

# Megatheriums for Breakfast 8

A fanzine published for ANZAPA and others by none other than...

David R Grigg, 1556 Main Road, Research, Victoria 3095, Australia.

## Oh No, Not Again...!

Yep, despite starting out with the best intentions the very day after the October mailing arrived, here I am again with two days to do and no contribution finished.

My only excuse, feeble as it is, is that I have been spending every spare moment working on a complete re-write of my shareware program AUTOREAD, which despite all the odds keeps on bringing in money. Would you believe I've signed site license deals with Barclay's Bank, the University of Windsor in Ontario, and the Bank of America this financial year? I must be doing something right, but being a good contributor to Anzapa isn't very compatible with my plans to become a shareware millionaire. At least I've managed to spend enough time on mailing comments this time around.

So, when all else fails, it's...

## Recent Reading

On a recent business trip to Sydney, I managed to snatch half an hour in my favourite Australian bookshop - Abbeys in York Street - before my first appointment.

Half an hour is not a long time to spend in book heaven, and I had turned to go, rather disappointed that I hadn't managed to decide on any purchases, when I suddenly saw in front of me a book bearing the word *Armadale* on the cover. My jaw dropped and my heart leapt with joy.

No, this wasn't a history of the suburb of Melbourne by that name. It was another major novel by Wilkie Collins, one which I have been trying to locate for a very long time.

Not only that, but there on the same shelf were three other books by Wilkie Collins that I didn't have, *The Haunted Hotel*, *Little Novels*, and *Blind Love*, all published in modern paperback by Dover.

My bliss was only tempered by the fact that I then had to carry a heavy bundle of books with me throughout my business appointments for the day. A small price to pay for a dedicated Wilkie Collins fan, I can tell you.

I have worked out that I now own 17 books by Wilkie Collins, which is a tremendous result after many years when I could only locate 4 titles. But it's still a long way from a complete collection - he published some 33 books.

So much for what I have been *buying*. This is what I have actually been reading:

<i>Scales of Gold</i>	Dorothy Dunnet
<i>Queen of Angels</i>	Greg Bear
<i>The Matter Myth</i>	John Gribbin & Paul Davies
<i>Neuromancer</i>	William Gibson
<i>The Summer of the Danes</i>	Ellis Peters

*Scales of Gold* is the fourth book in the Niccolo series by Dorothy Dunnet. I talked about the previous book, *Race of Scorpions*, some months ago.

In this volume, Niccolo voyages into deepest Africa in search of gold and knowledge, and gains both, but at a heavy price. As usual, Dunnet has an absolute mastery of historical and geographical detail. The years covered in this series are the middle to late 15th Century. She reminds us that by then, trade, banking and commerce were already very well developed, and that people then were no less intelligent and articulate than they are now. Particularly fascinating is her depiction of the city of Timbuktu, and its central role in trade across the Sahara and the rest of Africa.

I enjoyed this volume more than the previous one, perhaps particularly because of the focus on a new female character, (Gelis van Borsalen) who showed promise of being as strong and as interesting a role as that of Phillipa in Dunnet's earlier "Lymond" series. And I think I also enjoyed this book more because this time I had somewhat less trouble working out the complexities of situations. But it's still true that Dunnet often writes dialogue and description where many, many things are left unsaid, and you are supposed to be sharp enough to work out the byzantine intricacies of the plot from very subtle hints.

Not at all subtle, though - in fact absolutely devastating - is the ending of this volume. I don't think I have ever been so emotionally

shocked by a work of fiction as I was by the ending of this book. I went around for a whole day in a slightly dazed state. But it would be unfair of me to give it away here.

*Queen of Angels*, on the other hand, I found very disappointing. I struggled on to the end - science fiction novelists these days seem to think mere length a virtue - but when I closed the book I wished I hadn't bothered. It certainly didn't reach any particular high-point or reach any particular conclusion that I could see.

I was also very disappointed with *Neuromancer*. I know that everyone else read this book seven years ago, but I hadn't, and I bought it because I keep reading references to Gibson's "brilliant conception of cyberspace". Cyberspace is a word which has now well and truly entered the mainstream, at least among computer freaks, it seems.

