Erminia, I gathered my courage and asked if there might be a place there where I could plant my magnolia, because I didn’t want to leave it behind to be mowed over when the building comes down. She was very understanding that I might want to keep this friend nearby, and said we would try to fit it in outside my place, and if not, in the central yard!

I am astonished. Shocked and gobsmacked and

shaken and thrilled. There is only one sad note: no pets. I hadn’t decided that I would get an animal, but I had a very good cry as I contemplated never ever having one again. I am lucky that I get to walk Juniper, Susan’s dog. And that I get a cuddle now and then from Joani’s kitty.

Life continues to amaze me. I cannot believe I have obtained such a beautiful home. There is artwork in the hallways! And I’m halfway to making my first friend there — Dee, the woman whose place I will be taking. She is moving down the hall to a larger, more mobility-impaired-friendly apartment.

It has been an exhausting, horribly frightening two years (minus a month) since I first learned our building had been sold. I have hit the depths on more than one occasion as I considered the housing situation in Vancouver and how unlikely it would be that I would end up somewhere I really liked. But I held out, and now I have three apartments in my possession, two of which I am in the process of giving up. (*That* was one of the hardest phone calls I’ve ever made — to tell Beth, the wonderful, welcoming woman who rented me that lovely tiny home, that although I haven’t even entirely moved in yet, I’m moving out.)

They say you should count your blessings. I have been doing that a lot today. An unbelievable number of wonderful things are stuffed into my own little, shivery life. For that I give enormous thanks.

(6 July 2018)

JEFF HAMILL

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You don’t need to send me print copies of anything; just let me know when a PDF is available. We will probably have to move to a less expensive house in a few years, and the thought of moving all our books (Agnes and I between us have about 30 bookcases, plus another 30 storage boxes of books alone) makes me slightly ill. I imagine that many fans have far more, but in the last few years, as Agnes’s retirement looms ever closer, we realise that we won’t be able to afford the Seattle property taxes. Unfortunately — or fortunately, depending on how you look at it — a large percentage of our books are art books, or fashion history books, or books with wonderful illustrations (which includes many books reprinting old comics), etc. etc. — and none of them is quite the same on an iPad.

Based on the review in *SFC* 95, I read William K. Hartmann’s *Mars Underground*, which I liked. (I didn’t love it, but I liked it.) I plan to read Brian Aldiss’s *Hothouse* next, based on your recommendation. Right now I am about halfway through the collection *Red Star Tales: A Century of Russian and Soviet Science Fiction*, which I have been slowly ploughing through during the course of months.

Other than that, life is much the same for us. Agnes is still into historical costume; she goes to ‘period’ events (including meetings of the Jane Austen Society of North America); she still works for the University of Washington, maintaining the prostate cancer database. Unfortunately, the school where she taught the history

of fashion has closed, and I know she will miss the teaching.

I still do a lot of volunteer graphics work for Pathfinder Press (the publishing house of the Socialist Workers Party), plus my own side projects. A few days ago I found a PDF of *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism — Selected Writings by Marx, Engels, and Lenin*, but the PDF was made from a quickie scan job, so I separated out the images and I am cleaning them up in Photoshop; in a week or two I will have made a new PDF that will be much more readable.

Agnes and I did take one interesting trip recently — we went to a destination wedding in Isla Mujeres, off the coast of Cancún, Mexico. Since we both grew up in Tucson, we had long hoped to go travelling in Mexico together to see museums and eat tasty food. (Agnes is also fluent in Spanish, which helps. I can sort of follow a conversation.) This wasn't that trip, but it made us a little more serious about planning to go on our own someday.

(25 June 2018)

JOHN-HENRI HOLMBERG
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I'm belong to the movie lovers school, and have periodically reviewed movies in professional publications, though never in newspapers. Still, for two or three years in the early 1970s, and again for a while in the early 1980s, when recognised reviewers were issued 'passe-partout' cards valid at all cinemas in Stockholm, I saw virtually every film in general release. I believe that used to come to around 300 a year, but you could generally see three or four in a single day once or twice weekly. I can't say I retain all that much from this absurd wallowing, but I've probably kept up seeing around a hundred movies every year, though probably not more than a fifth of them in theatres. The last two in theatres were both last week, however, one a disappointing Swedish movie, the other one the British *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*, which was a worse disappointment, since I expect little from most Swedish films and considerably more from British films, particularly if directed by Mike Newell.

As for favourite SF films, the titles I give do vary over time, but when called on to list a number, the ones invariably ending up on the list include:

- Kubrick's *2001* and *A Clockwork Orange*
- Villeneuve's *Arrival*
- Scott's *Alien*
- Tarkovsky's *Solaris*
- Cronenberg's *The Fly*
- Gilliam's *Twelve Monkeys*
- Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*
- Zemecki's *Contact*
- Depending on how classically minded I feel, there is usually either Lang's *Metropolis* and/or Whale's *Frankenstein*.

(26 June 2018)

DAMIEN BRODERICK
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Thanks for the coverage of some of my recent books, but this is misleading:

[*brg* Damien sent me a complete Bibliography of his works up to the end of 2015. And now there are many more items published in 2016 , 2017, and the first months of 2018. You could check the complete list at the Wikipedia entry on Damien Broderick.*]

I have no idea who or what the *International Science Fiction Database* is, but it is several times wrong. The best place for accuracy is my Wikipedia entry, which is kept up to date.

- *The Physics of PSI: Science of the Paranormal* (ed. with Ben Goertzel) McFarland, 2015
Actual title: *Evidence for PSI: Thirteen Empirical Research Reports* (ed. with Ben Goertzel), McFarland, 2015.
- *Running on Empty? The Problem of Philosophical Progress* (ed. with Russell Blackford). In preparation.
Actual title: *Philosophy's future: The Problem of Philosophical Progress* (ed. with Russell Blackford), Wiley Blackwell, 2017.
- *Pscience Fiction: The Paranormal in Science Fiction Literature*, 2017.
Actual title: *Pscience Fiction: The Paranormal in Science Fiction Literature*, McFarland, 2018 [several months ago].
- And since then, but not yet available, a book I was commissioned to do for Springer, and which I delivered last week: *Consciousness and Science Fiction* [no subtitle as yet].

(9 July 2018)

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

I hope my letter got to you. I am enclosing a couple of pictures of the San Marco area. One was reproduced on paper inside the letter I sent you (Procuratie Nuove). The second, equally void of tourists (but not of their keepsakes on the pavement) shows the arches underneath one side of the Doge's Palace.

I have added two pictures of myself wading the 29 October tide. It happened in concomitance with a hurricane that devastated ample swaths of territory in northern Italy, razing to the ground entire forests. By comparison, the damage Venice suffered was absolutely minor. But of course, according to the clever man (no connection with what follows) in the White House, who considers himself a genius to boot, climate change is only a plot concocted by the nasty Chinese and their 'minions' (the rest of the world, practically).

[*brg* I've searched through my files, but I can't find the photos of you wading the tide. I don't even remember receiving them in the envelope you sent



me. However, here is your photo of the arches underneath one side of the Doge's Palace.*]

About the Donald. I came across an episode of *Barney Miller*, Season 6: *Vanished*, Part 2 (17 January 1980). Very uncanny. It is about a 'gentleman', Alfred Royce (played by Leonard Frey), who get arrested while robbing a supermarket with the intent to finance his presidential campaign. Here is part of his pitch (or speech if you like) while he is interrogated by Barney Miller.

'I'm offering people the opportunity to change their destinies to save this society before it destroys itself.'

'Uh, Captain this is Alfred Royce; caught him in the middle of holding up Arlo's Market.'

'I'm trying to work within the system but I had to do something to raise the money.'

'For what?'

'For my campaign.'

'Oh, you're running for president, too?'

'Hope I can count on your support.'

He cleaned out the cash register, then forced the people in the store to make voluntary contributions at gun point.

'I'm trying to qualify for matching funds. Have you any idea what a minute of network television goes for these days? Not to mention the cost of office space, political literature; oh, here, please take this — [He takes out some pamphlets from his pocket] posters, buttons, and don't even talk to me about hats and balloons. So I just walked into a market and held it up. It's tough to compete. I mean, I don't have a rich family like some people, or a rock-star girlfriend, or prematurely orange hair to grab attention. I'm not a crackpot, captain. I have valuable solutions to the critical problems confronting this nation.'

He hands a pamphlet to the captain.

'It's all in there. Do you like my slogan?: Alfred Royce, The People's Candidate.'

Perhaps he would have been a better candidate than the sitting one at the moment.

A further reference to the Great T. appears 9 December 1997 in the episode *Sweet Charity*, in which a fictitious Jack Gallo (played by George Segal) calls Donald Trump to tell him that he, Jack, has won the prize as Humanitarian of the Year, following with the expression 'Kick my ass', expressing it not only verbally after having meted out a generous cheque to a Foundation for Children. The image that follows is accompanied by the words, 'This one is for Trump'.

I have worked out a small site to celebrate the works of my wife Agnes. It might not be perfect but it should be visible even on a smart phone — <http://agnes.madeinveneto.it> — and if you want to see the state of some area at the margin of the Venice's Lagoon, here is a link to a YouTube short documentary on the subject (English version; I spare you the one in Venetian) put together by a cousin of mine: <https://youtu.be/qg4bCoVjLzs>

(14 December 2018)

About Harlan Ellison: in an exchange of letters at the beginning of the 1970s I described him as 'a revolutionary figure'. And I still think that, at the time, he really was. As you can see from the enclosed, *Again Dangerous Visions* was just in the making. At the end of the letter he says what he thought of my definition.

Will Venice sink because of the water or the weight of the rubbish the tourists leave behind? We have a very efficient system that allows the trash to be collected

To answer your questions briefly, I am currently putting the finishing touches on a companion volume to DANGEROUS VISIONS titled AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS. It will be published in late 1970 and will be followed in mid-1971 by the final book in the trilogy, THE LAST DANGEROUS VISIONS. These latter two volumes will contain only authors who did not appear in DANGEROUS VISIONS. The total wordage of the three books should approach three-quarters of a million words by close to one hundred authors.

I do not anticipate being in Europe for the Heicon. The schedule of work I've laid out for myself this year seems to prohibit any such pleasant excursion, though I would wish it otherwise. As for my being a "revolutionary figure," I am reminded of the manner in which such revolutionary figures as Che Guevara, Malcolm X, Joan of Arc and the Chicago 8 ended up, and I'm not so sure I like the title.

Best wishes,


HARLAN ELLISON

separately for recycling and generally the Venetians are abiding to it, but the tourists (both foreigners and Italians) do not care much. And transport in Venice is a challenge compared to other places: 53,000 inhabitants against an even larger number of tourists every day.

As for the now infamous 'Mose', which should stop the tides with its giant flap gates: it will probably be useless by the time it becomes operational. Its construction has been going on since 2003 among a flurry of scandals about money being pocketed by some of the very unscrupulous administrators. The completion date has now been moved to 2022, but most Venetians to not believe is going to happen, and so do I.

In the 50th Anniversary Issue you could tell how it all started, what moved you to do it, how and by whom you were encouraged to pursue the task with the modest means at your disposal. It might seem banal in this age where everything is done by few keystrokes or even by words spoken to a computer (Alexa and Siri at your command?) but such a story told to the 'newborn (so to speak) might have a sort of quaint appeal.

[*brg* In the editorial 'What's a few decades among friends?' in *SFC* 98, I have done my best to write the account that you asked for. Not as ambitious as the project suggested by John Litchen, but perhaps just as informative.*]

Netflix is doing a lot of saving these days (Amazon too with *The Expanse*, after SyFy had it canceled) and they pick up many productions from a variety of countries (also Italy, for that matter, with the recent *My Brilliant Friend* subtitled in English but spoken in Italian and Neapolitan). Somebody should tell them about *Cleverman*.

As for the passing of time, I feel the same way. In less than a week my daughter will be 42 and I wonder how we got there.

(31 December 2018)

RAY WOOD
PO Box 188, Quorn SA 5433

I've not thanked you before for sending *SFC* 96 is because I've just been through a nightmare seven weeks of trying to get on NBN, and haven't had any Internet or home telephone all that time. Three visits by technicians, five modems later, I've finally got my Internet and phone back again.

(29 May 2018)

PATRICK MCGUIRE
7541-D Weather Worn Way,
Columbia MD 21046, USA

Ray Wood has a decade or so on me. I remember *Sputnik* and the early reaction well, and I even remember my very young self congratulating myself on having been interested in SF and in space travel before that event, unlike all these late-comers. However, I have to rely on written sources for the atomic bomb, which was before my time.

There is considerable evidence that in the US and the UK the atomic bomb went a long way toward making SF more respectable with the public.

(Although post hoc does not always mean propter hoc, it is suggestive that soon after World War II major publishers started establishing SF lines and there was a boom in SF movies, which latter required a mass audience to break even financially.) I'm not sure how much of that evidence I will manage to dredge up by the time I get my loc written, but we shall see.

I of course have little knowledge of what may have been happening in Australia at the time. Conceivably the impact was less than in the UK, despite the prominence of UK publishers there. As I said in my loc, in contrast to at least much of the West, *Sputnik* did play an important role in making sf more respectable in the Soviet Union and probably elsewhere in Communist countries.

(9 May 2018)

Feature letters

Gerald Murnane: Breakthrough at the age of 79

[*brg* We readers of Gerald Murnane's books knew his work would be recognised ... eventually. For 45 years he had nearly won a few literary prizes, had never been nominated for the Miles Franklin Award, and had been published overseas only occasionally. Worse, Gerald had been afflicted with a major, painful health threat several years ago, but he regained his health during 2018. His publisher Giramondo Books (Ivor Indyk and staff) have stuck with his books for some years, and Text Publishing of Melbourne has been reprinting many of his major early books.

Recognition came very quickly. Some Australian academics organised a conference about Gerald's work in Goroke, the small western Victorian town where he lives. Gerald's US publisher took up his work with gusto, which led to some major reviews of his work in the *New York Review of Books*. This led to a *New York Times* journalist travelling from New York to Goroke to interview Gerald. The resulting article suggested that Gerald could be a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, and also gave readers an idea of what it is like to meet Gerald.

During 2018, Gerald spoke at several events I could not attend, including the launch of an LP that Chris Gregory produced. Gerald reads his own work and that of some of his favourite poets.

And then ... Gerald's *Border Districts* (discussed in *SFC* 96) was nominated for the 2018 Miles Franklin Award, but didn't win, but did win the 2018 Prime Minister's Award for Fiction.

And then ... Mark Rubbo, of Reading's Books in Carlton, Melbourne, who has supported Gerald's work ever since he began publishing in 1970s, held an event for Gerald's birthday on 28 February 2019 at the Church of All Nations, including a lively interview between Gerald and Jason Steger, literary editor of Melbourne's *Age* newspaper, and offering an opportunity to his readers to buy signed editions of Gerald's latest two books, *A Season on Earth* (Text publishing) (the complete version of *A Lifetime on Clouds*, which was cut in half when it was first published in 1976), and *Green Shadows* (Giramondo), Gerald's first book of poetry.

None of the 300–400 people who had turned up to the event was allowed to talk to Gerald, who left the building as fast as possible at the end. However, I did introduce myself to Ivor Indyk, of Giramondo. We were reminiscing about our favourite Murnane pieces of fiction, especially 'The Battle of Acosta Nu' (part of *Landscape with*

Landscape, which Norstrilia Press published), when Gerald's son Gavin said hello to me and Ivor, and told us of the events that had led to the writing of the story. It was great to catch up with Gavin. When he and Martin and Giles were boys, they visited our place in Collingwood a couple of times — but that was many years ago.

For a person celebrating his eightieth birthday, Gerald looked every bit of 60 years old. Goroke and golf and retiring from writing have led to a very healthy lifestyle.*]

GERALD MURNANE

PO Box 40, Goroke VIC 3412

You asked me about the Goroke Conference, as it's called now. I found my own speech and listened to it/watched it. I suppose the other speeches are out there somewhere, but I can't tell you where to find them. I use the net to listen to a few of my favourite bits of music and to learn racing results but for little else. I feel faint and weak when I peep, as I occasionally do, into the vast mass of stuff about myself and my books. I'm told Facebook and Twitter teem with stuff about me. That's OK. I'm not complaining. But I don't want to know about it. If this had happened to me during my writing years, I would have given up writing for fear of disappointing my fans or I would have turned into a Thomas Keneally and mouthed off about things that are none of my business.

Chris Gregory has made a record of me reciting stuff and reading a 1600-word palindrome that I wrote years ago. He tells me nearly a thousand people have heard it on ... I can't finish this sentence. Was it Facebook or Twitter or some other weirdly named network?

All I want to do is enjoy the peace of Goroke during the last part of my life. But I let intruders in. *The Seven Thirty Report*, whatever that is, is sending a producer and a cameraperson to Goroke soon to film the nine-day-wonder that I've become. I just hope book sales are boosted.

My bladder is definitely recovering. My average bout of sleep is now 90 minutes as compared to 50 minutes a few months ago. My general health is excellent. I've begun yet another book: *Must I Write? The Scrapbook of Gerald Murnane*. I'm the co-author only. Kate James, my former student, is working with me. We're compiling a very short collage from my lecture notes of old. There'll be comments from me and her, but all brief. Ivor Indyk has said he's very interested.

It's time for my daily fiddle practice. It cheers me more than all the hubbub in cyberspace. (11 April

2018)

As you know, I've been recently the subject of a long article in *The New York Times* Sunday magazine and of a brief segment in an evening program on ABC television.

Both of these achievements, so to call them, but especially the few minutes of TV coverage, have caused me to receive letters from many persons unknown to me and a few who knew me long ago but later lost touch. A few of the letter-writers have been loners and losers eager to think of me as one of them, but most have been sane and thoughtful well-wishers. And yet even most of these have surprised me by seeming to think that my recent publicity, and especially the TV appearance, are the culmination of my life's work: as though I drove myself for sixty years as a part-time writer in my evenings and during my weekends not to have sixteen books published but to see my name in the *New York Times* and to get seven minutes of air-time on the ABC.

(17 May 2018)

A talented and enterprising man named Chris Gregory is soon to release, as they say, a vinyl disc with sounds of my reciting in English and Hungarian and also reciting my palindrome of 1600 words DO GOOD, DOG-GOD! DO, O GOD!

Chris tells me that the disc will be launched at a brief function in Readings, St Kilda, on Thursday, 14 June, at 6.30 p.m.

(18 May 2018)

The best result of all the publicity is that the books are walking out of the warehouses every day. Michael Heyward of Text told me that the day after my brief sighting on the ABC's *Seven Thirty Report*, about 500 copies of my titles were sent to bookshops. And just this morning someone texted me a picture of *Border Districts* on display in a New York bookshop with a sign displaying a quote from the *New York Times* article ... something about me and the Nobel. And one last blast of the self-promotional trumpet: google WHEELER CENTRE EVENTS GERALD MURNANE.

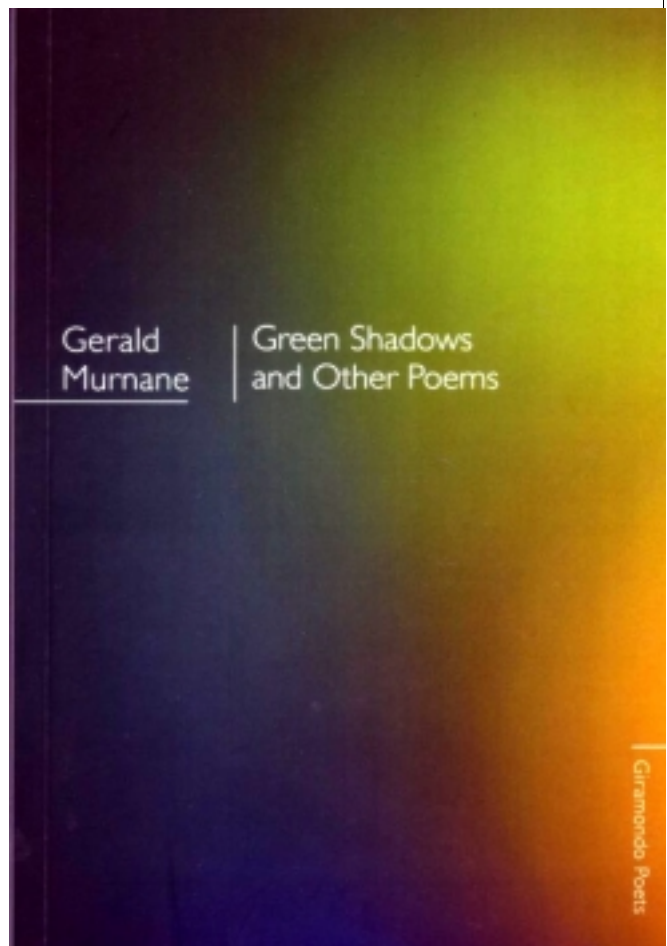
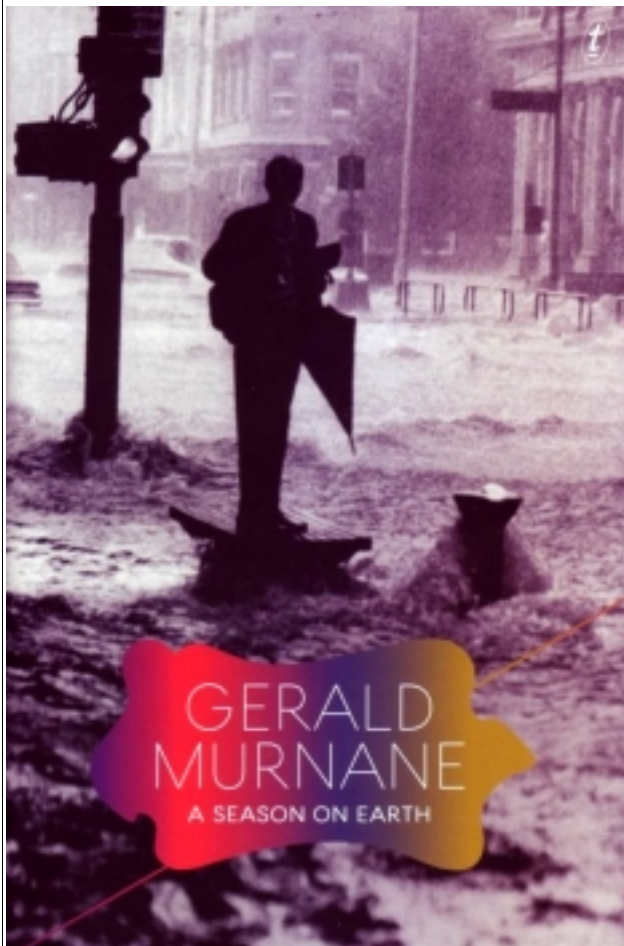
I received yesterday in the post the first chapter of a book on my work by an Irishman named Brendan McNamee, who lives in County Donegal. I don't normally relish critical writing about myself but I was much taken by his chapter. He sees me as a mystic of sorts. I don't object.

In our wildest dreams, we never foresaw anything like this when we set out to publish *The Plains* in 1981–82 — we being the Norstrilia Press men and myself. Poor old George Braziller in New York foresaw something of the sort but was badly disappointed.

Eighteen months after my bladder was subjected to a scorched earth policy, I am returning to something like my usual good health ... shouldn't suggest that my health failed ... it was an injury.

I use in letters now the style of punctuation that I use in text messages. I text now far more than I write.

An ex-student and I did a sample chapter for a book of quotes and short passages from my lecture notes. Ivor Indyk might have persuaded us to keep going if he had



been a bit keener on the project, but my collaborator and I scrapped it, she to write a book of her own and I to rest for ever more from the task that has occupied me on and off for nearly sixty years.

I go to Melbourne much less often nowadays. Next social trip may be in late November.