But I found that the book itself was very uninvolved, and Gibson's cyberspace bore little or no resemblance to anything like the way I currently interact with computers, or ever expect to: it was just an excuse for a hefty dose of fantasy, no different in kind from the treatment in the Disney film *Tron*. To my mind, no one has yet really written any fiction which really fits my conception and experience of computing and programming. Maybe I should do it myself.

I won't comment at length on *The Summer of the Dane*. The latest Ellis Peter's Brother Cadfael mystery, but this time there wasn't really very much mystery, so while it was a pleasant enough historical romance, it lacked the interest and edge that some of the other books in this series have.

I've also had the flu for the last week, with unpleasant headaches attached, so I've been re-reading a lot of very light stuff: Dick Francis, Larry Niven. It keeps the mind amused, if nothing else.

## Recent Listening

In preparation for our Mammoth Garage Sale, we've been going through our old vinyl records to see what can be parted with. Most of these records we haven't played in years, but there are some old favourites that I've dragged out and put on the turntable. Some of them I'll tape so that I can listen to them in the car.

This has also prompted me to go through my cassette tapes to rationalise them somewhat. One piece which I *only* have on tape is a wonderful album called simply *Welcome* by Ronce Blakely (I'm not even sure I have her name spelled right). I only have it on tape

because I taped it from the record that I borrowed from Lee Harding about 20 years ago. I don't mind admitting this breach of copyright because I would be very happy to buy the original - if only I could find it. I was unable to track down a copy of the original album many years ago, and it certainly doesn't seem to have made the transition to CD. Nor indeed have I seen any other albums by this lady. Of course I would be keen to know if any of my readers could point me in the right direction.

The strange thing about my delight in this album is that it verges on Country and Western music, which I loathe; but Blakely has such energy and emotion that her music completely transcends that genre. The speed of her delivery is frequently astonishing, and sometimes makes the lyrics hard to understand, but when they are clear they are generally very strong. As usual, though, set down in print the lyrics of pop songs seem much less powerful than in the musical delivery, because the pace and the emphasis is missing:

*She don't mind looking after somebody,  
in fact she likes to please;  
She don't mind cooking something special,  
but she hates being brought to her knees;  
She don't mind riding tough in the saddle,  
that's how she learned to ride.  
Lord! she loves her tenderness  
but her bitterness can't be denied...  
Lord, she hates to toe the line;  
She can't be nobody's bride.*

I've also rediscovered a couple of albums by Steeleye Span. This, for those too young to be familiar with the group, is strange stuff - sort of electric folk, I guess. Traditional English folk music set to a slightly faster beat, and backed with electric guitars and synthesisers. I like it, but then I like most traditional folk music too.

But a heap of albums has gone out in a pile for the garage sale. I now wonder why on earth we bought half of the records we did.

## Recent Computing

*But lo! men have become tools of their tools.  
Thoreau*

I've been trying, not entirely successfully, to get back to work on the next version of my shareware program, Autoread. But finding the time to really sit down and concentrate is very hard.

This new version is a complete re-write, using the "Turbo Vision" interface developed by Borland, which gives you full mouse control, pull-down menus, relocatable windows and all of that good human interface stuff. But my

brain must be getting old along with the rest of me, because I find it often very hard to work out how to manage all this wonderful capability.

I think programming is getting harder, not easier, as the years go by, and I'm not sure it's all just me. The amount that you need to know, and remember, in order to develop a fully-fledged program to the standard that users expect today, is quite staggering. In fact, I wonder if it is not becoming more than

any single individual can cope with; increasingly software development is in the hands of teams of people working for large organisations, rather than in the hands of individuals working by themselves. In this, software development is paralleling the development of science; little if no science these days is done by the independent amateur genius, it's all done by large research teams.

## At Last, the Mailing Comments Show...!

I've started this issue really early this time, so I hope I can do much fuller mailing comments than I've managed in the past. Coming only 5th in the Anzapoll category of "Best Mailing Comments" has chastened me and made me see the error of my ways, you see.

You really know you're home when you find a wombat under your bed #23

Cath Ortlieb

Thanks for your very interesting review of *Richard III*. Sue and I went to see Antony Sher's Richard many years ago, which I enjoyed greatly, but we didn't get to see the Bell version, so your description was very welcome.

You are right about the humour though; even Sher's production had a good deal of it, particularly in the scene where Richard pretends to refuse the crown when he is discovered in "prayer". Sher hammed that scene up very heavily.

It's a pity that the play is such unabashed propaganda! Henry Tudor is the knight in shining armour (literally, in the Sher version), and Richard the impossibly evil, malformed creature who (again, literally in the Sher version) slimes up onto the throne and murders everyone he can get his hands on.

Even without looking at the modern historical research, or even without having read *The Daughter of Time*, just on the grounds of commonsense you

would have to have grave suspicions about the veracity of the depiction of Richard III in this play. The trouble is, when you have SHAKESPEARE writing propaganda, he does it so well that the propaganda runs successfully for 400 years. Goebbels would have cut off his right arm for such a writer!

Slaydomania

Leanne Frahm

Oh, come on, Leanne! Don't be so pathetic! "Lowering the tone" of Anzapa indeed. Anyone would think from your outcry that the last few Anzapas have been wall-to-wall reports of cooking classes, reviews of the latest cookbooks, hand-lettered illustrated recipes and lengthy debates about what colour saucepans to use. When in fact all we've had is one article by me as part of a series on things I enjoy doing, and half-a-dozen follow-up mailing comments. Far, far more words in the last few mailings have been spent on, say, con-reports, for example.

Besides, I don't see why there should be any proscriptions on what we talk about here. Why shouldn't we simply write about what interests us, and ignore what doesn't?

Kim Huett said it perfectly last mailing when he replied to Jan MacNally:

*"I am not going to condemn people for holding an interest that I don't, if for no other reason than that interest is only one part of that person. I accept this interest in the same way I hope other people accept my interest in sport. I don't expect anybody to join me but I do expect toleration."*

Right on.

Nevertheless (with the above off my chest) I'm happy to take off

my apron and say that your piece on the Confederate Action Party was very amusing and greatly enjoyed. I don't know whether you are right to be alarmed about the party or not. Anything seems possible in Queensland, but in general I think Australians are too laid back to adopt any kind of fanaticism.

Leigh Edmonds wrote an interesting piece many years ago, in which he suggested that the good old Australian tradition of "She'll be right, mate" was a strong defence against extremism spreading in this country, and I suspect that he was right. I wonder whether he still feels the same way now that he has a PhD in history? Must ask him.

I do hope, however, that the current obsession with economic fundamentalism in this country is somehow headed off.

I think the fact that both major parties now espouse very much the same economic philosophy, which is generally perceived by the public to be wrong-headed, has led, and will lead, to such parties as the one you describe arising, as people look around desperately for some kind of choice other than between Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

The trouble is that economists persist in pretending that economics is a science, which it clearly is not (it fails most reasonable tests of what science is, including Popper's requirement that theories should be falsifiable - that is, capable of being proved false by experiment). Economics, I would suggest, is in fact on a par with astrology in that it requires a lot of mathematics and computing to produce apparently plausible answers and forecasts, and so appears eminently respectable until one starts to question the assumptions that went into the formulas in the first place.

Whoever called Reaganomics "voodoo economics" had it exactly right - except that I would suggest that the description applies to all economics, not just those espoused by Reagan.

There, Leanne, is that Deep and Meaningful enough for this mailing?

Ph.D. The Game

Jenny Glover

Um, I'm not sure if it's just me, but I found this contribution very confusing, and not at all as coherent as your usual contributions. On the other hand, perhaps my confusion stemmed at least in part from not realising that "Seducers in Ecuador" was a review of a book; I thought it was a fantasy piece of your own devising, until I got to the end.

Anyway, I found the Ph.D. game amusing, but I suspect I would find it more so if I had ever done a Ph.D. myself.

I felt great sympathy for you being ear-bashed by your emotionally fraught colleague. At the moment I am in a slightly similar position where I seem to be acting as an agony aunt to a young IBM salesman who is responsible for multimedia products. Every phone call from him lasts at least half an hour as he expounds on the internal politics of IBM (enough to make me never want to work for that organisation); every meeting lasts at least an hour for the same sort of reason. We're supposed to be working on a joint project, but I'm finding it exceedingly hard to get to grips with the actual work needed because my contact keeps wanting to focus on politics and strategy. And he's such an insecure, frenetic individual it's impossible to be curt with him without it leading to further agonising.

It's a bit like being saddled with a Nemesis; you start to dread every phone call, make excuses to avoid meeting. None of which is very professional, I'm ashamed to say.