(11 September 2018)

Yes, I won the Prime Minister's Thing, and I deserved it, but I find it strange that much better books than *Border Districts* never even made it to short lists. Do Australians still have to wait until their writers get noticed in the USA or the UK before they get praised in their own country? Everything turned around a few years ago when that piece by Coetzee appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, and the tide became a tsunami when that piece by Mark Binelli came out in the *New York Times*. I'm not complaining.

I made a vow several years ago never to leave Victoria again, prizes or no prizes. However, a much younger friend of mine, whom I had never met, persuaded me that she and I could make the trip together in a hire car. She flew from Brisbane, picked up the car in Melbourne, and met me in Horsham. Our timetable was gruelling, and we fell behind from the first. On our first night, I couldn't sleep for worrying about the crazy drive ahead of us. This was in a motel in St Arnaud. My companion was all for going on, but next morning I aborted the mission and I spent the day showing her around Bendigo. I was told later that my many fans at the presentation would have been disappointed if I had

turned up.

A big event is planned for 28 February to celebrate my 80th birthday and the launch of my last two books: *Green Shadows and Other Poems* and *A Season on Earth*, a Text hardcover of the four sections of which *A Lifetime on Clouds* comprised the first two. The 'big event' is in the Church of All Nations in Carlton and organised by Readings.

Life remains hectic. I stopped writing nearly three years ago — except for the archives — and wouldn't have time for it now, even if I had the urge.

I'm in remission from my cancer and fit and well.

(2 January 2019)

Your Fiftieth Anniversary edition has just been filed in the current drawer of my Chronological Archive, which now comprises tewetny-seven such drawers. I read with much interest the story of Norstrilia Press and changed from '1973' to '1974' the date of the first publication of *Tamarisk Row*.

Your magazine is as old as Giles and a year older than my twin sons. All four are a credit to their progenitors. I have written not a world of prose fiction or poetry for more than three years, nor have I plans to do so. I do, however, write occasional brief essays for the Chronological Archive and I often transcribe for that archive some or another text message. A few months ago I was receiving six or seven fan letters weekly. These have almost ceased, and I'm becoming again the recluse I'm reputed to be.

(9 May 2019)

Mars and beyond: Patrick McGuire, John Litchen, and Greg Benford

PATRICK MCGUIRE (Address already given)

SFC95: I ordered *Mars Underground* via interlibrary loan. I did, with some effort, manage to finish it, which is more than I have managed with some other books, but I cannot share John Litchen's strong admiration for the novel. To my mind, it had no really likable characters, and a mainstream-style plot involving a love quadrangle centring on a woman with sexual attitudes that would have been classed as decidedly 'advanced' in the 1920s, rather less so by publication in 1997, and a little less today. Thus I think her psychology is much more a thing of the present than an science-fictional depiction of the psychology of a woman of the future. There is also, as John intimated in his article, a plot twist involving obsessive security services, which (as I said in my earlier letter of comment) is a sad cliché. It probably has been over-used for at least half a century (or for thirty-plus years as of when *Mars Underground* was actually published). Hartmann does get points for making the security services at least a bit less paranoid than in many other novels.

Spoiler: Oh, and we have the cliché that the author can think of nothing better to power the plot resolution than an ancient alien artifact that Upon Being Excavated Sends a Message, Presumably to Its Mysterious Makers.

If that were not all bad enough, Hartmann could not even respect his own work enough to make its beginning consistent with the end. In the prologue, Carter contacts Annie Pohaka by sending her, at great expense, an interplanetary handwritten snailmail letter. In the epilogue, with respect to the same letter, he had contacted her by email and it is she who responds via snailmail. There is more wordage about all of this near the end, so I would imagine the prologue represents an earlier version that should have been updated. But it remains uncorrected in the Kindle sample of the ebook as it is on sale today, so Hartmann evidently did not even bother to make the correction after first publication, nor at any time in the intervening twenty years.

The background to all of this is a fairly plausible if somewhat optimistic picture of the establishment of a Mars colony for scientific research, slow terraforming, and a little tourism. Evidently some big names (Arthur C. Clarke, Buzz Aldrin, and others) found this back-

ground so interesting that they were willing to supply blurbs for the book.

I did come away with the impression that perhaps, to his credit, Hartmann would do better at nonfiction than fiction, and I requested via inter-library loan his book on early Spanish exploration of what is now the US Southwest.

That just arrived at my local library branch, but I intend to pick it up soon. (The author's Southwest connections may be why *Mars Underground* carries a blurb from mystery writer Tony Hillerman.)

(22 March 2018)

[*brg* to John Litchen:] I thought you might enjoy Patrick McGuire's letter of comment about one of the Mars books you discussed in your articles.*]

JOHN LITCHEN (Address already given)

As I have said elsewhere in the text published in *SF Commentary*, I read a story primarily for enjoyment, taking into account the time it was written and the things in the story that perhaps date it. By ignoring those minor things the real story emerges. I also said that everyone who reads the same books will have a different opinion, and that's fine. Looking at the prologue and the epilogue of *Mars Underground*, I see that Carter writes in the epilogue a real letter to Annie. I suspect this is the letter in the prologue that she receives in Hawaii. But the reason for actually writing letters is explained by Annie at the end in the epilogue when she responds, also with a handwritten letter, that there is something personal in a handwritten response, something that touches the reader's body and mind. Carter was going to send her an email but deleted it, then rewrote it and sent it. There is no indication that she received that email at all. So he writes the letter that she receives in Hawaii. She in turn responded to the original handwritten letter, which Carter reads in the epilogue. The use of emails was not as prevalent in 1997 as it is today. I'm sure if Hartmann wrote that story today it would be somewhat different, but it was written back in the mid 1990s. It doesn't seem confusing to me, just a bit of playing around with time and the sequence of events.

There are things in the story that are not in my view clichés, but rather traditional SF tropes that many authors use consciously or subconsciously as part of their story-telling. In stories about Mars, finding some kind of life is one; finding an alien structure or machine under the surface somewhere is another. If the find is accidentally activated and it sends out a message — to who knows where? — that's another cliché or trope. Security services that penetrate into everyone's lives and political systems, so that freedom is limited, is a common trope in future settings. These things appear in probably more than 60 per cent of stories, so of course may appear in a story set on Mars. What distinguishes a story using such clichés is how they are integrated into the story and whether the author convinces the reader to accept them as part of the necessary background and foreground to sustain the actions of the characters. I think Hartmann does do this,

and I really enjoyed the story.

As a reader I don't delve into the psychology of the subjects. Will ways of thinking in this area be very much different in the near future? Hartmann's story is set only in the 2030s. There is no way a city or colony of the size and general make up of people on Mars can happen by then. We haven't even reached Mars yet, apart from sending small robots and orbiting satellites. The whole story is improbable unless you project it into the next century. By then surely human psychology will be vastly different from that of today. I thought this is a good story because it depicts an aspect of living on Mars different from that is usually seen in quite a few books.

If Patrick really wants a book to find faults with, he should read Christopher Pike's *The Season of Passage*. This was written in 1973, but not submitted for publication until 1992. The author explains why he didn't update it. There are aspects of the book that jar the reader, but overall it is a page-turner, and was on the *New York Times* best-sellers lists for the year it was published. It is one hell of a story, and many little mistakes can be easily overlooked. The story itself defies categorisation, being in part SF and horror, as well as fantasy. This is not a book covered in the article I wrote for *SFC*, but will appear in the book-length version of *Dreams of Mars*, which will appear late in 2018. I would have finished by now — but the computer crashed and I lost all the files. I've subsequently obtained quite a few Mars stories that date from the mid 1940s through to the late 1950s. There are some fabulous stories among them, many dated but still readable, and enjoyable from a nostalgic point of view. These would have been the stories I would have read if they had been available in Australia at that time, but they weren't, because the government banned imports of foreign books and magazines after the Second World War, a ban not lifted until 1959.

(23 March 2018)

PATRICK MCGUIRE (again)

John's quick response has forestalled me. When Bruce told me he had forwarded my comments on *Mars Underground* for John's reaction, I had intended to tell Bruce that I was not sure that was a useful move, since we seemed to be largely into the realm of matters of taste. At some previous point years ago I had remarked in a loc (I'm pretty sure it was one to Bruce) that any work of SF has flaws, and often various readers will even agree on what the flaws are, but a given set of flaws bothers some people more than other people. John's tropes are largely my clichés, but undoubtedly there are other tropes of which I am more tolerant, and even I would agree that every so often an author breathes new life into what had seemed a dead cliché.

But come on, John — the artifact's excavation and its reaction to being dug up almost exactly parallels the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, seen, and probably seen multiple times, by every SF fan and most of the rest of the world. Was that really the best Hartmann could come up with? If so, he should not have been writing SF, and indeed his one other novel evidently has parallel contemporary and historical plots, and involves no SF.

On a semifactual matter, John says that there is no

textual indication that Annie received Carter's email at all. I would counter that there is no indication that she didn't (except the discrepancy between prologue and epilogue), and that I think John is making a heroic attempt to impose consistency on the inconsistent. Email was already in common use by 1997, especially among scientists such as Hartmann, and messages did not often get lost even in 1997. The clear implication of the novel is that email is the customary interplanetary medium, although some people (as in the real world) prefer the personal touch of handwritten snailmail and are willing to pay the very stiff postage for it. (I wonder why there is not an intermediate option of sending a fax or an image scan of a handwritten letter.)

I agree that SF should be evaluated at least scientifically on the basis of what was known at the time of writing or first publication, not of the present day. I don't think I suggested otherwise in my comments.

Morally, the issue is more complicated: we will tolerate more racism and sexism in old works than in something contemporary, but some works that did not bother the average reader when published cannot be read with enjoyment today. (I mention this for the sake of completeness. I don't think it much applies to Hartmann's work.)

There is a brief mention of a Catholic priest who looks (to the viewpoint character) lost and confused in the Mars colony, with an implication that such superstitions have no real place on Mars. This could be defended as characterisation of the viewpoint character, but it seems to me to raise a suspicion of anti-Catholic bigotry on the author's part. (There is nothing in Catholic teaching that should cause the priest to be confused about being on Mars.) I don't think anti-Catholic bigotry among a certain subset of American intelligentsia has increased or decreased much since 1997, in contrast to the progress made on racism and sexism.

(24 March 2018)

JOHN LITCHEN (again)

It didn't occur to me that finding the artifact and accidentally activating it to send a message paralleled the exact same scene in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The last time I saw that film was about 30 years ago, and such details fade into the jumble of other memories of films and books. I have Blu-Ray disc of it and should have another look at it. At least looking at a movie only takes the length of the movie, a couple of hours at most, whereas reading a book takes a lot longer. Perhaps I didn't read *Underground* carefully enough, so should also read it again to check, but to be truthful I can't really be bothered, since I also have a pile of books as yet unread, new stuff as well as reprints of old SF stories from the 1940s and 1950s. I find it fabulous that POD technology has allowed these early stories to be available in good-looking editions after more than half a century of unavailability. No doubt some of these will be awful, but then there may be some gems among them as well.

(24 March 2018)

GREGORY BENFORD

Address as already given

Patrick McGuire says: 'I have not read Benford's *The Martian Race*, but as summarised the premise seems very odd.' He should read books before commenting on their details. He gets this all wrong.

(3 May 2018)

JOHN LITCHEN (again)

You may remember, Bruce, that I have been communicating with Greg Benford. He first sent me an email via you (which you forwarded) to which I replied directly to him. He pointed out that I missed the major point in his story *The Martian Race*. I had read the story the same year it was published, but as I pointed out to him apologetically, I had forgotten many details because there has simply been too many books in between then and now, and I had thought that I could remember it since I hadn't read it nearly as far back as some of the early books mentioned. Sometimes details get mixed up in memory, or simply forgotten.

After emailing Greg I reread his novel and he was right: I did miss one major point, but the general summary was more or less okay. I have subsequently read the sequel he wrote six years later. *The Sunborn* begins about 20 years after the finish of *The Martian Race*, as well as a short story called 'Vortex', also a short sequel to *The Martian Race* that takes place a little before the beginning of *The Sunborn* (which he sent to me via email). The section on his writing that will appear in the longer book version (*Dreams of Mars*) is much more detailed, and will be expanded to cover the three Martian stories. It does include the point I forgot, which is probably the most important idea in the first novel. (Note: I had also read *The Sunborn* in 2006, but had forgotten about it completely until Greg reminded me that it was a sequel, so of course I had to read it again. This shows I am getting old. I never used to forget anything I read, but that was thousands of books ago.)

(5 May 2018)

PATRICK MCGUIRE (again)

I am happy to know that the premise of Greg Benford's novel as presented by John Litchen is 'all wrong', but am puzzled as to why Benford directs his ire at me and not at John, who apparently misrepresented his novel — which John presumably has indeed read. I stated clearly that I was commenting on John's summary, not on the novel itself, except to the extent that John's summary was reliable. Indeed, I think an objective observer reading my comment would conclude that I was leaving pretty wide open the possibility that John had summarised inaccurately. Is Greg shooting the messenger bringing him the news of John's error?

(6 May 2018)

JOHN LITCHEN (again)

How does Patrick know that my summary is all wrong if

he hasn't read the book in question? On page 20 of the Orbit edition, the Mars ship blows up because of a fuel blockage and a build-up of pressure, destroying the launch pad, the gantry, and other nearby stuff, of course killing the occupants of the ship about to take off. Congress halts the entire Mars exploration for the duration, which probably means it won't ever get going again, to the disappointment of the crew that had been training for a further Mission to Mars. Hence the idea of offering a prize for private enterprise to take on the exploration. On page 23 a slim, beautifully dressed man walks in on the Mars astronaut team and offers them the opportunity to go to Mars. He would put a private consortium together to win the prize offered by NASA. The details are all there in the book.

This is not the first time such efforts have been made, the most recent being NASA's offering prize money for private companies to develop launch capabilities to supply the ISS, to send up and bring back astronauts once NASA had abandoned the space shuttles (which also had two major mishaps and loss of life and long delays before resuming flights). If it were not for that prize money offering we probably wouldn't have seen *Space X*, *Blue Horizons*, Boeing, and others developing the launch and retrieval capabilities that we see happening

now. The US doesn't want to keep using the Russians to send their astronauts into space (both for economic as well as political reasons) and soon they won't have to. And the Russians will probably get to Mars well before any attempts from NASA will.

My summary of the story is reasonably accurate, except I assumed one simple point, that in almost every story about going to Mars the astronauts discover some kind of life ... almost every story. It is a common plot point. I did mention that Julia discovers slime mould in a volcanic vent, but what I didn't mention in the part published in *SFC* is that this is a very important aspect of the plot, much more important than the discovery of life. I had relied on memory when I wrote the summary, since this story is more recent than others from the 1950s and 1960s that I had to re-read because much about them was forgotten. The importance of the discovery of life in the story was pointed out to me by the author, so I re-read *The Martian Race* (post *SFC* publication) and came to realise just how important this discovery by Julia is to the story and thus to the sequel *The Sunborn*, which takes place 22 years later. This will be seen in a rewritten section in the forthcoming book *Dreams of Mars*.

(11 May 2018)

Always Coming Home: Yvonne Rousseau and Ursula K. Le Guin

YVONNE ROUSSEAU Reservoir VIC 3073

Thank you for your supportive messages of more than a week ago! Today, I feel much more able to peruse my correspondence with Ursula Le Guin and to extract some memories. At first glance, however, I was appalled to see how much fading there had been, and I therefore diverted my energies into preserving a fast-fading text from June 1986 which I attach to this email to remind you of the days of slower communications.

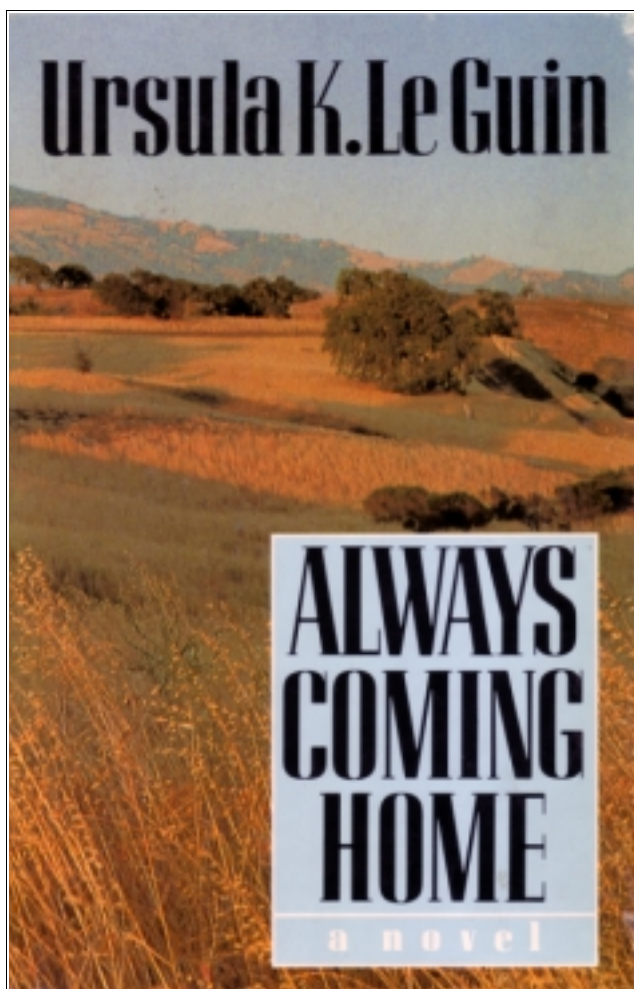
(15 April 2018)

From YVONNE ROUSSEAU to URSULA K LE GUIN carbon copy of an aerogramme, 12 June 1986:

Dear Ursula,
Thank you (overwhelmed- and overwhelming-ly) — for *Always Coming Home* — which arrived this morning (Bruce Gillespie assures me that this is a completely conventional time-lapse for mail between America and Australia ...). I had in any case agreed to review *Always Coming Home* for *ASFR* (2nd series), but had expected to have to use a borrowed copy, since *ASFR* is not yet on

Harper & Row's (or many other publishers') list, and since the combination of the sunken Australian dollar, and my own un-robust financial condition made buying it myself impossible just now. Thank you! The review should appear in the November issue of *ASFR* — by which time, the magazine will have a more legible font than was used in the issues that you may have received by now (depending on whether John Foyster sent them by air or by surface mail). Bruce has an *Always Coming Home* with the cassette, and has promised to let me listen to it; he hasn't read the book himself yet, on account of being Employed in a going-to-the-office-several-days-a-week way at Macmillan Publishers, and therefore feeling Distracted. (At present he is to be found in the Managing Director's office! — but this is only because the Director is overseas for six weeks, and additional sales representatives overran the corner in which the computer Bruce shares was formerly tucked away.)

I have passed on your messages to Bruce and Damien [Broderick], and to John Bangsund; Bruce was pleased to be told that he should never doubt you; John Bangsund produced a kind of telephonic purr (or, possibly pleased-and-friendly-bear-noise) when he heard that you had been rereading [Thomas Love] Peacock (a thing, by the way, that I love to do myself — rereading Peacock, that is; not the Bangsund pleasure-noise which I don't have the right vocal cords for making). Damien, on the other hand, had his-pleasure-on-hearing-that-the-anthology-had-reached-you a little tempered by his hav-



ing yesterday sent off a letter to Virginia Kidd [Literary Agent] with a list of complaints — one of which (now obviously unfounded) was his suspicion that your inscribed copy had never reached you. (Many of his complaints are, I think — like this one — a result of the difficulties of communication between America and Australia. I am afraid that I contributed to them when I rang Virginia to warn her that the American rights to Joan Lindsay's unpublished final chapter were now almost certain to be commandeered by an Australian publisher (although *Murders* [Yvonne Rousseau, *The Murders at Hanging Rock*] itself will be unaffected); Virginia mentioned the present presumed fate of one of Damien's manuscripts; assuming that she intended us to pass this on to Damien I did so — but he was already fuming, and it made him fume more. Nevertheless, Damien was undoubtedly pleased and relieved that your copy [of *Strange Attractors*] had reached you (your dedicatee [Gene Wolfe] received his long ago, at Aussiecon Two — a proof of which is that he recommended my story in it ['Mr Lockwood's Narrative'] for a Nebula, but the recommendation is ineffective unless the story gets American publication). Like the rest of us, Damien was extremely interested by the notion of a filmed *Left Hand of Darkness*, although he shared your doubts about Peter Weir's fitness for the job.

I expect that you know by now that you were awarded a 1986 'Best International Novel' Ditmar for [the volume of collected short stories] *The Compass Rose*. congratula-

tions! Virginia has pointed out that the categorisation is absurd, because it isn't a novel — others have complained (not about this in particular but in general terms) that the new criteria for eligibility are very confusing — but, still, a Ditmar represents fannish appreciation.

The ends of aerogrammes tend to take me by surprise, so I shall begin to stop right here. Thank you once again (I know already that *Always Coming Home* is a book that I want to have always about the place), and very best wishes from Yvonne.

(12 June 1986)

YVONNE ROUSSEAU (again)

I'm pleased to report that *SF Commentary* 96 reached my mailbox on Thursday 26 April — together with the photos of Jean Weber's 75th-birthday celebrations — and was almost completely perused the same day. Alas — I kept putting off replying, while hoping to get together for you some extracts of the correspondence between Ursula and me from the years 1986 to 2018.

For example, there was a letter from Ursula that Damien Broderick thought of printing in *Skiffy and Mimesis* (or perhaps *Chained to the Alien*) but I can't lay my hands on these anthologies at present. This was a letter from Ursula to Yvonne dated 15 March 1987:

(15 April 2018)

URSULA K. LE GUIN to YVONNE ROUSSEAU

I was in New Orleans recently as a quarter of a Mellon (Andrew Mellon Professorship — the other three quarters are Atwood, Gordimer, Murdoch — strange bed-fellows?) and a formal attack was mounted against the book [*Always Coming Home*] in class. The professor teaching the class was a sweetie, but this man had demanded to come and criticize *ACH*. It was an extremely virulent criticism, frequently verging on the personal — which this book arouses in a certain type of male bosom [...]. Well, if you read it, it's one thing, and not very nice. But if you are sitting there in front of 50 people being assaulted in this way, I use the word carefully, it's really pretty hard to handle. I was supposed to reply, and what I did was to wobble to the desk and read a couple of paragraphs from [Helene] Cixous. And then I read several passages from your [Yvonne's] review. I thought you said better than I could possibly say some of the things I was trying to do in the book. And anyhow, you gave me unspeakable comfort in that rather silly but trying position. Thanks!

(15 March 1987)

YVONNE ROUSSEAU (again)

Russell [Blackford] had typed this out, intending to print it in the letter column of *ASFR* (2nd series), issue 8, May 1987, but John Foyster decreed that this would be an

uncouth use of a personal letter.

Returning to *SF Commentary* — I fear that we'll never now discover what Brian Aldiss was intending with his Campbellian zebras.

I'm glad that both the *Paddington* movies were enjoyable. I've been hoping that Vida and I will get to see *Paddington 2* at Northland some day. How terrifying, however, to find after watching *Isle of Dogs* that you had

three days of eye-agony. I hope that all is well again now.

Thanks to you and Elaine for your good wishes. I'd been feeling rather low for several weeks (without the excuse of indexing a 700-page Chemistry textbook) but this evening I'm feeling much improved. Next GP appointment — Monday 7 May.

Love to you both — Yvonne

(3 May 2018)

Patrick McGuire: Polite and detailed disagreements

PATRICK MCGUIRE (again)

SFC 96:

In *SFC 94*, writing in 2016, I mentioned a serious flood in the old-town section of Ellicott City, the next town north of me. I said that the incident had made the US national news. Just a few months ago in 2018, and despite previous assurances that the earlier flooding had been a once-in-a-lifetime thing, the same part of town got flooded out again, just after businesses (plus a few residences) had rebuilt. At least this time the flooding happened more slowly and the only fatality was someone who, sadly, had deliberately gone into the flooded area, reportedly in an attempt to rescue his girlfriend's cat. I found out about that flood in an extremely roundabout way — from the news ticker on NHK World, the Japanese international TV service. Clearly, changes in land use elsewhere in Ellicott City (and possibly also in the climate) must have altered the flooding profile, and one would think that the authorities should have known this. At least they are now working on a revised flood-control plan.