Once I understood that "Seducers in Ecuador" was a review it made a lot more sense. It sounds fascinating, rather like a cross between *L'Eranger* and *Clara Reeve*. I haven't read anything by Vita Sackville-West, know little

of her except for her relationship with Virginia Woolf.

You're right about the debasement of fantasy, I think. Ursula Le Guin wrote very sagely about this in her essay "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie" in *The Language of the Night*. Real fantasy gets up and bites you when you are not looking, and it's dangerous stuff.

So few people are actually writing fantasy or science fiction these days, despite a plethora of books being published carrying these labels. There seems to be an inverse relationship between the number of titles and the core of real sf and fantasy.

To your list of titles I think I would add some books by William Mayne, like *Earthfests* and *A Game of Dark*, and some of Alan Garner's better works like *Eldor* and *The Owl Service*.

Word Smiths

{Dick and} Leah Smith

I think the curly brackets above are a Pascal joke, but I'm not sure...

Anyway, I greatly enjoyed this, and I hope you find the time somewhere to contribute regularly. Please consider me to have dropped a line about STET.

Your piece on language differences was very interesting. I'm sure you know Churchill's famous description of America and Britain as "two countries divided by a common language".

It is wonderful how language evolves and changes even over quite small geographical areas. There are certainly terms and phrases used in Victoria which are not understood in New South Wales, for example. *Scallops* mean something quite different, for example.

But dialects are another thing altogether. I was born in Yorkshire, in England, as was my mother. My father, however, was an expatriate Geordie (from County Durham). When I used to visit my cousins in Durham (about 50 miles away) as a boy, we had great difficulty understanding one another. And when I came to Australia from Britain at the age of 13, I might as well have been speaking Greek for a while. (The first question I was asked in an Australian school

was "Who'd ya barrack for?" - translation: "What football team do you support?" When at last I understood the question, I replied "Bradford City", to further mutual confusion).

As you point out, meals vary in timing and naming from culture to culture. In England our main meal was always at midday - which meant that we had to endure inedible "school dinners" provided by the school. But in Australia we eat our main meal in the evening, and have "lunch" at midday. "Supper" is occasionally used to describe a snack before bedtime.

Oh, here's Dick at last with mailing comments. Thanks for going to the trouble to comment on several back mailings; I always like that.

On cycling: yes, Holland is Bicycle Heaven and as flat as a pancake (which I suppose takes some of the fun out of it).

You're not the only person in the apta to remember *L'il Abner*. I'll bet Michael O'Brien and maybe even Bruce do too, which just shows how old and grey we are all getting. But I was never much of a fan of the strip (I never read many newspaper strips, come to think of it).

Re your comment to Bruce about ditto masters; I would say that 95% of all Australian schools (at least in the urban areas) would use photocopying these days as their duplication medium, rather than ditto, Gestetner or Roneo.

Module #97

Michael O'Brien

I loved your "Close Encounter" quiz.

I also found the letter from your correspondent in the States very interesting - an eyewitness account of these major new stories makes much more interesting reading than anything in the newspapers. But why didn't you give us the name of your correspondent?

You are right about casting pearls before swine (wasn't there a seventies rock group called that?). Familiarity with the classics and thus with classical allusions is fading fast; but on the other hand maybe that isn't such a bad thing. Educated writers in our great-

grandfather's time would have peppered their works with quotations in the original Latin or Greek, and would have expected the majority of their audience not only to understand the languages, but to know the source of the quotations. It's not really such a loss to have left behind such allusions, I think.

Even when we were young, a lot of education was still hidebound by the English classics at least; kids these days get to read and view a much wider range of material, and I'm not sure that is all bad. After all, modern popular culture also creates its own immortal quotes and references ("Go ahead, make my day" springs to mind for some reason).

Besides, lack of familiarity with the classics allows old fogeys like you and me to appear wonderfully superior when we come out with some well-chosen quotation; as Rumpole demonstrates, you can feel good by quoting the classics even when no one around you has any idea of what you are blathering on about. If only I could infallibly remember quotes accurately without having to look them up!