Timbers crashing in a more literal sense than in your obituary heading: Late in the winter, a tree blown over by the wind bashed into the roof of one of the other buildings in my condo development. The culprit tree was part of a stand that had been here before the complex was built about 35 years ago, and the tree had now grown tall enough to topple over onto the roof of a four-storey building. I believe the direct damage only got as far as the airspace between the peaked roof and the ceiling of the unit immediately beneath it. The condo board (perhaps pushed by the insurance company) decided to survey the entire tree stand, encompassing maybe half an acre/one-fifth hectare (at a very rough guess). A tarp remained on the roof for months; evidently there was some sort of bureaucratic delay, but in late July they closed off the parking lot closest to the site (displacing many of the affected cars onto the lot closest to me) and embarked upon a logging project that ended up taking down almost that entire stand of trees (although not the ones nearest to my own building, which were shorter and younger). The tree people are now finishing up, and repair work on the roof has begun and seems to be progressing rapidly. I hope the draconian tree removal was genuinely needed; several residents were unhappy about it. What had been a sort of miniature forest carpeted with leaves and pine needles is now a muddy

field covered with wood chips, if anything. I hope the condo board has plans in store to renovate the site.

Robert Day mentions James White's sexism (or at least what reads like sexism at this remove in time) in the 'Hospital Station' series. As best I recall, without re-examining the books, Prilcia has to be a male because (I believe for all two-gender species, not just humans) the Educator tapes (or whatever they're called) only work with the male mind. Females thus cannot be interspecies physicians. If memory serves, White did eventually wriggle somewhat out of the sexist corner that he had written himself into by having Conway's wife Murchison rise from a nurse to become a pathologist. Granted, it is not immediately obvious why a pathologist would require less knowledge of alien ecologies and species (and hence access to the Educator tapes) than a physician treating a patient would, but White's intention is good. At least as of when I last reread him, White's good points in the 'Hospital Station' books easily outweigh the many flaws in the series.

I agree with you, Bruce, that, contra Leigh Edmonds, I can't see any particular point in your earning a Ph.D. at this stage of your life, but I certainly disagree with you when you say you lack the intellectual resources to do it. I know a lot of people with doctorates (and of course have earned one myself), and I know an additional large number of people with other advanced degrees, and on the basis of having read many decades of your writing, I think you fit in well with that crowd. I gather (partly from what I hear of other Australian SF fans or pros that are doing it) that it is financially simpler to pick up a doctorate in current-day Australia than in the present-day US (in the good old days, I did mine almost entirely on fellowship money), and that there may be greater advantages to doing so than in the US, so I concede that Leigh's opinion may be weightier than mine.

John Litchen mentions having no idea who most of the people are in photos that his mother left him. I am partly in the same position, although my own mother did make intermittent efforts at captioning. In the last decade or so of her life, I tried to get her to finish the job, but it simply was not something she was interested in doing at that point. Oh, well. Most of the people in the photos would mean little or nothing to me even if I had the names, and I'm not a very visually oriented person anyhow.

Colin Steele reviews a nonfiction book in which a

bookstore customer is convinced that Hardy meant to title his book *Far from the Maddening Crowd*. The title turns out to be Hardy's quote from Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', and 'madding' is indeed the form used in reprints of the poem. According to my dictionary, there is in fact a rare verb 'to mad', meaning 'to madden'. Perhaps the verb was more common in Gray's time. I note that if 'maddening' were abbreviated in what seems to me to be a natural fashion, 'madd'ning' would have fit the poem's meter just as well. Conceivably we could blame 'madding' on the printer, which is known to be how 'inalienable' in the manuscript copy of the Declaration of Independence turned into the less common 'unalienable'.

In something of the same vein, there is a Russian urban legend that Tolstoy meant to title his novel *War and the World*. After the Revolution, Russia adopted orthographic reforms, and the words for 'world' and 'peace' are now spelled identically (*mir*). In Tolstoy's time, the words already sounded the same, but there was a spelling distinction, and the author definitely wrote 'peace'. However, one edition of his work had a typo in one volume, yielding a title page with the wrong word, which title page has been reproduced as 'evidence' in support of the urban legend. Still, the two *mir*s were pronounced the same, so who is to say that Tolstoy did not intend a pun? Especially if 'world' is understood to mean 'the European world' or 'the Russian world'. I once remarked, perhaps a little rashly, that the only acknowledgment in the novel of the existence of North America lies in references to the card game boston.

Colin Steele also favorably reviews *Too Like The Lightning*. I bounced off the book on my first attempt, but I may try again. Ada Palmer is an amazingly multitalented individual. Moving on to lesser degrees of multitalent, any number of mystery authors have published one sf novel (and the other way around for sf writers). Unlike Colin, I don't think I would count Chris Brookmyre as a multigenre author until he had managed at least his third sf novel. And umpteen writers, not just Ian (M.) Banks, were/are both 'literary' writers and established genre writers, although the genre in question is most often mystery fiction rather than sf.

I read with interest Roy Sinclair-Woods's attempt to diagnose why most people don't connect to poetry, especially sf poetry. Roy quotes approvingly a Walter Benjamin article saying in part that the novel has an essential dependence on the book (i.e., on the written form), unlike previous forms of storytelling. I think that poetry decidedly joined this dependence when it started playing tennis with the net down, that is to say abandoning the regular forms of rhyme, meter, and/or other constraints that, among other functions, had served to aid in memorisation. Beyond stray works of the occasional maverick traditionalist poet, these days about the only branch of poetry that usually still keeps the net up is song lyrics, and I will bet that the average educated person today has vastly more songs memorised than poetry of any other sort, and especially more song lyrics written since 1900 than other poems of the same age. Although I think popular interest in unsung poetry may be falling off even in Russia, it has survived there considerably longer than in the Anglosphere. I think part of

the reason is that Russians are taught to read poetry in a way that emphasises the meter (and, when present, the rhyme), whereas Anglophone children are told to ignore the meter and to read poetry as if it were prose, ignoring the lineation and just following the punctuation. (From what he says late in his article, Ray may agree with some of what I say in this paragraph.)

Whether we call it poetry or not, the Sophie M. White passage is presumably trying (not unlike a 1950s Fred Pohl story) to use the pedestrian voice of a crass unimaginative 'average person' to satirise a social ill, in this case failure to pay attention to glaring signs of global warming. The Masefield passage is attempting something completely different. Total apples and oranges! If, as Ray says, there are all those other unpoetical poems out there, why did he not pick one that would better parallel the Masefield? (Or vice-versa — even from my limited poetical knowledge, I think I could have found something in *Spoon River Anthology* that would better parallel the White. Or perhaps a self-justifying passage voiced by one of Robert Browning's or Shakespeare's villains.) Moreover, I think Ray could have found an 'sf' poem with greater sf content than White's while he was at it. Or was that part of his complaint about the sort of poetry found in sf magazines?

As an aside, Ray's contention is the first time I have ever heard the assertion that the bell-tolling in the famous Donne passage referred to a street procession. I have always understood it to indicate church bells.

Ray thinks that, because Masefield is writing poetry, it is perfectly all right to have stuck a late Hellenistic warship with multiple banks of oars and packed with rowers (a quinquireme) into a role that should be played by a cargo ship relying mostly on sail. Nineveh was far upriver on the Tigris in what is now Iraq (opposite modern Mosul) and Nineveh fell in or about 612 BC!! I would be willing to bet that even if the Ninevites had known how to build a quinquireme, and had somehow acquired the wood and other materials needed to do so, they could not have gotten a relatively large seagoing warship all the way down a marshy river to the Red Sea in the first place. No one is sure where Ophir was, but the closest candidate is in Arabia and the other possibilities require sailing out onto the Indian Ocean. The seacoast of Palestine is on the Mediterranean, so how the devil does Masefield think he is going to get his quinquireme from the Red Sea into the Med to reach 'haven in sunny Palestine'? And how can a ship 'of Nineveh' be 'rowing home to haven' to a Palestinian harbour six hundred miles, mostly over desert, from its home city? None of these points would have been unknown in 1902 when the poem was published.

If I were logic-chipping like one of Trump's lawyers, perhaps I would argue that 'of Nineveh' merely means 'Assyrian'. But that fails to parallel the subsequent straightforward national identifications of a 'Spanish galleon' and a 'British coaster'. The galleon is not 'of Madrid'. Nor would it solve the technological and chronological problems or the remaining geographical ones. A Trumpy lawyer would also point out that at certain times in the ancient world there did exist a canal running to Suez not from the Med but from the Nile, originating somewhere around present-day Cairo. But

this canal was not contemporaneous with the Assyrian Empire. Pharaohs from before the the Assyrian period may have attempted such a canal, but there seems to be no proof that they succeeded. Evidence is somewhat better that when Egypt was under Persian rule (after the Assyrians) the canal was finished, and such a canal definitely existed at least for a while in the Ptolemaic period, and one later existed for centuries under the Romans and early Muslim rulers. The Nile-to-Suez canal needed constant maintenance to keep it from silting up, so it repeatedly fell out of use, before being conclusively neglected by the later Muslim rulers. Also, the Red Sea is higher than Nile, so locks had to be employed. I doubt that a large Hellenistic warship would have fit in an ancient lock.

Perhaps it helps to be brain-dead to appreciate Ray's sort of poetry. Or at least to have an 'off' switch like the one evidently employed by most movie-goers. Even Ray himself grants that logically the quinquireme should have been a trireme, though, curiously, he defends the inaccuracy as poetic licence. Even triremes are too late for Nineveh. As I said above, it should not have been a warship at all! Ray's other example, Abraham Lincoln, needed no such cheap dodge. When he spoke, 1776 was indeed fourscore and seven years ago. (Incidentally, per modern historians, the quinqu- ('five') probably referred to rowers per oar or some such, rather than to having five actual banks of oars.)

Later on, I find Ray presenting to us a British Romantic distinction between 'poetry' and 'science' as if this distinction were today's accepted dogma. Perhaps his view explains why he is willing not merely to excuse but to praise Masefield's egregious blunders (in 'Cargoes' — the poet did much better work elsewhere). But Ray likely does the Romantics an injustice. Just exactly what did 'poetry' and 'science' mean to Wordsworth and Coleridge? Not what we mean today, surely, and I suspect something much closer to what the classical world meant by *poesis* and *scientia*. I think that, to the Romantics, prose fiction would probably count as 'poetry'. By extension, this also is where I think they would place science fiction. So long as Roy adheres to the Romantics, this likely refutes his theory that heavy sf readers are by their habits, upbringing, and education too pedestrian and information-bound to appreciate poetry. I suspect that Roy should instead be looking upon sf readers as allies, even if many of them do not enjoy all the same branches of *poesis* that he does.

Perhaps I would have been willing to invest the effort into unravelling Ron Drummond's piece of 'critical fiction' if the novelist that it concerned was someone I was familiar with. He isn't and I'm not.

I move on to Andrew Milner, who has done his best to alienate me. Professors of English, perhaps more than even most other academics, have a nasty habit of re-defining words for their present purposes in flagrant disregard of the words' normal meanings. One might have hoped that instead professors of the rich English language would command the intellectual resources to find or coin terminology that would suit their purpose without confusing the casual or inattentive reader. Milner starts off by using 'Australian utopian fictions' to

refer not to works written by Australians but to works written by others about Australia, or at least about a hypothetical southern island or continent that could, with some stretching, be identified with Australia as later discovered and explored. Next, he misuses 'uchronia', a well-established word meaning 'a work of alternate history'. Its first use in French (as *uchronie*) came in 1876, per *Brave New Words*. The first citation in English is from 1979, although I suspect that more searching would have turned up earlier instances. (Later: I found several through Google Books, although most or all were in discussions by Anglophones of French works. 'Uchronia' also, irrelevantly for present purposes, became the place name for a surface feature on Mars.) In any case, as subsequent *BNW* citations demonstrate, 'uchronia' had been in use in English in its established sense for decades before the first publication of the Milner article in 2014. Nonetheless, Milner is sufficiently ignorant or sufficiently arrogant that he feels free to use the word to denote instead plain vanilla future-set utopias.

Surprisingly after that start, when Milner gets to the meat of his article with his discussion of George Turner's work, his discussion actually strikes me as fairly intelligent. True, Milner confesses allegiance to Marxism, that factually refuted and morally bankrupt ideology, but Milner retains enough connection with reality to recognise that even among professors of English, 'the days are long gone when one could take a creative writer to task simply for being insufficiently Marxist'. He therefore couches his analysis in terms that a non-Marxist might accept, and he makes some convincing points. Even so, I wonder if Milner is not reproving Turner for not having written the novel that Milner would have preferred (which might indeed resemble the one that I myself might have preferred), rather than dealing with the one that Turner did write. The latter task is more generally considered to be the business of critics in general and English professors in particular. In making this argument, I rely for evidence mostly on Milner's own summary. I read *The Sea and Summer* so long ago that I remember little of it, and I may well have bailed out before finishing. Milner takes *The Sea and Summer* to be a cautionary tale, and he investigates the reason it has proven to be fairly ineffective in that role. He even pulls some quotes from the novel's postscript suggesting that Turner himself thought he had written such a novel. But this seems clearly contradicted by the approach of the novel itself, leading me to conclude that, unless Milner has quoted the author out of context (which I doubt), Turner somehow has failed to write the novel he thought had, and has failed so blatantly that it is not easy to understand why Turner would not have recognised the discrepancy.

If Turner had wanted to write a novel that would mobilise the public to do something about global warming, population growth, and other alarming trends in the same way that *On the Beach* served at least to cool down the Cold War a bit, why would Turner have written something so recomplicated in structure? The main narrative line turns out to be a historical novel set in what is, from the posited author's perspective, a thousand years in the past, and yet, not very plausibly, the novel is nonetheless about as accurate in depicting a possible

near future for us as one of our own contemporaries could manage. Turner, presumably deliberately, throws away a lot of verisimilitude by using this approach. Nothing analogous happens in the Shute. Turner adds a far-future frame involving three disparate characters (one of them the author of the main 'historical novel' narrative), whose society is facing problems of its own, including danger of extinction in the long term. The Shute novel is much more straightforward in structure. *On the Beach* also has a simpler target, namely Cold War tensions and perhaps nuclear weapons as a whole. (Although I doubt that Shute wanted to see the large and powerful Soviet conventional army overrun Western Europe.) If Turner has a single target at all, it must be the failure of nearly all governments to react in a timely fashion to scientific advice. But this is a pretty murky rallying point for a wide public to mobilise around. If Turner really wanted to emulate *On the Beach*, then, just as he picked one city in one country to focus on, he should have picked one disaster mode and stuck with it: global warming *or* overpopulation *or* ecological collapse *or* whatever. Turner would have known that any one mode was not the whole of the problem, but it would have been a more manageable bite, and once government got used to listening to advice on one problem, it would be more likely to do so on others. To engage the attention of a mass public, you need broad strokes and bright colours.

And why write something so unrelentingly gloomy? Turner gives us one reason to be depressed after another. *On the Beach* may end by wiping out the human race but (as best I recall) the characters do not accept that this will be the outcome until near the book's end, and even then many of them enjoy personal triumphs within the time they have left. (Even in the real world, we are all going to die, after all.) Even in *1984*, Winston Smith *appears* to be succeeding in his little personal rebellion against the State until he is caught near the end. Some readers have more tolerance for depressing novels than others, but surely it is obvious that depressing novels are not the way to build and mobilise a mass readership to effect political change.

Many novelists have written gloomy novels, many have written novels about global catastrophe, and in many of the latter, as in *The Sea and Summer*, the cause of the catastrophe is vague. It is perfectly possible to write a viable catastrophe novel without intending it to be a cautionary tale. I think Turner has written a novel obviously structured to accomplish ends not compatible with mobilising mass public opinion. If Turner himself thought otherwise, that is a paradox that perhaps should have been the central point of the Milner article.

The first mystery in Peter Young's article is what country has he moved to? (Or had he moved to in 2013 when the article was submitted?) This seems to be relevant, since he mentions the international move several times in his first few paragraphs. I am inevitably distracted as I try to figure it out from context. 'South East Asia' now seems to be 'local', although Peter seems to be using the geographical term in a very extended sense whereby it can explain Peter's interest in Australian Gillespie fanzines. That suggests to me that he is located actually in

parts more usually considered part of Southeast Asia. Thailand, maybe? Singapore? Peter really should have clarified this himself, but since he didn't, I think you should have, Bruce, unless the information is/was confidential for some reason (such as a military posting), in which case a rewrite might have been in order to avoid raising the unanswered question. To further complicate matters, Peter says that Mark Plummer, who I know to be in the UK, plans to lend Peter his *SFC* collection for indexing. Surely Plummer is not packing it off to Southeast Asia. Does this mean that Peter's stay in Southeast Asia is/was of relatively short duration and he planned to be back in the UK soon?

[*brg* As an editor, I can assume too much. I did assume that most of my readers already knew that Pete Young lives in Thailand with his wife and child, except when he is travelling the world as an employee of a major international airline. He visits relatives in Britain, and tries to fit SF conventions into his schedule. He publishes a fanzine, *The White Notebooks*, which can be found on efanzines.com in PDF format. He picked up the Gillespie files from Mark in Britain, and somehow wrote my ISFDb entries in what must be his very limited spare times.*]

As to the ISFDB itself: I have certainly profited from its existence, although so far mostly for fiction and in particular largely for short fiction, especially when I try to establish whether a given story of current interest to me has been collected in some volume I already own, or failing that one that is easily findable. I don't make a point of ego-scanning myself there, but when last I checked, the nonfiction entries for me were decidedly incomplete, and understandably so. I'm pretty far down on the list of names anyone would ever want to look up. Some fanzines, including but decidedly not limited to *SFC*, devote a lot of their wordage to locs. I presume that the ISFDB is making no effort to index this material, since Peter consistently refers to 'articles'. Save for a few exceptions in the form of long screeds on a single topic, it would probably be impractical to index locs, since the topic may change with every paragraph.

Bruce reviews 'Books My Friends Have Sent Me'. I will look for Russell Blackford's *Science Fiction and the Moral Imagination*. It does seem that the topic is a little sweeping to be covered in 204 pages, and I wonder if a more restrictive title should have been chosen. But perhaps we can blame the publisher, or perhaps Russell is painting with such a broad brush that he sees no need to deal with every relevant author, but rather just representative samples. (Later: the e-book version is offered in the US for US\$9.99, not outrageous for an academic book. I have read the Kindle sample, but to date have not committed to the whole volume. In his introductory gallop through history, Russell seems to be buying in a little too readily to the Enlightenment worldview for my taste.) I had known of Russell almost exclusively for his writings on sf, but when I looked up his works, I found that he has also published several philosophy works and popularisations of atheism. More material for my overgrown

To Be Read list. Alas, two of the Broderick/Van Ikin essay collections that you mention have been on my To Be Read list for years (they at least used to be available as e-books) and *Fantastika at the Edge of Reality* should probably join them as a volume worthy of reading.

(11 September 2018)

The first thing in *SFC 97* to inspire a response is Colin Steele's review of *Telling It Like It Wasn't* by Catherine Gallagher. This caught my attention for two reasons. First, I have an interest in alternate histories in sf and, to a lesser extent, in counterfactual histories in sort-of nonfiction. Second, Colin seemed to have discovered a new publisher and perhaps a new university. He lists the publisher as 'Chicago University Press'. I suspected the publisher was really the University of Chicago Press, and upon downloading the Kindle sample, I found that this was so, at least in the US edition. Although in its earliest days in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the U. of Chicago sometimes referred to itself as Chicago University, since then it has avoided that form of the name, using it in institutional histories only when referring to a failed predecessor university. Getting the publisher's name wrong seems an odd mistake for a librarian like Colin to make. Does the Press have an overseas subsidiary marketing to Australia and using a different name from its parent? Or is the form a convention adopted by Australian libraries to save a few characters?

As usual, Australian book prices seem amazingly high, but this is partly an artifact of the exchange rate of the Australian dollar and also, I assume, of your version of VAT and the markup of middlemen. The US print price for the book, per the Kindle listing, is \$35, and the Kindle e-book price is \$19.25. Stiff, but it's an academic book. Still, I will look into used books and interlibrary loan before I seriously consider paying that much. Probably the Australian prices would elicit less shock in an American if Australia had decided to call its currency something besides a dollar and to use something other than a dollar sign to represent it. (Not that Americans were the first to have a coin called a dollar, but they may have been the first to make the dollar their basic unit of currency.) The Australian dollar was worth US\$1.20 when Australia switched from pounds to dollars, evidence of a lot of, um, *daring* monetary policy since, even by comparison to the US. Anyway, it was an interesting review. As I have said before, Colin seems a lot more worth reading when he allows himself the space to go beyond a capsule comment.

One fairly consistent feature of Colin's reviewing is that he searches out authors' takes on their own work, quoting from blogs and interviews. This approach holds a certain appeal, but on the other hand, a work of fiction says what it says, not what its author intended for it to say. Whether intention and delivery coincide is something that probably will worry the author, but generally not the reader, who will take the work on its own terms. Or at least on the terms of an interaction between the work and the reader's personal psychology, not between the work and the intention of the author.

As I have mentioned before, my approach to reading does not operate by way of chronology and ranked lists, so as usual I have relatively little to say about your lists,

here for 2016. The only one on your Novels list that I have read at all was the 'four-star contender' *The Martian*, which I have already discussed in *SFC*, and I picked up no others from your general Books list. In Films First Viewed, I actually saw three, although two only when the local library acquired the DVDs, probably after 2016. I liked *Arrival* far less than most sf-connected people do, possibly because I know something about linguistics and something about how governments actually do things. The film did of course have its moments. By contrast, I followed the herd in praising *Spotlight*. However, as with *All the President's Men*, it may have been an appreciation of effective, socially useful investigative journalism more than of its fairly straightforward cinematic dramatisation. I saw *The Enemy Below* on TV a very long time ago, long enough that I recognised for what it was on the original airing the, uh, *emulation* on *Star Trek Classic* (using a cloaking device instead of a submarine). I started to call it a 'ripoff', but the *ST* version may have been authorised by the original movie's rights owner. I probably have not seen the film since.

Re Films Seen Again, I have watched at some point *Quatermass and the Pit*, *Young Frankenstein*, and *Lost Horizon*. From the runners-up, I have seen *On the Beach*. All of them years ago, however. As for TV shows, when it aired I saw some episodes of *Forever*, which made no strong impression on me, except that it was fairly watchable, which for me puts it ahead of most TV drama. *Doctor Blake* is still airing on public television here, but is probably seasons behind the episodes you have seen recently. I gave up on it after the first season or so, because as I said in a past loc, it seemed fixated on ripping the veil off all the ills of society. I do not watch mystery shows in order to be lectured at. I am glad to learn that it eventually gets better again, or at least better to your tastes, which do not always coincide with mine. I will have to keep watching samples for signs of the change. Barring the occasional missed episode, I have seen all the *Avengers* shows from Mrs Peel's advent forward, and I think one or two of the earlier ones, but it was long ago. I have never gotten into *Midsomer Murders*, but a lot of people of my acquaintance seem to like it, and at some point I should give it a proper watch.

And, once we get past the audio CDs, the lists start over for 2017! But I've had enough of lists, so I page on through. And then come the guest lists!

At least those sometimes come with extensive discussion. I mentioned in a past loc that I skimmed *Aurora* to see what the fuss was about, but felt no desire to actually read it through. It's interesting to see from professor of English Doug Barbour what he values in this product of PhD in English (but non-professor) Kim Stanley Robinson. (Doug's comments are, to the best of my recollection, similar to those of Gary Wolfe, another professor of English, on *The Coode Street Podcast*.) Those formed by other disciplines might focus on the novel's pessimism about interstellar travel and Robinson's argument that people should stop fixating on the stars and concentrate on the Solar System. (An argument which he backs up with scientific arguments that others have disputed.) To Doug, however, 'character's the essential stuff', as a ditty by, I think, Kingsley Amis, long ago put the argument of the mainstream English department. Doug, as an sf

reader (albeit of the 'literary' wing) is willing to allow and admire a focus on the psychology of the ship's AI, and to a lesser extent of the human personage Devi. Well, okay. I'm not sure if either Doug or I will be around long enough to see what the judgment of history is, but my own guess is that in a few decades not even many in the English department will regard *Aurora* as 'a great ... science fiction'.

Clarification: Later on, I remembered that Gary Wolfe on *Coode Street*, besides discussing matters of characterisation, did also spend time on the scientific argument of the novel, saying that it fits into a general trend in sf toward confining the action to our solar system. I don't recall that Gary had anything to say about the objections from Greg Benford and others toward Robinson's science, but perhaps he did so and I have just forgotten.

Doug also lists Madeline Ashby's *Company Town*. This novel generated a fair amount of buzz back in 2016, but it, and perhaps Ashby, seem to be fading back into obscurity. Possibly it suffered from having arrived at a time when the fad for dystopias and noir had peaked, and since then has begun to die down. I seem to recall that even at the 2017 Capclave there were multiple panel discussions on dystopias, but the big topic at the 2018 con seemed to be instead the revival of optimistic science fiction. I did note down for my possible reading a couple of the alternate-history novels that Doug listed.

Some writers of book reviews, not all of them academics, are curiously fond of the word 'sly', which they use as a term of approval. Myself, I think that anyone so enamored of slyness should be watched very, very closely. A word search shows that none of the other contributors to this issue used 'sly' at all, but that Doug

employed forms of the word twice.

I did read, or possibly attempt to read, *The Hydrogen Sonata*, but I remember practically nothing from the plot that Doug outlines, so I really should add the book to my ever-growing list of books to be read/reread. As I previously noted in a loc, I actually read more fantasy than I, who consider myself to be primarily an sf person, used to think I do, but I have not gotten around to the fantasy authors Doug reviews here. And that pretty much finishes off the issue. But I will close with something not closely linked to issue 97.

I am now in the process of reading a couple of works of nonfiction about sf. One is Russell Blackford's *Science Fiction and the Moral Imagination*, briefly mentioned in *SFC* 96. Roy Sinclair-Wood would find it to be a work by an Australian author that (like the non-Australian sources I cited earlier) states that the atomic bomb increased the public interest in sf (a notion that he previously expressed doubt about). The e-book edition is not paginated, but the passage is at Kindle 'location' 728. The other book is Alec Nevala-Lee's *Astounding*, which cites Campbell as making this claim of increased public interest in sf almost immediately after the atomic bombs were dropped. I did consider that it might be a matter of Campbell convincing the sf community and some outsiders of an expansion of interest that he actually nudged into existence and perhaps exaggerated. However, evidence to the contrary, as shown by Nevala-Lee, is that Campbell immediately, within a day or two of the bomb droppings, found himself asked for commentary by the general press. Nevala-Lee cites several of the appearances of Campbell interviews in the general press.

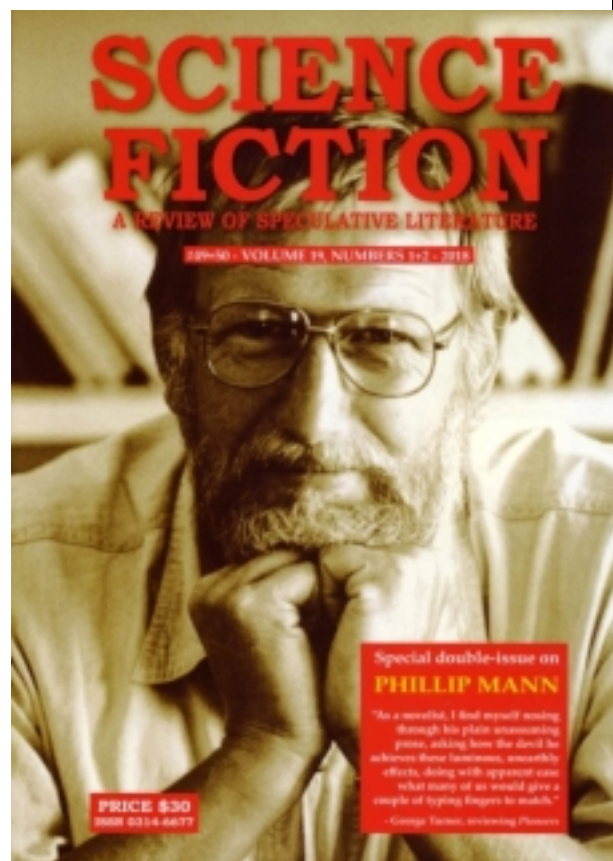
(5 November 2018)

We also heard from ...

We did not hear from many people about *SFC*s 96 and 97, other than the main correspondents, because I did not send out messages to potential readers, other than posting the issue itself on efanzines.com. That's where to keep looking. People who sent short emails included **Carol Kewley**, who enjoyed 'Stephen Campbell's fantastic cover'; **Werner Koopmann**, who has sent many photos, both of his and **Ulla**'s house in Germany and the boat cruises they have taken in recent years; and **David Russell**. Plus many good friends on Facebook and the internet. You will need to wait until next issue to see letters of comment in answer to *SFC*s 98 and 99.

I've set up an '**SF Commentary**' website on **Facebook**, which alerts people to my continued existence between issues of *SFC* and tells you when issues are released. The site also takes notice of magazines and books that I receive in the mail. In envelopes or parcels. Addressed. Stamped. Much to tell you about next issue, but for now I include the cover of the most dazzling publication of the year, **Van Ikin**'s *Science Fiction* from Perth. The latest issue, Nos. 49+50, includes 176 impeccably produced pages about **Phillip Mann**, the great New Zealand writer.

— **Bruce Gillespie**, 30 June 2019



Bruce Gillespie

Nova Not Out:

A really incomplete

and very personal history of the Nova Mob, 1970–2018

[First delivered to the October 2018 meeting of the Nova Mob, Kensington Town Hall, and published in ANZAPA, October 2018 mailing. Thanks to everybody, especially Kim Huett, who has supplied updates and annotations since then.]

Any history about any human activity is better than none, and a history of an activity in which I have been participating for 50 years is more interesting than most. I wanted to search out the documents that gave substance to my own fragmentary memories.

The Nova Mob must be one of the oldest continually active book groups in Australia. It has never operated like many of the conventional book groups — one person talking about a book that everybody has read during the previous month — but its operations have been similar enough to the traditional book groups that we can claim to be a notable part of that tradition.

The Nova Mob's history has not been continuous. It stopped operating from the June 1971 meeting until the last Wednesday in 1974, when at the December meeting the second incarnation took place. This lasted until the December meeting of 1978, when poor attendances forced its closure. The May meeting of 1981 is the beginning of the third and still current incarnation.

High hopes led to its beginning in August 1970. It was John Foyster's idea. Something of his motives in late 1970 can be gathered from this note he sent out announcing the third meeting of the Nova Mob: 'The next meeting of the Nova Mob will be held at the Degraives Tavern in Degraives Street on October 2. There is no excuse for Melbourne fans not to be there, each and every one of them' (*Norstrilian News* 14, 1970).

Why the need for a new group? Surely the Melbourne Science Fiction Club provided a weekly meeting place for Melbourne fans? John Foyster (2000, email to Rich Lynch, sent to me by Leigh Edmonds): 'The Melbourne Science Fiction Society was formed at about the end of 1968 by Foyster and John Bangsund because the MSFC seemed too much involved in socialising to the point where there weren't any new fans coming in from the sf reading public. The meeting site was at the Victorian Railways Institute, where Bangsund was employed at the time; Foyster felt that the Somerset Place clubrooms, while just fine for members, did not necessarily consti-

tute the ideal place to make one's first contact with fandom'. I had never heard about the Melbourne SF Society until I read that note; the Society itself began life as the Nova Mob in 1970.

In 1970, the Melbourne SF Club was still meeting in the old upstairs storage space in Somerset Place, behind McGill's Newsagency, but doom was about to descend. One of the Club's members reported to the City Council the fact that the Melbourne Fantasy Film Group was operating a 35 mm projector in a wooden building, in a space that could be reached only by a narrow staircase from the ground floor. Worse, the Club was showing old classic films on nitrate stock, which could explode at any time if somebody lit a spark near them. The old Melbourne SF Club was a potential death trap.

By the end of 1970, the Club's library and effects were stored at the flat rented by Paul Stevens and John Breden and South Yarra. Merv Binns, the long-time president, secretary and organiser of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, was planning to open Space Age Books, which he did in early 1971.

Unrecorded in print, but told to me by Lee Harding many years ago, is that the inspiration for the Nova Mob was the *Elves*, *Gnomes* and *Little Men's Science Fiction*, Chowder, and *Marching Society*, begun in San Francisco in 1948 or 1949, a group for the serious discussion of science fiction. Until the 1960s it published *Rhodomagnetic Digest*, a famous and sought-after serious fanzine.

The project begins

Writing a short annotated history of the Nova Mob should have been an easy project. All I had to do was go through my events diaries, which I have kept all my life, except between 1965 and 1971. All I had to do was copy down the dates, events, speakers, subject matter, and venue for each meeting. That's what should have happened.

Instead I found that I have been a sloppy diary keeper, especially during the 1970s and 1980s. Much of the information I wanted wasn't there. I found entire years when I hadn't mentioned attending a Nova Mob. There were plenty of years when I seemed to have attended only four or five meetings. And then I found (Wednesday, 4 August 1993) this entry — 'largest roll-up of the year' —

although I had recorded only one earlier meeting for the year. This implies that I attended many more meetings than I bothered to write in my diary. And I had probably done that for year after year.

I trawled through about 40 manila folders of huge amounts of Gillespie fannish memorabilia. I found plenty of references to Nova Mob meetings there, and these have helped fill in the gaps.

I found on my computer a whole folder of material I'd forgotten I'd received from Kim Huett in Canberra. He has been buying up as many ancient and glorious fanzines. He had scanned portions of the major Australian news fanzines and had sent me the references to the Nova Mob. From pages in John Foyster's *Norstrilian News* and *Chunder!* and Leigh Edmonds' *Fanew Sletter*, I've been able to fill in many of the gaps, especially details of the Nova Mob's first year. And during March and April 2019, Kim Huett sent to me much information he had found in *Thyme*.

Why document the history of the Nova Mob? To be honest, my main motive was to see if it could be done. Also, I wanted to pay tribute to the 21-year Nova Mob reign that has just finished, when Lucy Sussex and Julian Warner have been the Bossas Novas. An extraordinary achievement.

First meeting: August 1970

At the first meeting of the Nova Mob, there seems to have been some competition to find a name. Damien Broderick, well-known Melbourne SF author who has been living in San Antonio for about 20 years, wrote on the Fictionmags email list: 'David Boutland, who wrote as David Rome, and I were both at the inaugural meeting of the now decades old but than unnamed SF discussion group in Melbourne. As I'd rattled south on the tram from Brunswick or Carlton or whatever, I'd brooded on a possible name, and came up with "Nova Mob", William Burroughs being a modish interest at the time. Once we'd all assembled, sprawled on cushions, people threw in suggestions along the lines of "We Rocketeers with Shaggy Ears" or "Melbourne SF Discussion Group". I waited politely and at last opened my mouth to offer my suggestion, but David spoke a trifle more quickly. "How about The Nova Mob?" he said, to acclamation. I could only agree, biting my lip.'

John Bangsund wrote of that first meeting: 'Despite lack of public transport, about twenty science fiction enthusiasts gathered at Myf and Tony Thomas's flat in South Yarra to talk about SF and other things. It was agreed that the new group should meet on the first Friday of each month, and that meeting-places should be located within easy walking distance of a pub — for the benefit of people who forgot to bring-their-own ... The matter of a name for this group provided just about the liveliest discussion at the first meeting. No name suggested appealed to everyone, though THE RETURNED STARMEN'S LEAGUE and THE NOVA MOB were well supported — the latter largely because of its avant-garde (if that's the term I'm grubbing about for) associations and its Carthaginian possibilities (amongst them: the group's leader would be known as

the 'Bossy Nova'; his symbol of office, the 'Nova Cane'; the group's meeting place, what else but the 'Casa Nova?'). Other names suggested at the meeting and since include THE BLOG & CROTTLED GREEPS CLUB (Foyster: 'Crottled greeps are what you get when you didn't order them'), THE ILLUSTRATED MEN (David Boutland's idea, I think, which he undermined with his insistence that members be required to wear tattoos), THE MELBOURNE SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY (how pedestrian can you get?), THE DEMOLISHED MEN (the bester both worlds?), THE GAUSSJAMMER CLUB (a nice tribute to Captain Chandler, but it does sound more than a little like an Afrikaans swear-word), THE C'MELL CLUB (one of the few that really appeal to me) and THE HIGHER ENTELECHY, MELBOURNE (which has the advantages of unintelligibility and — well, you work out the other one). With luck, the subject should provide entertainment for quite a few meetings.'

The second meeting: September 1970

Eighteen years later, Yvonne Rousseau (30 April 1988, in *Australian Science Fiction Review*, Second Series, No. 14, p. 3) wrote: 'The Nova Mob has for the past seven years has met every month — usually to hear someone read a paper about sf and its writers, which is then discussed by the gathering (among whom there sometimes lurks the subject of the paper) ... The Nova Mob's first guest speaker was Bruce Gillespie, with a paper on Philip K. Dick.'

How did I get to make the very first presentation to the second meeting of the newly convened Nova Mob, held at the flat of John Bangsund on Friday, 4 September 1970? This was dropped on my head because I wasn't at the first meeting. In true Australian fashion, I had been dobbed in.

This might explain why I delivered the shortest talk I've ever given: a whole four pages of manuscript. I thought I might reprint here a fair copy of this talk. Two weeks of searching through my vast pile of manila folders failed to find it. Instead, I found the first draft, which does not include the page numbers of the three books I referred to. Hence I cannot bore you rigid by reprinting the very first Nova Mob talk. My subject was Philip K. Dick, of course. During the last 48 years I have given at least two other talks about the works of my favourite SF author. I do recall that about 40 people crowded into John's flat in St Kilda, 20 people in each living room.

My audience? The door jamb between the two rooms.

That night I received the best response I've ever had to one of my Nova Mob talks. As part of the argument I read a section from towards the end of Philip Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*. It was a pretty standard science-fictional action sequence, crisp and precise. I then read a very similar action sequence from a writer without naming the source. The prose of the action sequence was exactly the same in each passage. The second passage was from Graham Greene's novel *The Comedians*. Audience suitably gob-smacked.

You are invited to the second meeting of



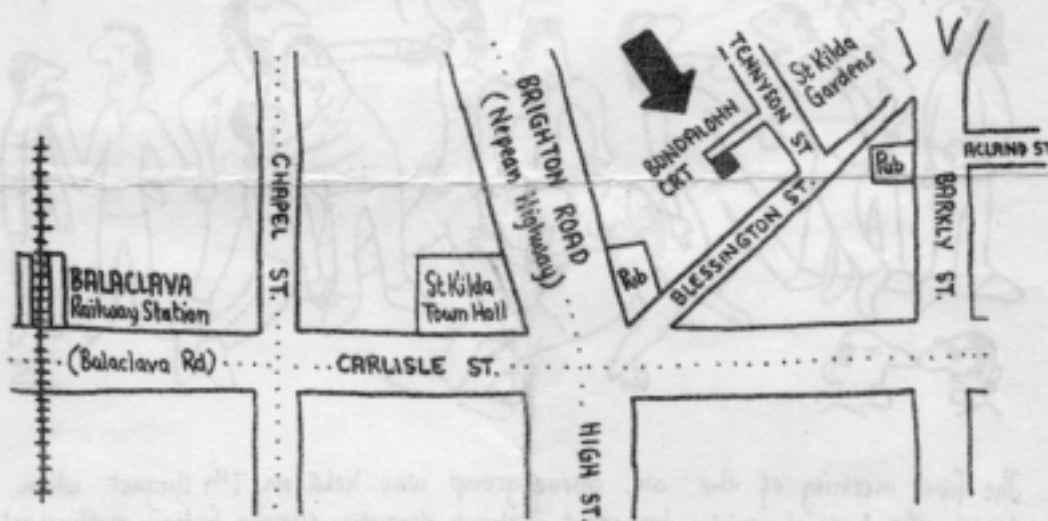
The first meeting of the, ah, above group was held on 7th August, when, despite the lack of public transport, about twenty science fiction enthusiasts gathered at Myf and Tony Thomas's flat in South Yarra to talk about sf and other things. It was agreed that the new group should meet on the first Friday of each month, and that meeting-places should be located within easy walking distance of a pub - for the benefit of people who forget to bring their own.

The second meeting will be held on FRIDAY, 4th SEPTEMBER, commencing about 8, at FLAT 1, 8 BUNDALOHN COURT, ST KILDA. Guest speaker will be Bruce Gillespie, publisher of *SF Commentary* - his subject, Philip K. Dick. The October meeting will most likely be at the Degraes Tavern, in the city.

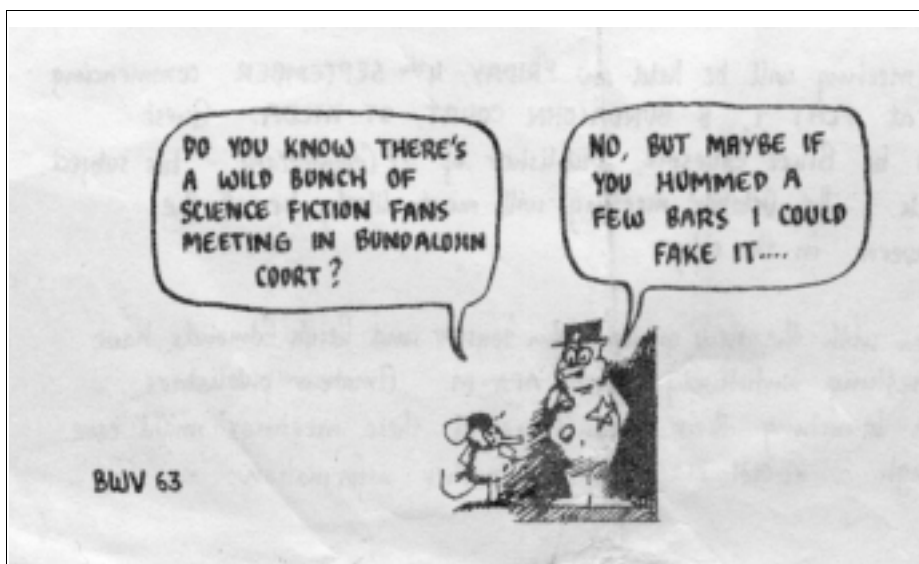
The location of Bundalohn Court is roughly indicated on the rough map below. Drivers of cars are requested to park them in Jemmyson Street, and drivers of camels &c. are respectfully advised that the St Kilda Gardens are closed at sunset, but that the beach isn't all that far away.

Your host for the evening, John Bangsund, advises:

Jony and Myf Thomas set a wonderful precedent at the first meeting by providing supper and ensuring that everyone was comfortable. I have no intention of following that precedent. The first dozen or so people to arrive will find chairs; the remainder, a rather hard floor. To be on the safe side, bring a cushion or plump friend. I had a guilty feeling leaving the Thomases without offering to help with the dishes: I don't want anyone to have that feeling at my place, so I will be providing disposable paper cups and plates (and coffee and a few miserable biscuits). If you want further information about the group or this particular meeting, ring Leigh Edmonds (62-0131, ext. 793) or me (60-0421, ext. 2055) during office hours.



Trams: 4 or 4D from Swanston Street. Others run down Chapel Street from Batman Avenue, and from Glenferrie Road to Carlisle Street. Buses: Balaclava station is about half a mile away. From St Kilda station a bus runs down Barkly Street.



John Bangsund, leaflet p. 3, September 1970.

Apa-Nova

Both John Bangsund and John Foyster mention in their reports on the early meetings the establishment of a new apa (amateur publishing association) to accompany the new group. It was called Apa-Nova, and it lasted only until the first incarnation of the Nova Mob failed. Few people contributed to the ‘mailings’ at each meeting. I have no recollection of this apa. I didn’t contribute to it, and seem not to have kept any copies. I was too busy churning out issues of *SF Commentary* at the time.

Beginnings and inspirations

The trouble with writing about the history of events of 48 years ago is that I can’t guess which assumptions I share with you, and which assumptions make no sense to people in 2019. The people I will mention most are John Foyster, John Bangsund, and Lee Harding. They were the creative kernel of *Australian Science Fiction Review*, the best fanzine I have ever read. The magazine was nominated twice for the Hugo Award, and I seem to remember that its editor, John Bangsund, was nominated once for Best Fan Writer. The magazine began in 1966, and chugged to a stop at the beginning of 1969. It put Australia on the world map as far as overseas fans were concerned. It was the inspiration for quite a few other Australian fanzines, including my own *SF Commentary*, which began in January 1969, and the Second Series of *ASFR*, which ran from 1986 to the early 1990s. John Bangsund was a brilliant editor and writer, one of Australia’s best-ever writers when he wasn’t being self-conscious about his writing. John Foyster had a more abrasive style, but could be just as witty as John. John Bangsund wasn’t even much interested in science fiction, except for a few authors, but he loved the idea of worldwide fandom and loved receiving an endless stream of complimentary letters of comment. John Foyster was the powerhouse behind *ASFR*’s serious interest in science fiction literature. And Lee Harding was a *bone fide* SF writer who also wrote very good reviews and articles.

Between the three of them, under their own names and pseudonyms, they wrote most of the first few issues of *ASFR*.

Inevitably, they formed more than an editorial team. They became a rival power centre (if such a concept can be applied to science fiction fandom) to the traditional centre, the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, which had been led by the ever valiant and long-suffering Mervyn R. Binns for the previous 20 years. This heady sense of power — this sense of becoming part of the world map, instead of a mere

footnote to the great fannish centres of New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and London — expressed itself through John Foyster’s various concepts of the time. The social centre of this group was not the dusty upper room of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, but around the kitchen table of whichever flat or house John Bangsund was living in — at least five of them between 1966 and 1972.

John Foyster’s example inspired Leigh Edmonds to begin Australia’s first apa, ANZAPA (Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association), in October 1968. We celebrated its 50th anniversary on 7 October 2018.

John Bangsund, inspired by a letter from Andrew Porter in New York, floated the idea of a world convention in Melbourne. John Foyster ran with the idea. A feasibility committee was appointed at the 1970 Easter Convention in Melbourne, and the bid was formally launched at the 1971 Melbourne Convention held at New Year. Australian fans were encouraged to publish fanzines, for that was our main way of publicising the bid — through publishing fanzines, writing letters, and using the phone. The Internet was still 25 years in the future.

John Foyster’s preferred other method of encouraging the campaign was to gather active fans together as often as possible and enthuse them — hence the launch of the Nova Mob in 1970.

The first incarnation

The first incarnation of the Nova Mob was a failure. Before it stopped happening after June 1971, only three meetings had been devoted to talking about science fiction: my talk on Philip K. Dick; a general discussion of the works of Robert Heinlein; and a paper by George Turner. Unfortunately I did not write down in my diary what he talked about when a very small number of us met around a table at the Golden Age Hotel, Melbourne.

John Foyster wanted to encourage maximum participation, so most meetings were at eating places or parties. The April meeting, unrecorded by me but written about



Golden Age Hotel, Melbourne, 10 June 1971. Last meeting of the first incarnation of the Nova Mob. Merv Binns (l.), John Foyster (r.). Probably the back of my head. (Photographer unknown, probably George Turner.)

by John Bangsund, was an energetic party at his flat in St Kilda on the first night of the 1971 Easter Convention, the Mini- Melcon. Not much serious talk about science fiction. Lots of drinking, even though many of us still did not drink alcohol.

The second incarnation: many mansions and flats

John Foyster was not one to give up on a good idea, although his life kept taking strange turns. Having launched the Worldcon bid, he dropped out of that after the US bombing of Haiphong Harbor in North Vietnam in 1972. For a couple of years at least, John wanted nothing to do with activities connected with USA. Robin Johnson headed the Bid Committee, then became Worldcon Chair after Australia won the bid in 1973 to hold the world convention in Melbourne in 1975. But suddenly, at the end of 1974 John reconvened the Nova Mob.

At the end of George Turner's long article about Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, published in *SF Commentary* 41/42, I've written that it was first delivered as a paper to the first meeting of the reconvened Nova Mob on 5 December 1974, at my flat in Carlton Street, Carlton. That's my nomination for most memorable Nova Mob meeting of them all. George Turner delivered his paper on *The Dispossessed*. It is long and detailed. As Lee Harding remembers, this led to John Foyster declaring that after reading *The Dispossessed* he would read no further works by Ursula Le Guin. I can't remember if he gave his reasons. The real surprise of the evening was a long rebuttal of the book by Peter Darling, a Sydney fan, by then living in Melbourne, who became a vital part of the Australia in '75 team. It was one of the few times when I've heard somebody mount a reasoned argument against a book under discussion, instead of the emission of cries of disgust. Unfortunately, Peter did not publish

his arguments.

From the beginning of 1975 until the end of 1978 the new incarnation of the Nova Mob had one major problem — every meeting was held at a different venue. This problem has been a major difficulty even in recent years, even when Julian Warner has had the use of the Internet. In the 1970s, the Bossa Nova, who was John Foyster for most of that period, and then Carey Handfield, had to tell all interested people where the next meeting would be every month. The news fanzines were very helpful, but like most fanzines, did not always come out on time. If we had a well-attended meeting, people would know where the next one would be held. After a poorly attended meeting, phone calls had to be made, or information dropped into Space Age Books, or whatever.

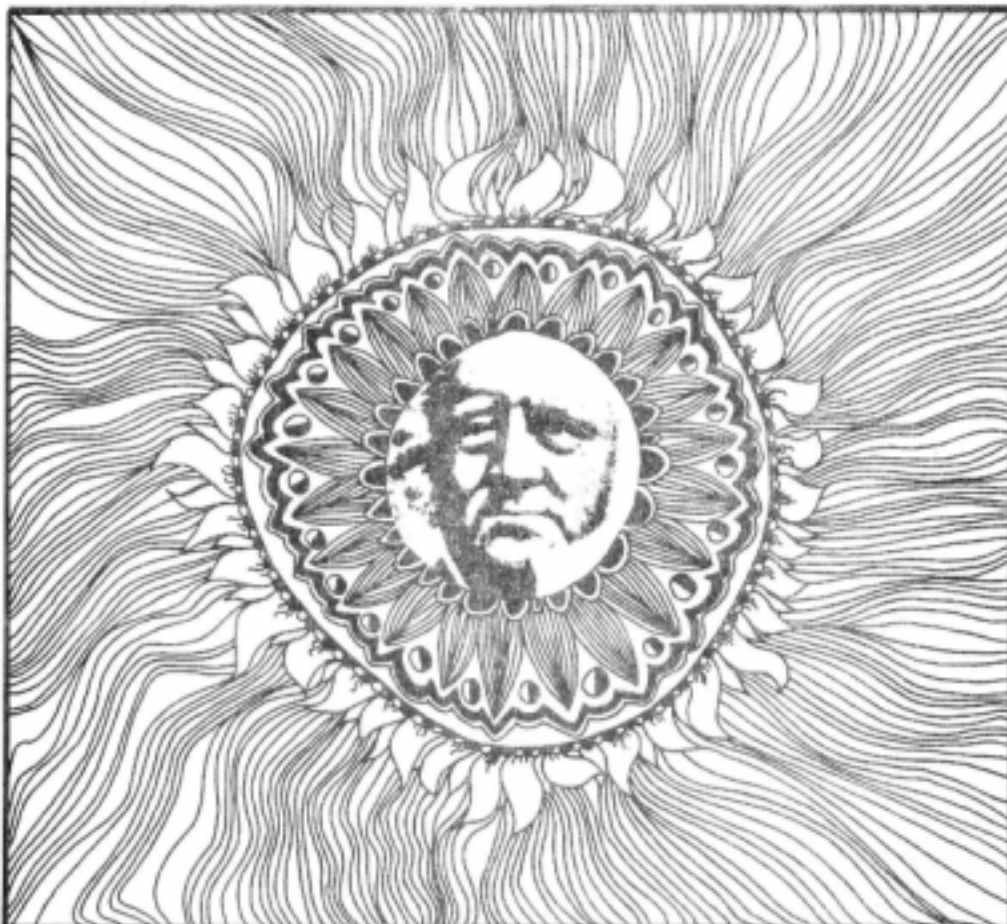
When I go through my diary entries I'm surprised at how many memorable meeting were held between 1975 and 1978. Remember that 1975 was the year in which Melbourne held the World Convention, in August, at the Southern Cross Hotel. People were busy with many Worldcon activities, yet still turned up at Nova Mob month after month.

When the Nova Mob began, John Bangsund had just split up with his first wife Diane, and was living in a bachelor flat in St Kilda. Various people who tried to share the flat with him fled quickly to other places of abode, but one of his hapless flatmates was Valma Brown, who sought solace in the arms of Leigh Edmonds. They have been together ever since. John Bangsund then took a job in Canberra as a Hansard reporter during the entire three years of the Whitlam Government. There he met Sally Yeoland, and they were married in 1974 and moved to Adelaide some time after Aussiecon in 1975, then back to Melbourne in 1978. John Foyster was married to Elizabeth during the years we've described so far. They had moved from a house in the eastern suburbs into a house in Clowes Street, South Yarra, owned by Elizabeth's parents, just near where Punt Road crosses the Yarra River. This house, with its large living room and central location, proved an ideal location for several meetings every year.

I haven't recorded in my diary the location of most of the meetings from 1975 to 1978. If I had access to all the newszines of the time, I could probably reconstruct this information. Unfortunately I gave all my newszines to Leigh Edmonds sometime in the late 1970s, when he was living in Canberra. He took them to Perth with him, and donated them to the Murdoch Library collection. There they lie still.

I do record that I had great trouble reaching some venues by public transport. On Tuesday, 4 May 1976, for instance, it took me 40 minutes to find Rob Gerrand's place. Rob was, of course, speaking about the works of Jack Vance. On one occasion, I tried to take the bus from the city centre to Clowes Street, South Yarra, only to find the bus did not run after 6.30 p.m. I had not yet discovered the Punt Road bus from Collingwood to St Kilda, which runs very close to Clowes Street.

I still rented my own flat in Carlton Street until the end of 1976, so several lively meetings took place there. Everybody lived close to everybody else in the general Carlton area, or in St Kilda. Rents started climbing. My own rent rose from \$14 a week in 1973 to \$21 a week just



THE NOVA MOB

- sometimes laughingly referred to as The Melbourne Science Fiction Society - meets next Friday, 2nd October, at the DEGRAVES TAVERN, Degraives Street, Melbourne, on which occasion John Foyster (publisher of "The Journal of Omphalistic Epistemology", late reviewer for the ill-fated "Vision of Tomorrow", master of disguises and all-round jolly good fellow) will speak on his feet - their nature, history and abiding significance. (With handnotes.)

Interested? Here's the drill:



Didn't hurt a bit, eh? Here's another: The Degraives Tavern normally closes about 8.30pm. You arrive about 6 or 7, spend liberally on the excellent (not to mention cheap) food and drink available, and about 8.30 the regulars are turfed out and the meeting starts. About midnight you stagger out, a better and a wider man. (Or woman, depending on what you've been drinking.) Be prepared to spend about two or three dollars.

Further information? Try Leigh Bimonds - 615-8793 or John Bangsund - 60-0421 ext 2055. Don't ask a policeman.

John Foyster, Nova Mob leaflet, January 1975, p. 1.

THE NOVA MOB: Notice of Meeting

The first meeting of the Nova Mob for 1975 will be held at the home of John Foyster, 6 Clowes Street, South Yarra, from 7.30pm on Thursday January 2. The subject for discussion is THE BASIC SCIENCE FICTION LIBRARY, and Lee Harding will lead off: the following is his list.

"Basic for whom? Anyone, when pressed, should be able to name their favourite (12) sf books. This has not been my intention. I have chosen a list of titles I would recommend to anyone not yet acquainted with the genre - in particular schools and other libraries - and I would use all or any one of them to convert educated readers to sf. My intention has been to produce a short list of relatively permanent value, one that will not be made unfashionable by social progress or literary pretentiousness. So: a Basic Library of SF for all time (one hopes):

1/ BARTH ABIDES George R. Stewart. The definitive catastrophe novel; well-written and, in this respect, well ahead of the competition.

2/ TIGER! TIGER! Alfred Bester. The best example of what has been loosely termed 'wide-screen baroque sf', and easily the most entertaining sf novel ever written.

3/ THE SILVER LOCUSTS Ray Bradbury. He has his detractors, and no one will deny that his later work, chocolate fudge and all, has tarnished a reputation that once burned brighter than any other sf star. But time cannot efface the weird lyricism of these tales. They helped sf to take a giant leap into literature and influenced a generation of writers. It is good to reflect on that.

4/ SPACE LORDS Cprdwainer Smith. His unique vision of a far-out future deeply reflecting our past hardly needs any introduction. These stories seem to best typify his remarkable output ... but it's hard to choose.

5/ HOT HOUSE Brian Aldiss. Chosen to best represent the far, far, future ~~genre~~ sub-genre. Aldiss' apocalyptic vision of a world gone mad with vegetation is surely one of the most extravagant in all sf.

6/ THE SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME ed. Robert Silverberg. This is volume 1 of the series, but any one of them will suffice. The more one digs into the sf past the more it becomes apparent that the best material has been under novel-length...

7/ CITIES IN FLIGHT James Blish. The one-volume Avon edition, naturally. Of all the so-called 'epics' of sf, this one seems to me the most satisfying. Blish's imagination continues to soar when lesser writers give out, and his prose remains constantly readable where, say, the Asimov of FOUNDATION time hasn't aged at all well.

8/ THE NINE BILLION NAMES OF GOD Arthur C. Clarke. When it came to selecting a one-author collection, Clarke's seemed the one best suited to display the short-story medium. He has the hard-science approach of many of his compatriots - Anderson, Clement, Niven, etc. - but blended with the gentle poetry I have been convinced best represents a 'sense of wonder'.

9/ THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE Philip K. Dick. A fine, smoothly-written novel that best typifies the sf predilection of playing with alternative possibilities. Quiet, moving and richly detailed; possibly the best book Dick has done.

10/ THE SIRENS OF TITAN Kurt Vonnegut. Chosen because it is such a damn fine book - probably the only one to match TIGER! TIGER! for sheer entertainment.

11/ THE PARADOX MEN Charles L. Harness. Sorry, but I just had to slip this one in. It overlaps with the Bester book - both being superior examples of wide-screen baroque. But it has so many brilliant passages that cry out for examination and appreciation that I had to put it in...

12/ THE SHORT STORIES OF H.G. WELLS This needs no special pleading: here are just about all the plot elements of every sf story you have ever read. Wells was a master story teller, then and now. I know of no better way to begin an odyssey into short story sf than this marvellous volume.

Well there it is. One final word: my selections have been soundly based on AVAILABILITY of the works mentioned. Bearing in mind the basic premise of the above library, I feel this is essential.

Have fun,

Lee Harding "

.....
You are invited to bring a friend or two to the meeting of January 2, and so you are receiving two copies of this notice.

.....
The December 1974 meeting of the Nova Mob made a few decisions about future meetings. Initially at least meetings will be only semi-open: i.e., you can bring a friend, but there won't be any advertising. This will probably change in the future. Meetings will be held on the first Thursday of the month (co-inciding with meetings at the One Tun, as it happens). A tentative program for early 1975 was laid out as follows:

- Thursday, February 6: Philip K. Dick - led by Bruce Gillespie
- Thursday, March 6 : Awards in Science fiction: a general discussion, later with particular reference to the Hugo Awards for 1975.
- Thursday, April 3 : Definitions of Science Fiction - led by George Turner
- Thursday, May 1 : The work of Alfred Bester, as exemplified by THE INDIAN GIVER (novel appearing in ANALOG 11, 12/74, 1/75) - led by John Foyster
- Thursday, June 5 : The novels of Wilson Tucker - led by Bruce Gillespie

The above is subject to change at short notice - and other ~~wxkx~~ subjects have already been listed. Your suggestions are welcomed.

typed by the self-appointed secretary, John Foyster, 15.12.1974

.....
Either casually or deliberately I (John Foyster) have given some readers of this the impression that there might be some sort of do at the Foyster Farm on January 1. I cannot deny it: yer all welcome to come up on the first day of 1975 - bring what you need - and if you are one of the few readers who hasn't been and consequently doesn't know exactly how to get there, ask around, and if desperate ring me at work (811271). Spread this information around as much as you like!

before the house was sold from under me. Up a couple of blocks and around the corner was the slanshack (fannish shared household) that was first called Innuendo Inc. Robin Johnson and John and Jenny Ham shared it first. Then Jenny Ham disappeared, then John Ham, and Robin began sharing the house with Don Ashby and others. The name was changed to the Magic Pudding Club. It's a bit difficult remembering the other inhabitants, because the place became a seven-nights-a-week party. Don's life centred around various girlfriends, his small theatre group, and fandom. His brother Derrick moved in, before he and Christine McGowan became partners, then married. Randal Flynn had been at the 1975 Le Guin Writers Workshop, but suddenly came back from Brisbane and appeared among us in early 1976. The brightest star of the place was Ken Ford, a very sardonic and amusing educated ocker.

Two visionary moments from the Magic Pudding Club

Just before or after the Governor General, Sir John Kerr, dismissed the Whitlam Government in November 1975, the great comedian Norman Gunston (real name Gary McDonald) hosted a program in which he put himself forward as 'NG for GG'. The Magic Pudding Club boasted one small black-and-white TV set, around which a large group of us gathered. We saw nothing but fuzz on the screen. Robin Johnson picked up the aerial, and lo! vision was restored. So Robin spent the whole hour holding the aerial so that we could watch *The Norman Gunston Show*.

A month or so later, Derrick Ashby volunteered to speak about Fantasy Novels to a Nova Mob meeting held at the Magic Pudding Club. He certainly did. Derrick was undertaking some sort of tertiary course at the time, probably teacher training. He had written his literature thesis about J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. This he read to us ... *all of it*. It took about two hours. Derrick's big brother Don retired to the kitchen, along with his personal gang. It was reported that John Foyster sat, eyes glazed, throughout. The rest of us couldn't believe what was happening, but survived. After all, you could count on a great post-Nova Mob party at the Magic Pudding Club.

Changes and challenges

Venues included the flat that Robin Johnson and Peter Darling shared before Aussiecon, George Turner's flat in St Kilda, the house that Merv Binns and his father Ernie shared in Ripponlea, and John Foyster's flat after he and Elizabeth split up in 1976. Also the house in Johnston Street, Collingwood that Elaine and I shared until March 1979, and John and Sally's house after they moved from Adelaide to their house in Kew in late 1978.

As you can see from my diary entries, everybody was dragged in to give papers. John Foyster gave many presentations, including 'The Role of the Horse in Science Fiction'. Marc Orlieb spoke about 'The Role of Chocolate Mousse in Science Fiction'. David Grigg gave

some fine science-based talks, including one on 'Why Science Is More Interesting than Science Fiction'. I gave one talk, fully written, on the novels of Alan Garner at the gigantic Brunswick Street flat into which Don Ashby and friends moved in 1977, and another talk, *ex tempore*, on Russell Hoban. The latter experience convinced me not to give talks without a prepared script.

On 7 November 1978, I record that we had a gathering at the Amess Street slan shack in Carlton, which included the ever-in-motion Don Ashby, Henry Gasko, who had arrived from Canada during 1975 or 1976, and Carey Handfield. At the December meeting that year, Rob Gerrand and I talked about the works of Brian Aldiss, at Rob's place. My note says that it was 'very badly attended. Nova Mob future in doubt.' No meetings were held during 1979 and 1980.

What was the world like by then? The exhilaration of the Gough Whitlam days, 1972 to 1975, had receded, followed by the huge increase in unemployment during the Fraser years. However, tertiary education was still free, although Whitlam's universal health care had been squashed by Fraser. Rents were still low, but increasing in the inner suburbs. Most of us were single at the beginning of the seventies, but many of us formed partnerships during the decade, and began to spread out to the middle and outer suburbs. David Grigg and Sue Pagram got together, lived in St Kilda for awhile, then moved out to David's parents' place at Research. Lee Harding and Irene Pagram had got together in 1972, and were living in St Kilda. John and Sally Bangsund had moved to Fairfield. John Foyster had split up with Elizabeth in 1976, and he and Jenny Bryce had moved into a huge upstairs flat on the Esplanade, St Kilda. It was in their huge living room that the 10th Anniversary of ANZAPA was celebrated in 1978. Don Ashby kept moving until he settled in Brunswick for some time and got married to Max. Throughout these years he organised the Don Ashby furniture-moving service for the many fans who moved house. Elaine and I got together in March 1978, married in March 1979, and moved to our own house in Keele Street, Collingwood. Carey Handfield, Rob Gerrand, and I were heavily involved in our small publishing company, Norstrilia Press, which ran from 1975 to 1985.

The upshot is that we were all too busy to feel the lack of monthly Nova Mob meetings, and there seemed no way to revive the institution using the system of having each meeting at a different venue.

In 1979, several people important to this story met each other for the first time at the Writers' Workshop held in Sydney, where Terry Carr and George Turner were writer instructors/mentors. Two previous workshops for prospective writers, in 1975 and 1977, had forged firm friendships, including with Philippa Maddern, Randal Flynn, and Kitty Vigo in 1975. The Sydney Workshop of 1979 not only brought to Australia Terry Carr, one of America's greatest book editors and fanzine publishers, but also introduced to each other such people as Russell Blackford, Judy Buckrich, Lucy Sussex, and Leanne Frahm. I don't have a list of attendees, because no anthology of their works appeared. (1975's workshop led to the publication of *The Altered I*, edited

by Lee Harding, and 1977's led to *The View from the Edge*, edited by George Turner.)

The Nova Mob as a concept remained strong in the vast mind of John Foyster. He remained committed to the idea of Australia as a centre of SF criticism and reviewing. George Turner was one of his main allies. George, a mainstream author and Miles Franklin Award winner, had in 1967 been discovered by John Bangsund as someone deeply interested in science fiction literature. George Turner wrote powerful critical articles and reviews, first for John at *ASFR*, then for various John Foyster fanzines, and then a huge amount of material for my *SF Commentary*. John Foyster once suggested that we hold Critics' Workshops as well as Writers' Workshops, with the Nova Mob as a pointer to how a critics' workshop might work.

The current incarnation: Venue (1): Shakespeare Grove, early 1980s

We have now arrived at May 1981, the renaissance of the Nova Mob and the beginning of the current era. John and Jenny moved from the Esplanade to a huge house in Shakespeare Grove, St Kilda. Across the road was Luna Park. Every night the background sound was the screams of people as they travelled along the dips and curves of the Scenic Railway. The beach was less than 100 metres away. The living room provided, at last, a permanent home for the Nova Mob.

During the 1970s, people had always met for dinner before Nova Mob meetings, but rarely in any organised way. Now that we had moved to St Kilda, John and Jenny suggested a regular pre-Nova Mob dinner at the Danube Restaurant in Acland Street. This was the companion restaurant to the Scheherazade, which lasted much longer. Both were second homes for the many Jewish families who had moved into the area after World War II. Both provided huge portions of delicious Hungarian food. At the Danube, if you asked for the wiener schnitzel, you were greeted with a huge slab of perfectly cooked veal that covered the plate. If you showed any hesitancy in eating it, the waitress, who was built like a tank and seemed just as threatening, would order you to 'Eat! You will eat your dinner!'

Again, I was dobbled in to provide the first talk at the new venue. I remember people gathered round and peered peircingly at me as I talked about the short stories of Gene Wolfe. That paper eventually appeared in one of the early editions of *Australian Science Fiction Review*, Second Series. I had written the talk between 10 o'clock in the morning and midday that same day, but I think it stands up quite well.

Strong personalities were involved in the Shakespeare Grove days of the Nova Mob. As I wrote at the time: '[After the Danube gathering] we staggered to Foyster's, only to have a drunken slanging match between Lee Harding and Damien Broderick, with John Foyster clapped out in the corner. Depressing. Interesting to meet Russell Blackford for the first time. Not much worthwhile said about the works of Samuel R. Delany.'

This might indeed be the meeting that was taped by John Foyster, then faithfully transcribed in the pages of Damien Broderick's novel *Transmitters* a year or so later — with the names of the guilty changed.

On Wednesday, 2 September 1981, however, we had 'a very good Nova Mob. Malcolm Gordon, Roger Weddall, and Elaine Cochrane attended. Foyster much more approachable than usual. His talk was about Brian Aldiss, esp. about Aldiss's work as a reflection of social changes in Britain over the last 25 years.'

The following month's meeting included cutting a cake for George Turner's 65th birthday.

After 1982, it again becomes a bit difficult to guess the venue of each meeting. Most of them were at Shakespeare Grove, but John and Jenny asked for their privacy from time to time. We had several meetings at the house in Brunswick that Damien Broderick and Diane Hawthorne had bought in Brunswick after they arrived from Sydney in the late 1970s. On Wednesday, 3 March 1982, Christopher Priest returned to Melbourne from Britain. He had most recently spoken to a Nova Mob, along with Vonda McIntyre, after the 1977 Monash Writers Workshop. In 1982, he had travelled back to Australia as a guest of the Adelaide Writers Festival, but had become so bored in Adelaide that he had flitted across to Melbourne to catch up with his friends here. Yvonne Rousseau tells the story later in this issue of how it nearly became both her first and last Nova Mob meeting.

When we met at Damien and Diane's, we tried out various eating places, especially Alaysia 2 in Sydney Road, which some years later was closed by health regulators. The range of subject matter remained familiar: J. G. Ballard, Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon. For the first time, writers were asked to speak about their own books. Damien talked about his *The Dreaming Dragons*, after the Norstrilia Press edition was published, and Gerald Murnane spoke about his third book, *The Plains*. Also published by Norstrilia Press, it did not really fit any category. It was nominated for the *Age* Book of the Year, and re-started Gerald's career.

When you look at the list of meetings from these periods, you will find large gaps in my notes. I cannot remember whether these gaps occurred because I did not attend meetings, or because (as often happened) I filled in entries weeks later and forgot to enter the date of the meeting. For instance, in 1984 I recorded no meetings until Wednesday, 6 June 1984. However, my note does give the correct impression: that the Nova Mob was still very much a centre of fannish activity in Melbourne, although many other groups had sprung up during the 1970s and 1980s. I wrote: 'Dinner at the Danube. Mark Linneman on the works of Robert Heinlein. Newcomers included Anne Harding (a friend of Jenny Blackford), and the Linneman cheer squad: Marc Ortlieb, Terry Stroud, Roy Ferguson, Phil Ware and Mandy Herriot. The news arrived of the death of Bert Chandler.'

Venue (2): the Blackfords'

By the end of 1984, we had established that the Nova Mob could keep going very well if it had a permanent

base; but John and Jenny could no longer provide that monthly venue. Thus began the two-year residence at the home of Jenny and Russell Blackford in South Melbourne. The only reason why I knew the precise period is because I discovered an account that Jenny Blackford wrote in *Larrikin* of the last Nova Mob party of that two-year stint.

Venue (3): Cathy Kerrigan's

After two years, at the end of 1986 Russell and Jenny declared that enough was enough. I did not attend any meetings during 1987, and a few in 1988. During those years the Nova Mob met at the flat of Cathy Kerrigan, in the Windsor area east of St Kilda Road. I found it difficult to reach her flat by public transport. More importantly, I could not get to whichever restaurant we ate at first, and then get to Cathy's flat. On one occasion, Wynne Whiteford drove me. Although I have listed a few meetings in 1988, I don't remember attending them.

Much more important to this saga was the fact that in 1987 John Foyster took a job in Adelaide, broke up with Jenny Bryce, and some months later began living with Yvonne Rousseau, who also moved to Adelaide with her daughter Vida. Elaine and I felt this loss keenly, but we were glad that during later years Yvonne and Vida often returned to Melbourne to catch up with many friends. Yvonne kept writing magnificent essays for my magazines.

Venue (4): Alan Stewart's

At the beginning of 1989, Alan Stewart, who had bought a house in Richmond, offered it as a venue for the Nova Mob. According to my diary notes, I attended very few meetings during that time, but again this could have been more a result of diary-keeping fatigue than Nova Mob fatigue. I do recall that Alan's living room was never quite large enough to fit the people who wanted to attend, but we all fitted in somehow. It proved more difficult to find a nearby restaurant offering edible food. Alan insisted that we should eat at cheap restaurants, but cheap often meant sub-par in his area. At the Erawan Thai restaurant, every dish tasted of some strange ingredient I have not encountered before or since.

It was Alan who started the tradition of End of Year Yum Cha Brunches to replace the End of Year Parties. I record in my diary that on Saturday, 20 January 1990, we held the 1989 End of Year gathering as our first Annual Yum Cha. I also record that it was Mark Linneman's last day in Australia. Elaine and I had first met him at a New Year's Party at Damien and Diane's place in 1981 just after he had arrived from America to take up a position as Law Librarian at Melbourne University. He would have loved to have stayed in Melbourne, but felt that for professional reasons he had to return to America — a move that nearly proved fatal to his career.

Our stay at Alan Stewart's was a very pleasant period in the history of the Nova Mob. Wynne Whiteford attended regularly, and gave a few talks. Somewhat older than the rest of us, he would pop through the door, greet

everybody, and sit straight down on the smallest chair in the room. I said to myself at the time: I want to be as fit as him when I reach that age. I have now reached that age, but would prefer to sit on comfortable chairs. George Turner also attended regularly until his first stroke in 1993, after which he went to live in Ballarat until his death in 1997.

Back to 1991. On 1 May, Sean McMullen spoke about 'SF Writing for the Media'. This might have been the first time that the Nova Mob was willing to admit that media SF existed. At the meeting I received the real Ditmar Awards from Mark Loney. You might recall that Mark Loney had produced a set of Ditmar Awards that looked like stuffed cane toads for the Easter convention held in Brisbane. Mark said that he was then going to substitute the real Ditmars on the night. However, in the week before the convention, his brother died. Mark had to fly back to Western Australia, and stayed there a few weeks. He wasn't in Brisbane, and his cane toad Ditmars were taken as a send-up of the Ditmars altogether, at a time when the Western Australian fans were starting to take them very seriously. They were also very upset because that year a Ditmar was awarded to Best Fannish Cat.

On 2 October 1991, I gave my talk on the novels of Jonathan Carroll. Attendees included such people as Marc Ortlieb, George Turner, Terry Frost, Alan Stewart, Roger Weddall, Michelle Muijsert, LynC, Donna Heenan, and Julian Warner. Marc has since gafiated, and others no longer attend the Nova Mob. Roger died in 1992, George in 1997, and Michelle a few years ago. LynC and Julian are still with us.

Marc Ortlieb could always draw the largest crowd to a Nova Mob. In 1993, he talked about Lewis Carroll's verse-novel *Sylvia and Bruno*. He also gave a very successful talk on the works of Colin Kapp, an author now nearly forgotten.

Nova Mob directions, 1990s

It's not much use merely listing further talks during this period. The list I give in my diary notes (with later help from Kim Huett) is reasonably complete. It's worth asking about what was *not* happening at this point. The wave of feminist thinking that rolled through the outside world in the early seventies and through fandom during the later seventies seems to have washed right past the Nova Mob. Women were now attending meetings in ever increasing numbers. This is rather different from the situation at the end of the 1960s, where the only women to be found at Melbourne SF gatherings were girlfriends or wives of SF fans. But the main SF fan activities attracting large number of women fans were the various forms of media SF — *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* in the sixties, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* in the mid seventies, and *Star Wars* in 1977. These phenomena were rarely mentioned at Nova Mob meetings. There were increasing numbers of major women writers in literary SF, starting with Ursula Le Guin, Josephine Saxton, and Joanna Russ in the early seventies, their numbers expanding rapidly from 1978 onward. But very few women Nova Mob attendees volunteered to give talks. Yvonne Rousseau is a very

fine writer about all things science fictional, but she did not feel confident about public speaking. Elaine Cochrane has given six talks over the years. Ali Kayn gave a presentation about her *SF Handbook* in 1995, and Kerry Greenwood has given highly entertaining Nova Mobs on two different occasions about her own work. Things improved greatly after 1997.

Venue (5): The home of Lucy Sussex and Julian Warner

Alan Stewart proved to be a stalwart host, despite problems with his home plumbing, but by the end of 1996 it was obvious that his living room simply could not hold the numbers of people who wanted to attend Nova Mob. People often had to stand in the corridor outside his main room, or sit on chairs just outside the door. Lucy Sussex and Julian Warner had moved recently to their current residence in Brunswick, so they offered their place as a venue for meetings from the beginning of 1997.

When you consider that it's 21 years since we moved to Frederick Street, and Lucy and Julian became Bossas Novae, I would still claim that these 21 years form a continuous period of great success.

We had already heard a few authors talking about their own work, but thanks to Lucy's abilities as a networker among the SF and fantasy writing community, from 1997 on we have been treated to an extraordinary roll call of interesting authors talking interestingly about their own work. On 1 October 1997, for instance, Isobelle Carmody gave her presentation. Lucy and Julian's very large kitchen was packed with people ('thousands', I say in my diary). Isobelle was already one of Australia's most popular children's and young adults' writers, and a fine speaker.

Much the same happened when Cecilia Dart-Thornton spoke to us. She was enjoying quite some success at the time, although I haven't heard her name mentioned much recently. She did mention that Lee Harding's *Displaced Person*, which won the Australian Children's Book Award in 1982 and stayed in print for more than 20 years, had been an inspiration to her when she began writing. Isobelle Carmody has said much the same.

Somewhen in 1998 or 1999 we were first invaded by the authors who described themselves as writers of horror. I was unfamiliar with the genre at the time, and it took awhile to realise that these authors had a much wider view of its possibilities than I had. Steve Proposch and Daniel (?) spoke to us in 1997. They were editing one of the first major Australian horror magazines of the time. Sometime in 1999, we were first visited by Kirstyn McDermott and Ian Mond, and their friends Ori Schiffrin, Andrew Macrae, and Sarah Marland. I don't remember how they had met each other, but they could talk about newer writers that some by-now-old-fogeys such as me had never heard of, let alone read. Kirstyn gave talks about the work of Michael Marshall Smith and Caitlin Keirnan, and both she and Ian gave a presentation on Dennis Etchison. Ian Mond gained a full house

for his very funny and vivid talk about the work of Joe Lansdale. Andrew Macrae gave talks about such authors as Jack Womack, the cyberpunk writers, and Greg Egan.

Ian credits me with welcoming him and his friends to the Nova Mob — which raises a whole question of whether or not people felt welcome to the group during previous years. I know that Malcolm Gordon attended for several years in the seventies without anybody much talking to him, and other people have made similar comments. It seems to me that Nova Mob became much more welcoming during the late 1990s and 2000s.

It's not clear why people gradually stopped being willing to give talks to the Nova Mob. As I record in my diary, each February meeting would be devoted to formulating the program for the coming year. One could depend on most dates to be filled by people volunteering to give papers or other types of presentation. For instance, in 1998 Charles Taylor spoke about the novels of Wynne Whiteford, Elaine Cochrane talked about Greg Egan, I gave a paper about the stories and novels of Joanna Russ, and Steve Paulsen talked about the *MUP Encyclopedia of Australian SF and Fantasy*, which had just been published. That was a normal Nova Mob schedule.

However, as the years rolled on, Lucy and Julian found it more and more difficult to rope in volunteers to give papers. This has much to do with the quality of the guest speakers that they found for us, including, among others, Karen Joy Fowler from California, Kerry Greenwood from the worlds of crime fiction and TV, Andrew Butler from Britain, and Dorothy Porter from the world of science fiction poetry. It seems to me that people began to expect to be entertained, not to provide the entertainment themselves. This has made life increasingly difficult for Lucy and Julian.

One positive effect of speaker fatigue is that Justin Ackroyd began stepping in more and more to organise his round-table discussions about award nominees and winners. He used Slow Glass Books to track down the possible nominees and winners for the Hugos, Arthur Clarke Awards, World Fantasy Awards, and Aurealis and Ditmar fiction categories. He could then assign each book to a definite speaker, so that all nominees were covered. This style of Nova Mob meeting has worked very well for many years, until superseded by Justin's hockey-umpiring duties.

Venue (6): The home of Andrew Macrae and Sarah Marland

Hosting the monthly Nova Mob inevitably becomes a drag for anybody who undertakes the job. As Nova Mob fatigue set in for Lucy and Julian, Andrew Macrae and Sarah Marland, who had a house along Union Street, Brunswick, began to take over hosting duties. I record that most of the meetings for 2002 were at their place, and all of them after April 2003. Something Had To Be Done, because Andrew and Sarah were not sure that they would be staying at the house in Brunswick. Lucy and Julian thought of the perfect solution: stop clogging up anybody's living room and move to a library venue.

Venue (7): North Carlton Public Library, Rathdowne Street, Carlton (2004–2006)

Venue (8): Northcote branch of the Darebin Public Library, Separation Street, Northcote (2006–15)

Venue (9): Kathleen Syme Community Library, Grattan Street, Carlton (2015–18)

Venue (10): Kensington Town Hall, near Newmarket Station (2018–)

Moving to the North Carlton Public Library in 2004 provided many benefits to the Nova Mob. Yes, we found that we could afford it, although many people had their doubts at the beginning. For many years, the \$2 gold coin donation each month from every member attending covered room rental and edibles costs. However, I am told that in some later years, some individual fans topped up the kitty when necessary, and the charge had to be increased to \$5 per person per meeting.

The numbers of attendees that had crowded us out of living rooms at Frederick Street and Union Street did not diminish, but only increased. At the first meeting at the North Carlton Library, 33 people attended for the traditional ‘Deciding the Program for the Year’. Most meetings at the North Carlton Library had 20 or more attending, and often I counted 30 or more. You’ll find

in my notes mentions of new people who found the Nova Mob during those years, including Tim Train and Lexie Harley, Lucy Cleary, Frank Weissenborn, John Davies, Clare McDonald, Roslyn Gross, Brad Jackel, etc. Tony Thomas returned to the Nova Mob after 40 years or more, and Jenny Bryce for the first time since the mid 1980s. However, apart from guest speakers such as Bernard Calleo on Comics, Alison Goodman on selling your fiction on the internet, and Andrew Nette on Australian Pulp, there remained a fairly small range of people willing to deliver papers: me, Elaine Cochrane, Bill Wright, Charles Taylor, Murray MacLachlan, Lucy Sussex, and Julian Warner. Ian Mond, Kirstyn McDermott, and their friends overwhelmed us with their brilliance, then faded away: Ian got married; Kirstyn became the partner of writer Jason Nahrung and they went to Ballarat; Andrew and Sarah just disappeared from view. They got married, then split up.

Still, apart from problems with dealing with library managements, which have led to the periodic change of venue, the Nova Mob remains an extraordinarily successful feature of the Australian SF scene. The steady decrease of attendees at the Kathleen Syme Library happened only because of an unexpected side-effect of moving to Carlton: the lack of parking. People such as Elaine and me found the Carlton location much more convenient than any of the other library venues, but many people stopped attending because they could not find parking spaces. This is not a problem around the Kensington Town Hall.

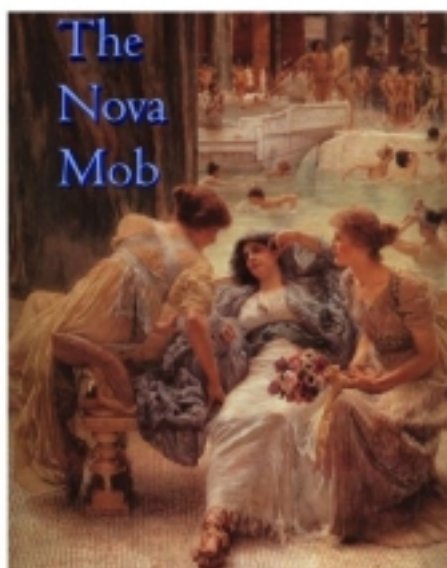
Conclusion

Nothing more to add, except odd notes about matters I have not even mentioned so far. For instance, I ask myself: why have few of the papers delivered at the Nova Mob been published? Mine have, of course, because I’ve been able to dump them into my own magazines. One of them has travelled widely and often reprinted: my talk about ‘The Non-Science Fiction Novels of Philip K.

eFNAC
Historical
Photo-supplements
#2

July 2001

In this case, a combination of the before-meeting dinner at the Saigon Inn, and the June 2001 meeting of...



At the Saigon Inn



John Bangsund



Sally Yeoland



Charles Taylor



Rose Mitchell



Sue Ann Barber



Danik Bancilhon

John Foyster's eFNAC,
PDF available on eFanzines.com.
Captions are John's. Correct
spellings are Murray MacLachlan,
Kirstyn McDermott, and Andrew
Macrae.



Bruce Barnes



Trevor Clarke

And then, off to

The Nova Mob

(partial attendance)



Yvonne Rousseau



Alan Stewart



Andrew McCrae (speaker)



Julian Warner



Ori Shifrin



Ros Gross



Murray McLachlan



Trevor Clarke



Lucy Sussex



Kirsten McDermott



Charles Taylor



Ian Mond



Bruce Barnes



Chris Deere



Bruce Gillespie



Sarah Markard



Sue Ann Barber

And my thanks to Elaine
Cochrane, Bruce Gillespie,
and Julian Warner for help
in identifying the players...

John Foyate
28 June 2005

Dick'. Elaine has consented to the publication of only three of her papers so far: the R. A. Lafferty article, which has recently been reprinted in America, her article about Dan Simmons' SF books, and her coverage of interesting popular books about science. Quite a few of George Turner's talks have been published, but I can't match the titles I've written in my diary with particular manuscripts I have on file. I'm not sure how many of Lucy's pieces have been published. If John Foyster published any of his Nova Mob presentations, they must have been in his fanzines. I can't pin them down. Making a checklist of published Nova Mob talks would be huge other project, one I don't have time for.

Worse, the one sure record we thought we had of

Nova Mob meetings could not be found. John Foyster recorded every Nova Mob meeting he attended in the 1980s, but after his death in 2003 in Adelaide, Yvonne could find none of those cassettes. Did they even make the journey from Melbourne to Adelaide in 1987, let alone survive incarceration in the vast Foyster collection in Adelaide? We will never know.

Many apologies for mentioning matters I shouldn't have mentioned, and failure to mention your name, whoever you are. Thanks for all the memories.

— **Bruce Gillespie**, 25 September 2018 (with a few bits added in April 2019)

Yvonne Rousseau

Yvonne gets her knees thumped

My first fannish contact was, essentially, Bruce Gillespie — but with complications.

At the beginning of 1975, after four years in Adelaide, I had returned to Melbourne with my husband Mick Weiss and our one-year-old daughter Vida. A few weeks earlier, our son Ralph had been born prematurely, and had died. Although I was wistfully aware of Melbourne's 1975 Aussiecon, and the associated writers' workshop with Ursula K. Le Guin, it was absolutely impossible for me to participate. Instead, conditions worsened until, at the beginning of 1976, I began life anew (with a sense of reprieve) as a deserted wife, struggling to support my daughter and myself.

No clue reached me of another inaugural event in 1976, when Norstrilia Press, established by three Melbourne sf fans — Rob Gerrand, Bruce Gillespie, and Carey Handfield — published *The Altered I* (based on Le Guin's Aussiecon workshop, and edited by the novelist Lee Harding). In March 1981, however, Norstrilia's critical anthology *The Stellar Gauge* (edited by Michael J. Tolley and Kirpal Singh) became the subject of my first review in the *Australian Book Review* (ABR). I also reviewed Norstrilia's novel *The Dreaming Dragons* (by Damien Broderick) in the ABR of May 1981.

Two fannish invitations ensued. Colin Steele (sf reviewer for the *Canberra Times*) wrote inviting me to appear on an sf literary critics' panel with himself and the Melbourne Age sf reviewer (the novelist George Turner) at the Australian National University in Canberra. My circumstances would have obliged me to decline, even if ABR had not taken six weeks to forward the invitation. However, I now subscribed to Bruce Gillespie's fanzine *SF Commentary* (having read of it in the Melbourne Age, and wishing to educate myself). On the strength of my ABR reviews, Bruce thought it worthwhile to send me a series of invitations to the monthly meetings of Mel-

bourne's sf discussion group, the Nova Mob.

On the one hand, I pined for this chance to meet, at last, other readers of science fiction. On the other hand, my current dwelling in Brunswick was distant from possible babysitters, and (while even less good at map-interpretation and orientation than I am today), I would need to travel by night-time public transport from Brunswick, due north of the city centre, to St Kilda, due south, and then find Shakespeare Grove.

The seeming solution was the Nova Mob advertised for Wednesday, 3 March 1982. In mid-December 1981 my daughter and I had migrated somewhat south-east to North Carlton, close to friends willing to babysit; and this Nova Mob (starring the visiting British writer Christopher Priest) was to be relatively nearby, at a Brunswick address. Consulted beforehand by telephone, the as-yet-unmet Bruce Gillespie assured me that the Mob was always delighted to see new faces. I privately wondered, nevertheless, whether this would apply to one possible attendee: Damien Broderick, whose crushingly polite letter in the August 1981 ABR, commenting on my favourable review of *The Dreaming Dragons*, had been answered with equally crushing politeness by my own letter in the September 1981 ABR.

Setting off by tram on an end-of-summer sultry evening, at the age of 36, to make my first fannish contact, I therefore regretted that my babysitting friends (who knew nothing of the letters in ABR) had dwelt so much on the disquieting theme of how extremely brave this was of me. 'Humdrum and unenterprising' was the description I would have preferred.

When I rang the doorbell beside the meeting-site's open front door, I was disconcertingly peered at from the other end of the passageway by a vague figure which then went away again. Nevertheless, I was soon being ushered inside by new arrivals, and exchanging introduc-

tions with the affable Lee Harding and with three fans who would be Collectively engaged with me, four years later, in editing the second series of *Australian Science Fiction Review*. Lucy Sussex (who remarked upon Darko Suvin, one of the household's Persian cats) and Jenny and Russell Blackford. Whereas Lucy's hair was blonde and exceptionally long, Jenny's was both short and exceptionally blonde: she wore a stylish black dress adorned with military-style buttons, and she sat on the kitchen table to drink from the mouth of an elegantly shaped long green bottle. This drew an embarrassed remonstrance from Russell, who seemingly believed that one used a wine glass as proof that one wasn't inebriated.

Before Lee and Lucy and the Blackfords drifted away into the living room or the back garden, I had learnt that this meeting-site was not neutral space: I was actually a guest in Damien Broderick's house. He and Chris Priest and most of the Mob had yet to arrive from the local pub where they had been dining. Now I felt uneasy until I could identify myself to my host, since he might have felt annoyed enough by my *ABR* letter not to want to let me into his house.

Perched on a kitchen chair strategically placed to intercept new arrivals, I was unfortunately also in the path of Imme, the household's outsize German short-haired pointer. Highly strung at the calmest of times, Imme now began manically racing past, and she twice cannoned into my knees, apparently as heedlessly as an armoured tank. Unaware that Damien himself had taken two months to recover from a leg-injury that Imme had inflicted using similar tactics in an open field, I strove to conceal my agony. Considered as an excuse for writhing in public, 'the dog bumped me' seemed pitifully inadequate.

Further demoralisation: thunderous noise revealed that there was a second doorway into the living room, and that the rest of the Mob had now made use of it. Abandoning my apparently foiled plan to waylay my host, I braved the living room, which (in Bruce Gillespie's estimation) now held thirty people, and would comfortably accommodate six. The bafflingly wet-haired man with the British accent, recounting an anecdote about Captain Chandler, was clearly Chris Priest — and I could also identify George Turner. Was anybody Bruce Gillespie, though? Both Lucy and the Blackfords had seemed vague when I'd mentioned his name.

Vexingly, Damien Broderick now entered the living room, bringing food from the kitchen: obviously, I'd vacated it too promptly. Although he was recognisable from his photograph in *The Dreaming Dragons*, he looked taller, cleaner and more austere than I had expected. Meanwhile, although Lee and Lucy and the Blackfords seemed to recognise neither my name nor my face, other strangers elsewhere were still bafflingly able to remember me from the television appearances and newspaper and magazine photographs that accompa-

nied the publication in 1980 of my book *The Murders at Hanging Rock*, which itself contained my photograph. Another photograph of me had appeared recently in the Christmas 1981 literary pages of the *Bulletin* magazine, with my time-travel story 'The Truth about Oscar'. Thus, when my host met my eye briefly and looked away again, unsmiling, I had no certainty that he didn't recognise me.

Paranoia burgeoned as I sat unobtrusively on the living-room floor. These mostly male people all knew one another; they were more numerous and almost all bigger than me; mine were the only shabby jeans and home-repaired sandals here; and apparently I ought to have come equipped not with my copy of Priest's *Inverted World* but with a bottle. Short silences were beginning to perforate the conversation. Soon, every eye might inexorably turn upon me, with a gentle request for my credentials. If this should happen, I now feared that I would simply scream in primitive schoolyard terror.

When I stood up and walked out of the room, I felt that I still had a choice: it was not essential to walk towards the front door. When I reached the front gate, it was still possible to retrace my steps and accompany two late arrivals back up the path and into the living room. When I reached the tram stop, I might still have crossed to the shop and brought back a bottle of mineral water to share with the Mob. Instead, after a long wait for it, I caught the tram home.

Despite this debacle, I now regard all the sf people I've named above (except for the never-met Kirpal Singh and A. Bertram Chandler) as friends. Moreover, in 1991 Damien Broderick's *The Dark between the Stars* surprised a blush with its printed dedication: 'For Yvonne Rousseau/saint and savante/this solipsistic samba'. These developments became possible after I telephoned Bruce Gillespie to apologise for my defection. In order to recognise one another at future Mobs, we then arranged for me to meet with Bruce and his wife Elaine Cochrane at the Cafe Sport, in Lygon Street, Carlton, at 11.30 in the morning of Saturday 27 March 1982. First, I'd delivered my daughter Vida to her weekly dancing class at Madame Mangiamele's Mangala Studios, just around the corner in Grattan Street. Mutual amazement: one of Vida's teachers, the beautiful Claudia Mangiamele, was well known to Bruce and Elaine as the legendary princess of the Melbourne University Science Fiction Association. Having met Bruce and Elaine, I liked them so much that even though neither of them was actually at my next Nova Mob (a discussion of *The Dreaming Dragons* in St Kilda on 5 May 1982), fandom has felt friendly to me ever after.

— Yvonne Rousseau, 2001. First appearance: Leah and Dick Smith (eds): *Contact! 72 Fans Find Fandom*, Ditto 14/FanHistoriCon II (Bloomington, Illinois, 12–14 October 2001)

The really incomplete history of the Nova Mob, August 1970–October 2017

Bruce Gillespie's diary entries — and much other information from Kim Huett

In the first version of this list (ANZAPA, October 2018), if a meeting was not mentioned, either (a) I didn't attend it; (b) I did attend it but did not note it in my pocket diary; or (c) I had not been able to find any other information about a meeting for that date.

Now, thanks in particular to Kim Huett consulting issues of *Thyme*, *Norstrilian News*, and *Fanew Sletter*, an immense amount of extra information has been added to the first five pages of this checklist. Thanks also to other contributors, including Julian Warner, Alan Stewart, Leigh Edmonds, Mark Plummer, Sally Yeoland, for new information.

1970

Friday, 7 August: Inaugural meeting: flat of Tony and Myfanwy Thomas, Millswyn St., South Yarra. First APA-Nova collation.

Friday, 6 September: Bruce Gillespie on Philip K. Dick. Flat of John Bangsund at Bundalohn Court, St Kilda.

Friday, 2 October: General meeting at the Degraives Tavern, Degraives St., Melbourne. Robert Silverberg speech played. John Foyster spoke about politics and SF.

Remembered, not recorded (probably December): A Nova Mob party at the flat of Leigh Edmonds and Robin Johnson in Moonee Ponds.

1971

Friday, 5 February: Gastronomica/The Flying Restaurant: not much talk about science fiction. Lots of drinking.

Friday, 5 March: John Foyster and others: Round-table discussion about Robert Heinlein.

Thursday, 1 April: Nova Mob party at the Bundalohn Court flat of John Bangsund.

Saturday, 6 May: Meeting to discuss Australia in '75 campaign.

Thursday, 10 June: Meeting at Golden Age Hotel, Melbourne. Attending included John Foyster, George Turner, Merv Binns, and Bruce Gillespie.

This seems to have been the last meeting of the first series of the Nova Mob.

1974

Thursday, 5 December: **First meeting of the reconvened Nova Mob.** Bruce Gillespie's flat in Carlton Street, Carlton. George Turner on Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*. Vigorous discussion. Attending incl. John Foyster, Lee Harding, Peter Darling, me, and others.

1975

Thursday, 2 January: Lee Harding: 'The Basic Science Fiction Library'.

Thursday, 6 February: Bruce Gillespie: yet another talk on Philip K. Dick. Lively meeting.

Thursday, 6 March: An hour's trip to Nova Mob meeting [where?]. Round table discussion on 'Awards'. Little achieved.

Thursday, 10 April: George Turner: 'Definitions of Science Fiction'. Foyster residence, 6 Clowes Street, South Yarra.

Thursday, 1 May: At flat of John and Elizabeth Foyster, Clowes Street, South Yarra. Foyster led a discussion of the work of Alfred Bester.

Thursday, 5 June: Bruce Gillespie spoke on the novels of Wilson (Bob) Tucker. Only seven people turned up. John Litchen turned up later.

Tuesday, 1 July: Rob Gerrand on A. E. Van Vogt. Magic Pudding Club, 259 Drummond Street, Carlton.

Tuesday, 2 September: John Foyster on J. G. Ballard.

Tuesday, 7 October: Magic Pudding Club, Drummond Street, Carlton. Derrick Ashby's interminable reading of his university thesis about J.R.R. Tolkien. Some adjourned to the kitchen.

Tuesday, 4 November: John Foyster led discussion: 'The Role of the Horse in Science Fiction'. 6 Clowes Street, South Yarra.

Tuesday, 1 December. End of year party.

1976

Tuesday, 6 April: George Turner (and others) on the works of James Blish.

Tuesday, 4 May: Spent 40 minutes trying to find Rob Gerrand's place (863 Hampton Road, Brighton). Rob Gerrand on Jack Vance.

Tuesday, 6 July: Bruce Gillespie's flat, 72 Carlton Street, Carlton. Don Ashby on Samuel Delany. George Turner on his recent trip to England.

Tuesday, 3 August: John Foyster: 'Prediction'.

Tuesday, 5 October: General discussion: 'My Favourite SF Short Stories'. Gerrands', 563 Hampton Road, Brighton.

Tuesday, 2 November: John Foyster: 'Humour in Science Fiction'. Gillespie's flat, 72 Carlton Street, Carlton.

1977

Tuesday, 8 February: Chris Priest (and Vonda McIntyre). Discussion of the work of Christopher Priest. 6 Clowes Street, South Yarra.

Tuesday, 5 April: John Foyster: 'Why It Is So Difficult to Write a Good SF Novel'. 6 Clowes Street, South Yarra.

Tuesday, 3 May: Robin Johnson: 'The Heinlein Juvenile Novels'.

Tuesday, 7 June: Elizabeth Foyster: 'The Common Coin of Science Fiction'. 6 Clowes Street, South Yarra.

Tuesday, 5 July: Bruce Gillespie on Alan Garner, at Ashby/Handfield/Gregory etc. slant shack, Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. Lively meeting. Elizabeth Foyster helpful.

Tuesday, 2 August: David Grigg on 'Pretention in SF'. Vigo residence: 2 Grattan Place, Richmond.

Tuesday, 6 September: John Foyster: 'Science Fiction Can Be Fun!'. New Foyster residence: 2/178 Lennox Street, Richmond.

Tuesday, 4 October: David Grigg on Kurt Vonnegut.

Tuesday, 1 November: At Robin Johnson's (no subject listed). Dinner beforehand at **Leo's** in St Kilda.

Thursday, 8 December: Pleasant Nova Mob nosh-up at Clowes Street. Talked to George Turner.

1978

Tuesday, 7 February: Carey Handfield speaks (on what?). Robin Johnson's flat.

Tuesday, 7 March: Bruce Gillespie on Russell Hoban. Speaking from notes only, but everyone joined discussion. At George Turner's flat in Westbury Street, St Kilda.

Tuesday, 4 April: David Grigg, Lee Harding, and George Turner: 'Influences on My SF Writing'. At Merv Binns' house in Ripponlea.

Tuesday, 2 May: David Grigg: 'Why Science Is More Interesting than Science Fiction'.

Tuesday, 6 June: At John Foyster's flat. Worst Nova Mob ever, with everybody insulting everybody else by the end of the meeting. Shudder!

Tuesday, 4 July: Robin Johnson and George Turner on James Blish.

Tuesday, 5 September: Steve Solomon: 'Physics and Science Fiction'. Cochrane/Gillespie house, Johnston Street, Collingwood. 14 people turned up. Crowded. Announcement of Andrew Whitmore's engagement.

Tuesday, 5 October: John Foyster on George Turner's *Beloved Son*. Very good Nova Mob. George took it all sportingly. At John and Sally's place in Kew. John Bangsund drove us home: talked until 1 a.m.

Tuesday, 7 November: Lee Harding on the work of E. J. (Ted) Carnell. Amess Street slant shack.

Tuesday, 5 December: Bruce Gillespie and Rob Gerrand on Brian Aldiss, at Rob Gerrand's place. Very badly attended. Nova Mob future in doubt.

1979–80

No Nova Mob meetings.

1981

Wednesday, 4 May: **Beginning of era at the home of John Foyster and Jennifer Bryce, Shakespeare Grove, St Kilda (opposite Luna Park).**

Dinner at the **Danube Restaurant**, Acland Street, St Kilda.

Wednesday, 3 June: Dinner at Danube, then rave-up at Nova Mob, with Bruce Gillespie trotting through his

paper on Gene Wolfe (written between 10 a.m. and midday that day). Lots of people.

Wednesday, 1 July: Waited until 6.20 for arrivals at the Danube. Old guard still not arrived. Finally we staggered to Foyster's, only to have drunken slanging match between Lee Harding and Damien Broderick, with John Foyster clapped out in the corner. Depressing. Interesting to meet Russell Blackford for the first time. Not much worthwhile said about the works of Samuel R. Delany.

Wednesday, 5 August: Much better Nova Mob than the month before. John Foyster actually being specific about the novels of Barrington Bayley. Ended up listening to ABC radio: Damien's bit about the Canberra Conference on 'Books and Ideas'.

Wednesday, 2 September: Very good Nova Mob. Malcolm Gordon, Roger Weddall, and Elaine Cochrane attended. Foyster much more approachable than usual. Talk about Brian Aldiss informative, esp. about Aldiss's work as a reflection on changes in Britain over the last 25 years.

Wednesday, 7 October: Pleasant meeting. Each person attending brought 5 minutes of talk about a science fiction short story. Had quite a good yarn to Harding before the meeting. A cake for George Turner's 65th birthday.

Wednesday, 4 November: 'European SF', starting with the brothers Strugatsky and moving on to French, German, Italian, etc SF.

1982

Wednesday, 3 February: I took to the Danube food and white wine after some months' absence. Meeting: mainly John Foyster discussing his trip overseas. Also talked to Jenny Bryce.

Wednesday, 3 March: First tryout of **La Bussola**, Brunswick. Then to **Damien Broderick's** for Nova Mob with Chris Priest. [Nearly Yvonne Rousseau's first meeting.]

Wednesday, 7 April: Lots of people at the Danube. About 30 at the meeting. Marjorie Dedman: 'The Role of Women in SF'. Everybody most excited.

Wednesday, 5 May: Damien at Damien's place. Discussion of *The Dreaming Dragons*.

Wednesday, 2 June: [Elaine and I were away on holiday.] John Foyster on J. G. Ballard.

Wednesday, 7 July: Russell Blackford on Kurt Vonnegut and Thomas Pynchon. We met Micheline and Raynor at the Danube.

Wednesday, 30 August: First dinner at **Alasya 2**, Brunswick. George Turner: 'SF and the Critics'. Program for coming months made up. Carey Handfield to produce Nova Mob newsletter.

Wednesday, 6 October: Gerald Murnane on *The Plains*. Very successful meeting. Lots of people. David and Sue Grigg there, and Steve Solomon.

Wednesday, 3 November: Harding spoke on not writing SF any more. I spoke ramblingly on not reading it any more.

Saturday, 4 December: Christmas party at Lee Harding's place, 19 Kiaora Parade, Ferntree Gully.

1983

Wednesday, 6 April: Bruce Barnes: 'Conflicts Between Print and Non-Print SF'. Lots of interesting sidelights came out of the conversation. Only slightly fewer people. Blackfords odd, but interesting. Good talk to Mark Linneman.

Wednesday, 4 May: Wynne Whiteford: 'How Other People Get those Crazy Ideas, I Suppose, But Maybe They're Not All That Crazy — Maybe It's Just Me.'

Wednesday, 1 June: Highly successful meeting. Mark Linneman: 'The Law and SF'.

Wednesday, 6 July: [Elaine and I at dinner elsewhere.] Damien Broderick: 'Science Fiction Should Get Back in the Gutter Where It Belongs.'

Wednesday, 3 August: Round table discussion of George Turner's *Yesterday's Men*.

Wednesday, 7 September: Lucy Sussex and Russell Blackford: Vladimir Nabokov's *Ada, or Ardour*.

Wednesday, 5 October: Cathy Kerrigan: 'Arthurian fantasy'.

Saturday, 10 December: Nova Mob party.

1984

Friday, 30 March: [Subject unrecorded: perhaps led by Bruce Barnes.] At the home of Sally Yeoland and John Bangsund, West Brunswick.

Wednesday, 2 May: Marie Maclean: 'Natural and Unnatural Language.'

Wednesday, 6 June: (Dinner at the Danube.) Mark Linneman: 'Critics of Heinlein'. Newcomers included Ann Harding (friend of Jenny Blackford), and the Linneman cheer squad: Marc Ortlieb, Terry Stroud, Roy Ferguson, Phil Ware, and Mandy Herriot. News arrived of the death of Bert Chandler.

Wednesday, 4 July: Cathy Kerrigan on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. She and Marc Ortlieb okay; the others a bit ramblly. The Foyster/Bryce residence now centrally heated. Copies of *In the Heart or in the Head had just arrived*; Carey sold lots after the meeting.

Wednesday, 1 August: Damien Broderick: 'SF as a Language.'

Wednesday, 5 September: George Turner on reviewing.

Saturday, 8 December: Nova Mob party: Russell and Jenny Blackford's place, 198 Nott Street, Port Melbourne.

1985

Wednesday, 6 February: **First meeting of two-year residence at the home of Jenny and Russell Blackford.** Dinner at **Rose and Crown**, Bay Street, Port Melbourne. Meeting: discussion of George Turner's *In the Heart or in the Head*.

Wednesday, 3 July: Lucy Sussex: 'Australian SF From the Mainstream'.

Wednesday, 7 August: Randal Flynn turned up at Nova Mob: cheered us up greatly. Yvonne Rousseau: 'George Turner's Children of Time Trilogy.'

Wednesday, 4 September: Aussiecon 2 Mop-up.

Wednesday: 2 October: Jenny Blackford: 'Judging the Aussiecon Short Story Competitions.'

Wednesday, 4 November: Cathy Kerrigan: 'Preoccupations in the *Dangerous Visions* Anthology.'

Saturday, 7 December: Nova Mob party at Sean and Trish McMullen's in Abbotsford. I did not attend.

1986

Wednesday, 5 February: Russell Blackford: 'The Fiction of Lee Harding.'

Wednesday, 5 March: Cathy Kerrigan: 'Islands, Doctors, Death and Gene Wolfe.' The March meeting was the first to feature an *ASFR* (Second Series) collation session.

Wednesday, 9 April: Sean McMullen: 'Australian SF Between Conventions.' (Reprinted in *Thyme* 55, July 1986.)

Wednesday, 7 May: Foyster introduced a tape sent by Richard Lupoff.

Wednesday, 4 June: Marc Ortlieb: 'The Role of Chocolate Mousse in Science Fiction.'

Wednesday, 2 July: Gerald Murnane: 'Style in Writing.'

Wednesday, 1 October: Malcolm Gordon: 'On Evolution'.

Wednesday, 5 November: Planning of the Christmas do, and topics for meetings in 1987.

Saturday, 6 December: Nova Mob Party at home of Sean and Trish McMullen, 35 Foam Street, Elwood.

[1987-88:

We met at Cathy Kerrigan's flat during 1987 and 1988. I found it difficult to meet with people for dinner then get to her flat without car transport. Kim Huett adds this information, derived from *Thyme* 60: 'The 1987 Nova Mob meetings will be held at a new venue: 17/140 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn, the home of Cathy Kerrigan. Meetings will begin, as usual, at 8 p.m., with those who wish meeting earlier for eats at the Riversdale Hotel Bistro, cnr. Auburn & Riversdale Rds, Hawthorn.'

1987

Wednesday, 4 February: John Foyster: 'Magazine SF in 1953.'

Wednesday, 4 March: Sean McMullen: 'First Flights' (authors' first stories).

Wednesday, 1 April: Yvonne Rousseau: Ursula Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*.

Wednesday, 6 May: Bruce Barnes.

Wednesday, 3 June: Janeen Webb: 'SF Published by the Women's Press.'

Wednesday, 1 July: Russell Blackford: 'The Novels of John Calvin Batchelor.'

Wednesday, 3 August: Jenny Blackford.

Saturday, 5 September: Clayton's Conspiracy: a party, since many regulars were attending the worldcon. Merv Binns's place: 1 Glen Eira Rd, Ripponlea.

Wednesday, 7 October: Mark Linneman: round-robin on the worst Hugo-winning novel.

Wednesday, 4 November: Wynne Whiteford.

December: The Nova Mob Christmas Party: home of Teresa Morris, 259 Moreland Rd, Coburg.

1988

Wednesday, 4 May: First time I'd been to Nova Mob in two years. Round table discussion: lists of Favourite SF Books of All Time.

Wednesday, 1 June: Wynne Whiteford spoke (briefly) on the origins of SF ideas.

Wednesday, 5 October: George Turner: 'New Directions in SF: Are There Any?'

Wednesday, 2 November: Mark Linneman: 'Clifford Simak.'

Saturday, 10 December: Christmas party at Sean McMullen's, 35 Foam Street, Elwood.

1989

Wednesday, 1 February: Sean McMullen and Nick Stathopoulos: 'Illustrating Australian Science Fiction.' Sean McMullen's: 35 Foam Street, Elwood.

Wednesday, 5 April: **First Nova Mob meeting at Alan Stewart's place in Richmond.** Round-table discussion of the differences between Australian and British/US SF.

Wednesday, 5 May: Cathy Kerrigan: 'Anne McCaffrey.'

Wednesday, 9 June: Round-table: 'Beauty and the Beast.'

Wednesday, 5 July: Bruce Barnes (no subject listed).

Wednesday, 2 August: Bruce Gillespie: 'Cordwainer Smith.'

Wednesday, 6 September: George Turner on Awards.

Wednesday, 4 October: Wynne Whiteford and Sean McMullen: 'Was There a New Wave?'

Wednesday, 8 November: Alan Stewart: 'Shared World Anthologies.'

1990

Saturday, 20 January: **1989 Nova Mob inaugural Annual Yum Cha.** Mark Linneman's last day in Australia.

Wednesday, 4 April: Bruce Barnes: 'Secret Societies in SF.'

Wednesday, 2 May: Donna Hennan: 'The Current State of Cloning.'

Wednesday, 6 June: Wynne Whiteford: 'Intelligent Aliens.' Meeting at **Laokon Restaurant** in Richmond.

Wednesday, 4 July: Marc Ortlieb: 'Something Escatological.'

Wednesday, 5 September: Alan Stewart: 'Shared Worlds Anthologies.'

Wednesday, 5 October: Bruce Gillespie on 'Philip K. Dick: The Non-Science Fiction Novels'. First dinner at **Erawan Thai Restaurant, Richmond.**

1991

Wednesday, 1 May: Sean McMullen: 'SF Writing for the Media'. Received the *real* Ditmars from Mark Loney. (Had been given two stuffed cane toad Ditmars just after the Easter convention in Brisbane.)

Wednesday, 7 August: Alan Stewart: New Zealand Fans.

Wednesday, 4 September: Wynne Whiteford: 'The Science

in SF.'

Wednesday, 2 October: Bruce Gillespie: 'The novels of Jonathan Carroll.' Attendees: Marc Ortlieb, George Turner, Terry Frost, Alan Stewart, Roger Weddall, Michelle Muijsert, LynC, Donna Heenan and Julian Warner.

Saturday, 7 December: Annual Yum Cha, Dragon Boat, Melbourne.

1992

Wednesday, 15 April: Rex Thompson from New Zealand.

Wednesday, 6 May: Ian Gunn.

Wednesday, 3 June: John Foyster: 'How Science Fiction Has Not Kept Up with Society.'

Wednesday, 1 July: Sean McMullen: 'Before Galileo: SF By Australian Women From the War to Galileo.'

Wednesday, 5 August: Marc Ortlieb: 'An Attack of the Willies.'

Wednesday, 2 September: Wynne Whiteford.

Wednesday, 7 October: Bruce Gillespie: 'James Morrow and the ERNI'.

Wednesday, 4 November: George Turner: 'On the Receiving End of SF Criticism'.

Saturday, 5 December: End of Year Yum Cha.

1993

Wednesday, 7 April: Wynne Whiteford: 'Bloopers in SF.'

Wednesday, 5 May: Mark Morrison and Penny Love: 'Writing In a Gaming World.'

Wednesday, 2 June: Sean McMullen: 'Not Normal Behaviour (Mainstream Publishers & SF).'

Wednesday, 7 July: Julian Warner on 'SF and Music.'

Wednesday, 4 August: largest roll-up for the year: Marc Ortlieb: 100th anniversary of the publication of Lewis Carroll's *Sylvia and Bruno*.

Wednesday, 1 September: Bruce Gillespie on Kate Wilhelm. George Turner's first Nova Mob since recovering from his stroke.

Wednesday, 3 November: Lucy Sussex: 'Making Things Difficult for Yourself.'

Saturday, 4 December: Nova Mob Yum Cha, Lotus Inn.

1994

Wednesday, 2 February: Decisions on all meetings for the coming year. Race Mathews' first meeting.

Wednesday, 2 March: Paul Kidd.

Wednesday, 6 April: Dirk Strasser.

Wednesday, 4 May: Charles Taylor: 'Eric Frank Russell.'

Wednesday, 6 July: Steve Paulsen: 'Horror Writing in Australia'.

Wednesday, 7 September: Race Mathews.

Wednesday, 5 October: Bruce Gillespie: 'Keith Roberts.'

Saturday, 3 December: Nova Mob Yum Cha: Lotus Inn.

1995

Wednesday, March 1: Last dinner at Erawan.

Wednesday, 5 April: Wynne Whiteford on *Red Mars*. First meeting at **Swami Indian Restaurant, Richmond**.

Wednesday, 3 May: Marc Ortlieb: 'Colin Kapp.'

Wednesday, 7 June: Hung: 'Space Communications.'

Wednesday, 5 July: Sean McMullen and Steven Paulsen.

Wednesday, 2 August: Bev Macdonald [= Bev Hope?]

Wednesday, 6 September: Ali Kayn. Some new people (Stephanie (?) and Sarah Endacott) and Race Mathews.

Wednesday, 4 October: Terry Frost: '*Wild Palms*.' Small number; enjoyable discussion.

Wednesday, 1 November: Peter Nicholls: 'My 100 Favourite SF Writers'.

Sunday, 3 December: Nova Mob lunch.

1996

Wednesday, 6 March: round-table discussion: Books Read Recently.

Wednesday, 3 April: Aurealis Awards. Bill Wright's first Nova Mob for many years.

Wednesday, 7 August: Discussion: Hugo Award nominations.

Wednesday, 2 October: Elaine Cochrane: 'R. A. Lafferty.'

Wednesday, 6 November: Race Mathews: 'The SF Novels of Iain M. Banks'; and Bruce Gillespie: 'The Non-SF Novels of Iain Banks'.

Sunday, 8 December: End of Year Yum Cha.

1997

Wednesday, 5 March: **Meetings move to home of Lucy Sussex and Julian Warner, Brunswick.** Dinner at **Shinjuku**, Sydney Road.

Wednesday, 2 April: Bruce Gillespie: 'The Novels of Olaf Stapledon.'

Wednesday, 7 May: Kerry Greenwood.

Wednesday, 4 June: Judy Buckrich.

[*Sunday, 8 June:* **Death of George Turner in Ballarat.**]

Wednesday, 2 July: 'SF and Games;' Shinjuku dinner.

Wednesday, 6 August: Steve Proposch and Daniel ? on horror fiction.

Wednesday, 3 September: Robert Jan: 'SF Radio.'

Wednesday 1 October: Isobelle Carmody. Audience of thousands trying to fit into Sussex/Warner kitchen/living room space.

1998

Wednesday, 6 May: Asian restaurant near Alaysia. [No meeting note in my diary.]

Wednesday, 3 June: Charles Taylor: 'Wynne Whiteford.'

Wednesday 1 July. Aussiecon III programming, with David McDonnell. Back to Alaysia for dinner.

Wednesday, 5 August: Elaine Cochrane: 'Greg Egan.'

Wednesday 2 September: Steve Paulsen: '*The MUP Encyclopedia of Australian SF and Fantasy*.'

Wednesday, 3 November: Bruce Gillespie: 'The Novels and Short Stories of Joanna Russ.'

Sunday, 20 December: Nova Mob End of Year: Vietnamese restaurant in Victoria Street, Richmond.

1999

Wednesday, 3 February: Discussion of the year's program.

Wednesday, 3 March: Award nominees and winners. First dinner at **Satay Inn**, Melbourne.

Wednesday, 3 April: Hugo nominations.

Wednesday, 7 July: James 'Jocko' Allen: '*Babylon 5*.'

Wednesday, 1 September: Pre-Aussiecon 3 Nova Mob/Critical Mass meeting and drinks. Attendees included Bruce

Gillespie, Perry Middlemiss, Julian Warner, Mark Plummer, Claire Brialey, Irwin Hirsh, Paul Kincaid, Dave Langford, and Eve Harvey.

Wednesday, 6 October: Christopher Palmer: 'Philip K. Dick.'

Wednesday, 3 November: Ian Mond and Kirstyn McDermott: 'Dennis Etchison.'

Sunday, 19 December: Nova Mob End of Year: Mandalay, Bridge Road, Richmond.

2000

Wednesday, 1 March: Andrew Macrae on Cyberpunk SF.

Wednesday, 7 June: Kirstyn McDermott: 'Michael Marshall Smith.'

Wednesday, 3 August: Bruce Gillespie: 'SF Biographies and Autobiographies.'

Wednesday, 4 October: Ian Mond: 'Joe Lansdale.'

Wednesday, 1 November: Elaine Cochrane: 'Paul McAuley.'

Sunday, 17 December: Nova Mob End of Year Yum Cha: Shark Fin Inn.

2001

New regular dinner group at Saigon Inn, Liverpool Street, Melbourne.

Wednesday, 7 March: Bruce Gillespie: 'The Novels and Short Stories of Avram Davidson.' Very hot night, so we all sat outside.

Wednesday, 4 April: Charles Taylor and Sarah Marland: 'Bram Stoker and *Dracula*.'

Wednesday, 2 May: Very good Nova Mob on the Arthur C. Clarke Award nominees: Ian Mond (*Perdido Street Station*), Elaine Cochrane (*Salt*), Sarah Marland (*Parable of the Sower*), Alan Stewart (*Revelation Space*), Lucy Sussex (*Salt*), and Charles Taylor on the Ken McLeod novel.

Wednesday, 7 June: **At Andrew and Sarah's place in East Brunswick.** [Photos of attendees at Saigon Inn dinner and meeting attendees included in this issue, pp. 64–5, and in John Foyster's *eFNAC* 2, *eFanzines.com*.]

Wednesday, 4 July: Quay Phan.

Wednesday, 1 August: At **Andrew and Sarah's**. Andrew Butler from Britain. Dinner with Yvonne etc.

Wednesday, 5 September: Pam McIntyre: 'The Harry Potter books.'

Wednesday, 3 October: Andrew and Sarah's place: Cecilia

Dart-Thornton.

Wednesday, 7 November: Roslyn Gross: 'Diana Wynne Jones.'

Saturday, 16 December: Nova Mob dinner: about 20 people, including Wynne Whiteford and Gwayne Naug.

2002

Wednesday, 6 February: Ian Mond: 'Stephen King.'

Wednesday, 6 March: Marc Ortlieb: 'Approaching Alice.' Biggest Nova Mob so far (32 people). Visitors/guests: Mary and Lister from Clarion Writers Workshop.

Wednesday, 3 April: Murray MacLachlan: 'Iain Banks and the Culture.' [Meeting shifted from Frederick Street to Andrew and Sarah's at last minute, so I didn't get there.]

Wednesday, 1 May: Julian Warner: 'Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar series.'

Wednesday, 5 June: Lucy Sussex on reviewing.

Wednesday, 3 July: I had a cold, so welshed out of Nova Mob. Elaine says that 24 people turned up to listen to Keith Stevenson (*Aurealis*).

Wednesday, 7 August: Justin Ackroyd: round-table discussion on the Hugo nominations. At **Andrew and Sarah's**.

Wednesday, 4 September: Andrew MacCrae: 'Jack Womack.' Very good.

Wednesday, 4 October: Bruce Gillespie: 'Novellas, SF and Not SF.' About 25 attended. Caught up with Michael Whittle and son. Vanessa Jacobson visiting from Canberra.

Wednesday, 6 November: Andrew Milner: 'The Academy and SF.'

Sunday, 22 December: Nova Mob Dinner. Eastern Inn. Gwayne Naug turned up, as well as Jane Routley, just back from Denmark.

2003

Wednesday, 5 February: Met Jim and Janet Caughran, in from Canada. Dinner at Saigon Inn. 30 people at Nova Mob, including two from Clarion South (Grace and Alice) and two from the new Melbourne University club.

Wednesday, 2 April: **Meetings at Sarah and Andrew's for rest of the year:** Dorothy Porter.

[Saturday, 5 April: Death of John Foyster in Adelaide.]

Wednesday, 6 August: Charles Taylor: 'Frederic Brown.'

Wednesday, 3 September: Sarah Marland: 'Haruki Murakami.' (I made the mistake of expressing doubts about *Doctor Who* to Danny and others.)

Wednesday, 3 November: Ian Mond: 'Doctor Who.'

Sunday, 14 December: Nova Mob Yum Cha: somewhere in Victoria Street, Richmond.

2004

Wednesday, 4 February: **First meeting at the North Carlton Library.** 33 people attended to decide program for the year.

Wednesday, 7 April: Bruce Gillespie: 'John Foyster as SF Critic.' Dinner at Saigon Inn. Met Lucy Cleary for the first time. Robin Johnson in town from Hobart.

Wednesday, 5 May: Murray MacLachlan: 'The Footnote in Science Fiction.'

Wednesday, 2 June: Frank Weissenborn's presentation about his self-published books.

Wednesday, 4 August: Justin Ackroyd-led discussion: Award winners.

Wednesday, 1 September: Charles Taylor: 'L. Sprague de Camp.' Sarah Marland: 'Jasper Fforde.'

Wednesday, 6 October: Kirstyn McDermott: 'Caitlin Kiernan.'

Sunday, 19 December: Nova Mob Yum Cha: Shark Fin Inn.

2005

Wednesday, 2 February: 'The Apocalypse in YA Fiction' (no speaker listed).

Wednesday, 6 April: Caught up with Yvonne Rousseau and Sally Yeoland at Saigon Inn. Four new people at the meeting, including Tim Train. Spoke to my *A Scanner Darkly* notes (Lenny Bailes and Howard Hendrix from Potlatch 2005), but forgot to take the book with me.

Wednesday, 4 May: Round-table discussion of Arthur C. Clarke Award nominees. I spoke about David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*.

Wednesday, 1 June: Frank Weissenborn: Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Mars' trilogy.

Wednesday, 6 July: Hugo Award nominees, plus Continuum Guest of Honour (?). Attendees included Janice Gelb, Jane Routley, Dannik, Mitch.

Wednesday, 3 August: Murray MacLachlan: 'New Zealand Science Fiction.' Before the meeting, Ian Mond told me that I would be Fan Guest of Honour at next year's Continuum 4.

Thursday, 18 August: Special Meeting: Karen Joy Fowler. Some new people, plus Rob Gerrand, Terry Frost, etc.

Wednesday, 2 November: First time at the **Duke of Kent** for dinner: overcrowded; not very exciting food. Jack Dann: 'My Early Days.'

Saturday 31 December: Nova Mob Yum Cha at West Lake Restaurant, Melbourne. 42C — hottest December day ever.

2006

Wednesday 1 February: Tried **Supper Inn** (with Bill Wright, John Davies, and Frank Weissenborn) before the meeting. Round-table discussion: 2 minutes each speaker: 'Come As You Are: The Book You Are Reading Now'.

Wednesday, 1 March: **Move to the Darebin Library, Separation Street, Northcote.** Dinner at Supper Inn. I thought I knew where the Northcote Library was, but couldn't find it. Bill, Frank, and I went home. John Davies persevered, and eventually found it. (Discussion on Aurealis and Ditmar Award nominees.)

Back to North Carlton Library.

Wednesday, 5 April: Andrew Milner: 'Dystopias: Why *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is Not a Dystopia.' New eating place: **Thai City**, Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.

Wednesday, 3 May: The Chandler Award presentation to Lee Harding. Bruce Gillespie's talk, plus footnotes, especially from Lucy and Julian.

Wednesday, 7 June: Frank Weissenborn: 'A. E. Van Vogt.'

Wednesday, 5 July: Rosaleen Love.

Wednesday, 4 October: Murray MacLachlan on Uplift novels, especially those by David Brin.

Wednesday, 1 November: Dinner at Thai City. Alan Stewart joined us. Meeting: Justin Ackroyd-led discussion on World Fantasy Award nominees. None sounded like a winner.

Saturday, 9 December: Nova Mob End of Year Dinner. Society Restaurant, Melbourne.

2007

Wednesday, 7 February. Bruce Gillespie: 'SF Short Stories.' Held at **Northcote Library**.

Wednesday, 4 April: Julian Warner: 'M. John Harrison.' Dinner at **Oriental Bistro**, Russell Street, Melbourne.

Wednesday, 2 May: Arthur C. Clarke Award nominees. Thumbs down to all of them. Dinner at Oriental Bistro.

Wednesday, 6 June: Bill Wright: 'Harry Crosby/Christopher Anvil.' Met with Mark Plummer and Clare Brialey, in from London, at Oriental Bistro first.

Wednesday, 4 July. General discussion of 'The Book Being Currently Read'.

Wednesday 7 September: **Official move from the North Carlton Library to the Darebin Library, Separation Street, Northcote.** Kirstyn McDermott: 'Edgar Allan Poe.' Dinner at Oriental Bistro: return of Bill Wright from trip to Thailand.

Wednesday, 3 October: Frank Weissenborn: 'Michael Moorcock's 'Blood' trilogy.' Meeting videoed by a friend of Frank's.

2008

Wednesday, 6 February: New people included Clare McDonald. Decisions about the year's program.

Wednesday, 5 March: Bill Wright: 'James White.'

Wednesday, 2 April: Steve and Sue Francis in from USA. Dinner at **Peacock Inn**, High Street, Northcote. At the meeting, Bruce Gillespie received his Peter McNamara Award from Justin Ackroyd. Mini-cyclone day: blackouts, traffic chaos. 21 people still managed to get to the meeting.

Wednesday, 7 May: Justin Ackroyd-led round-table discussion of recent Australian SF and Fantasy Books.

Wednesday, 4 June: Brad Jackel: 'The Doré illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*.'

Wednesday, 2 July: Justin Ackroyd's Hugo Nominations round-up: thumbs-up to *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* and *Brasyl*.

Wednesday, 6 August: Bruce Gillespie and Tony Thomas (notes only): 'Tribute to Thomas M. Disch' (had died on 6 July), plus Bruce Gillespie: 'Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*.'

Wednesday, 5 November: Elaine Cochrane: 'Dan Simmons.' Dinner at **Northcote Social Club**.

Sunday, 14 December: Nova Mob Annual End of Year Dinner: Piraeus Blues Restaurant, Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. 35 people.

2009

Wednesday, 4 February: Round-table discussion: 'Desert Island Books.' No working loo at the library: had to walk over to near-by shopping centre.

Wednesday, 6 May: J. G. Ballard (who died on 21 April): round-table discussion: Lucy Sussex, Rjurik Davidson,

Murray MacLachlan, Julian Warner, John Davies, and others.

Wednesday, 2 September: Frank Weissenborn: 'A. Bertram Chandler.'

Wednesday, 7 October. Bruce Gillespie: 'The Treasure Hunt: Books about SF.' 25 people attending: good feed-back. Dinner: **Antz Bistro**, Melbourne.

Wednesday, 4 November: Ian Mond on Thomas Disch.

Wednesday, 2 December: Nova Mob End of Year Dinner: Pumphouse Hotel (where?).

2010

Wednesday, 3 February: Decisions about the year's program. 'Books Read over the Holidays.'

Wednesday, 3 March: Julian Warner: 'Brookes: *Seven Types of Plot*.'

Wednesday, 7 April: Jason Nahrung: 'Fiction about Vampires.'

Wednesday, 5 May: Ian Mond: 'David Foster Wallace.' Two new attendees, including Alexis Harley.

Wednesday, 2 June: Lucy Sussex: 'Jonathan Lethem.' Dinner at Antz.

Wednesday, 7 July: Michael Pryor: 'Australian Young Adult SF and Fantasy.'

Wednesday, 4 August: Murray MacLachlan on fanzines.

Wednesday, 1 September: the day before Aussiecon 4, so meeting cancelled in favour of:

Monday, 6 September: Nova Mob meeting held at Aussiecon 4.

Wednesday, 6 October: Lucy Sussex on Kim Stanley Robinson's *Galileo's Dream*.

Wednesday, 3 November. I ate at Antz, then felt a cold coming on, so went home. Program: general discussion of Australian anthologies.

Wednesday, 1 December: Nova Mob End of Year Dinner: North Fitzroy Arms Hotel, cnr Rae and Reid Streets, North Fitzroy. Mainly talked to Peter Fagan, Ros Gross, etc.

2011

Wednesday, 2 February: Program for the coming year. Books read over the holidays.

Wednesday, 6 April: Bernard Calleo: 'Comics.' Lively discussion with Ian Mond about the peculiar nominations for the Ditmar and Cronos Awards.

Wednesday, 4 May: Scratch meeting on 'Inappropriate Book Blurbs.' New attendee: Candace from WA. A low turnout.

Wednesday, 1 June: Alison Goodman and her husband Ron: 'How to Sell Your Book over the Internet.'

Wednesday, 6 July. Not attended. [Listed program: Mike Shuttleworth on the International Comics Festival.]

Wednesday, 3 August: Trudi Canavan and Paul Ewins with their slide show of Trudi's author tour to Britain and Europe. I managed to set off the new security alarm at the Library.

Wednesday, 7 September: Meg Mundell on her new novel.

Wednesday, 5 October: Bruce Gillespie on the fiction and art of Mervyn Peake. Dinner at **Northcote Social Club**. Attendees included Mike from ACER, Gail Boyd, Yvonne Rousseau, Tony Thomas.

Wednesday, 2 November: Shaun Tan, interviewed by Lucy Sussex.

Wednesday, 7 December: Nova Mob End of Year Dinner: North Fitzroy Arms Hotel.

2012

Wednesday, 7 March: Elaine Cochrane: 'Popular Physics Books'.

Wednesday, 4 April: Murray MacLachlan: video presentation on the Ace Doubles.

Wednesday, 2 May: Kerry Greenwood spoke first to the Darebin Library crowd (200+ people), then immediately after: a full presentation to the Nova Mob. Delicious yarns.

Wednesday, 6 June: Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey in town from London, plus NAFF winner. About 30 attendees. General discussion: 'YA Post-apocalyptic Fiction.'

Wednesday, 7 September: Dinner at **Northcote Social Club**: Art Widner (his last trip from USA), Elaine and me, Perry Middlemiss, Lucy and Julian. Perry Middlemiss on C. J. Dennis.

Wednesday, 3 October. Back to **Antz Bistro** for dinner. Justin Ackroyd on this year's Awards, with help from Tony Thomas. About 30 attending.

Wednesday, 7 November: Ian Mond on the year's short stories.

Wednesday, 5 December: Nova Mob End of Year Dinner at Edinburgh Castle Hotel, Brunswick. Bruce Burn from NZ turned up. Talking to him, Murray MacLachlan, Jamie Reuel, etc.

2013

Wednesday, 6 February: General discussion: 'Favourite Theses and Thats of 2012.'

Wednesday, 4 March: Terry Frost: 'Genre Films.'

Wednesday, 3 April: Caitlin Herrington: 'Lois McMaster Bujold.' Mihaela Perkovic, GUFF winner, on GUFF. Over 30 attending.

Wednesday, 1 May. Tim Hehir interviewed by Chris Johnson about his new novel for Text Publishing: *Julius and the Watchmaker*.

Wednesday, 5 June: Tony Thomas and Bruce Gillespie: 'Graham Joyce.' Tony on the YA novels, and me on the most recent trilogy. Yvonne Rousseau attending, plus Robin Johnson from Tasmania, and Jenny Bryce. Her first Nova Mob in many years.

Wednesday, 3 July: Justin Ackroyd-led coverage of the Arthur C. Clarke Award winners. Murray MacLachlan also provided a full list of winners and nominees.

Wednesday, 7 August: Andrew Nette: 'Australian Pulps', including a Powerpoint presentation.

Wednesday, 4 September: Lucy Sussex on her new book about Fergus Hume. [*Blockbuster*.]

Wednesday, 6 November: Alan Stewart on Xanth series and Robert Jordan's 'Wheels of Time' novels.

2014

Wednesday, 5 March: Sarah Endacott: 'Objects of Power in Fantasy'.

Wednesday, 2 April: Andrew Macrae on his novel *Truck-songs*.

Wednesday, 7 May: **Temporary meeting venue on St George's Road.** Grant Watson: 'The Making of *John Carter*, the Movie'.

Friday, 6 June: Special Nova Mob at Continuum X, featuring DUFF winner Juanita Coulson.

Wednesday, 2 July. **Back to Northcote Library.** Julian Warner: 'Crime novelists Peter Corris and Barry Maitland.'

Wednesday, 3 September: Stephen Knight: 'The Legendary Robin Hood.'

Wednesday, 1 October: Murray MacLachlan: 'Matthew Hughes.'

Wednesday, 5 November: Ian Mond on various Awards nominations lists.

2015

Wednesday, 4 February: Finally gave my long-promised talk: 'Genres Work Both Ways'. 15 attending. **Monthly attendance fee put up from \$2 to \$5.** A few suggestions for the coming year's meetings.

Wednesday, 1 April: Sarah Endacott and Jamie Reuel picked us up from home in order to take in a whole lot of coffee mugs to the Darebin Library for our supper. Lucy and Julian gave a talk on the 19th century, the Gothic, Romanticism, and the beginnings of genre fiction.

Wednesday, 1 July: Instead of Nova Mob, many attended launch of Lucy Sussex's *Blockbuster!*, about Fergus Hume, at Readers Feast, Collins Street, Melbourne.

Wednesday, 5 August. **New venue: Kathleen Syme Library, Carlton.** Luke from the Sticky Institute spoke about the 'other fanzines' (the zine movement), with many examples. Dinner: will stick to **Antz Bistro** in future; new food place in Carlton for the others too noisy.

Wednesday, 2 September: Janice Gelb on the Sick Puppies controversy. Raining.

Wednesday, 4 November: Paul Collins and many of his Ford Street Publishing authors from the anthology *Rich and Rare*, interviewed by Lucy Sussex: Gabrielle Wong, Michael Pryor, Michael Hyde, Meredith Costain, Ali Kayn, and quite a few extras in the audience.

2016

Wednesday, 3 February: Honey Brown spoke about her novels.

Wednesday, 7 April: Jukka Halme, GUFF winner. [I could not get to the meeting.]

Wednesday, 1 June: Justin Ackroyd: 'What Books Have You Been Reading?' Upper room at the Kathleen Syme Centre.

Wednesday, 6 July: Marlee Jane Ward.

Wednesday, 10 August: Justin Ackroyd's annual discussion of Arthur C. Clarke Award nomination lists: Justin, Tony Thomas, Justin's friend Keith, Murray MacLachlan, etc.

Wednesday, 7 September: Skype interview with Gillian Polack in Canberra. Long trip home: bus instead of train after Clifton Hill because a car slammed into the side of a train at Ivanhoe.

Wednesday, 5 October: General discussion: 'Book Covers.' Everybody spoke.

Wednesday, 2 November. Meeting: Robin Johnson interviewed from Ballarat via Skype.

Wednesday, 7 December: Nova Mob End of Year Dinner: Retreat Hotel, Abbotsford.

2017

Wednesday, 5 April: Meeting: Skype interview with Sean Williams from Antarctica about his month there.

Wednesday, 3 May: Donna Hanson from Canberra not quite comprehensible (because of Skype failure) when interviewed. Caught up with Jane Routley.

Tuesday, 4 July: Nova Mob special: 'Amazing and Astounding World: Collecting Science Fiction.' After, Justin drove us to Rosstown Hotel, Carnegie for Merv Binns' / Dick Jenssen's / Justin's birthdays.

Wednesday, 6 September. Sudden, forced change of venue to **Cafe Italia**, Carlton. Tony Thomas, Murray MacLachlan, and Bruce Gillespie spoke about the work of Brian Aldiss (he had recently died).

— **Bruce Gillespie, September 2018; diary entries 1972–2017; much extra material by Kim Huett derived from sources such as *Norstrilian News*, *Fanew Sletter*, and (particularly) *Thyme*.**

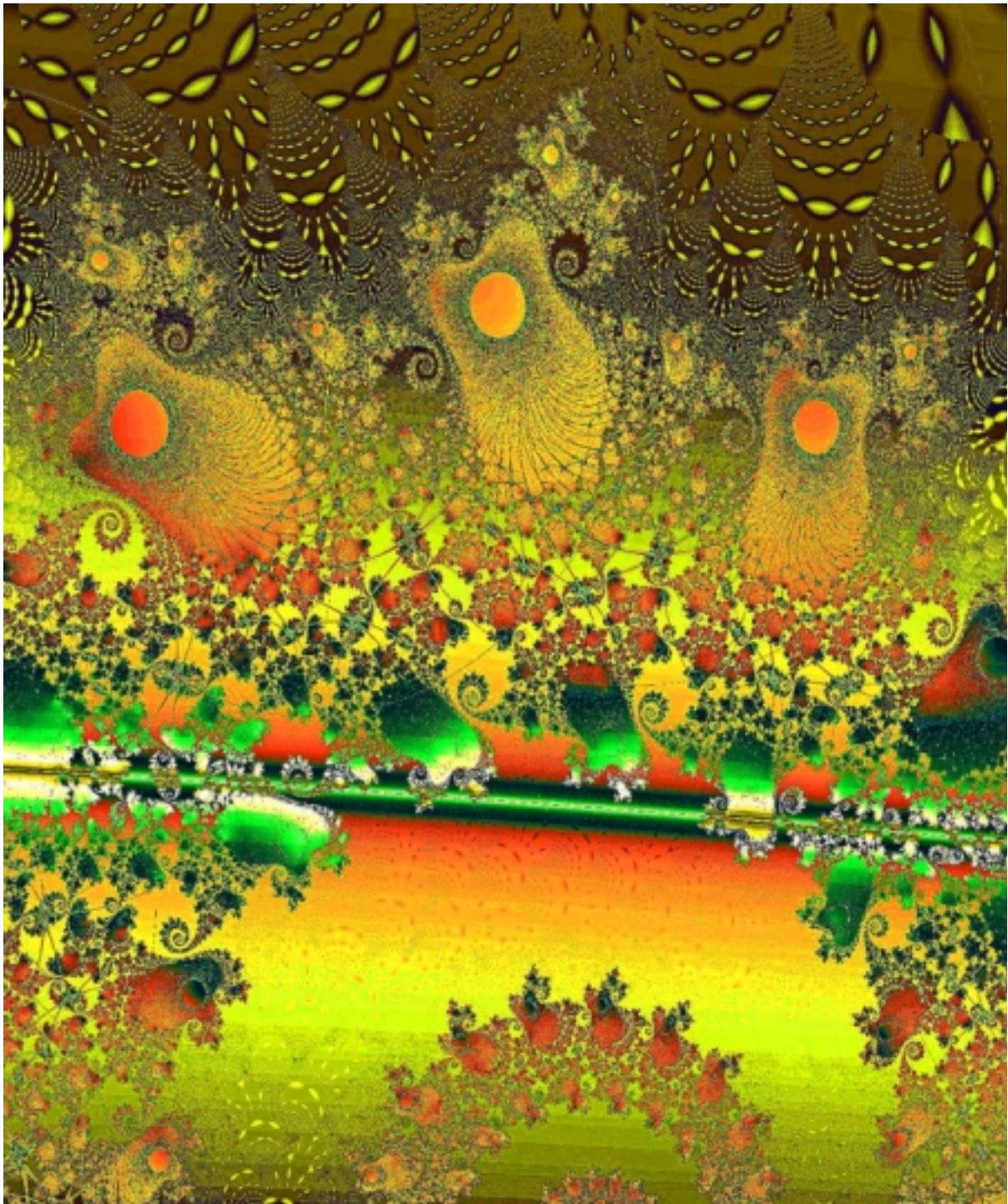


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