*I pass, like night, from land to land  
I have strange power of speech;  
That moment that his face I see  
I know the man that must hear me;  
To him my tale I teach.*

I also enjoyed your bit on how the past saw the future. There's a whole book about this, called *Patterns of Expectation 1644-2001* by L.F.Stone. But it's interesting to look, as you do, at the specific case of predictions made by earlier generations about what life would be like in the 1990's. Almost universally, such predictions were over-optimistic about the effects of technology and how different the world would be. Whereas in fact, apart from in a few specific respects, our everyday lives are not that much different from those of our parents and grandparents. Prophets almost always forget that the old always lives cheek by jowl with the new.

I was greatly amused to read recently a children's encyclopedia published in 1960, which I could easily have read as a 9-year old boy. One section dealt with "The Future and You", and tries to forecast "what life will be like in,

say, 25 years", ie in 1985. The authors would, I fear, be gravely disappointed in the real future that lay before them. They make some good hits, but mostly they are quite, quite wrong. Some examples might amuse (or depress?):

*Some countries with great distances between towns will no doubt build electronic motor-roads for use by electronically-controlled cars...as long as the driver travels on such a road he won't have to do any driving...*

*We can safely predict that in 25 years time the majority of large ships will be nuclear powered...perhaps the future of marine transport will lie under the sea.*

*Very fast and powerful nuclear 'traction' aeroplanes without passenger space - and perhaps even without crews - may be crossing the continents and seas continuously at great height...*

*...we can form quite a convincing and probable picture of an English or Continental home in the 1980's. It will be more 'flexible' than today's - with moveable walls... Everything will be electric, for current will be as cheap as dirt - plutonium-operated atomic power stations will be dotted all over the world...*

*There is bound to crop up one formidable problem in an age where so many things are done mechanically: the problem of what to do with our spare time... The problem will be aggravated by Man's increasing longevity. ...the 'killer diseases' of today - cancer and heart ailments, malaria and other tropical endemics - will be rooted out just as tuberculosis, the great killer of the past, has already been more or less eliminated...*

That last prediction sounds particularly hollow today given the recent strong resurgence of untreatable, drug-resistant TB in the United States and the Third World.

G'nel 69

Marc Ortlieb

Well, I haven't listened to any of the music you refer to in this. (This is probably some kind of record, no pun intended). So it's a bit hard to comment, though I can imagine your joy at finding a

long-desired album, because it matches my joy when I find a long-desired book. But I greatly enjoyed your *Marching Song of the Boring Old Farts*. Very apt, I thought. It's also the first time I've seen the word *gafiate* used as a noun.

Gobbets #3

Kim Huett

While you are shrinking inward, I am alas moving in the opposite direction. My belly now sags over the top of my pants, not by much I agree, but by enough to be uncomfortable, and I wobble if I try to run. It's back on the bike again as soon as it stops raining here in Melbourne (the Met Bureau have confidently predicted that it will indeed stop sometime in the next six months).

Sport... ug... (tolerate, tolerate!)... hmm. I managed to totally ignore the Aussie Rules Grand Final, though it wasn't easy, but I understand that the Cup or Flag or whatever (as Wendy Harmer, current winner of the Anti-Football League's Wilkie Award, said "Is there a Cup?") has left the State for the first time. All we can do is pray that it does not return.

The Haberfield Herald

Gerald Smith and Womble

Yes, Gould is very good. As well as his collections of articles from *Natural History Magazine*, you should try to find *The Mismeasure of Man*, which is a striking demolition of the "science" of IQ testing. Don't bother with *Time's Arrow*, *Time's Cycle*, though, unless you are in to real academia.

I see so few films that I can't comment on your viewing list. And the amount of television I watch appears to be following a continuously descending curve.

1992 Anzapoll Results

Cath Ortlieb

Congratulations, Bruce! And also to Roger. Your placings in the poll were well deserved.

OBO

Alan Stewart

Well, I know who gets my vote for "Best Typo" in the next Anzapapoll. 72pt type for the wrong deadline!

Land of 10,000 Loons

Jeanne Mealy

Is a "rummage festival" what we call a "garage sale"? That is, people selling their surplus household goods outside their house? If so, we just held one, and it rained, so we only sold a fraction of what we had on offer.

Speaking of weather, this Spring in Melbourne has been very unusual in that it has done nothing but rain. We've had about two sunny days out of the last three months. It gets very depressing after a while...

Liked your reprinted c\*\*\*king blunders.

As you no doubt have read by now, my father has had his bypass and is doing really fine.

Good luck with buying a house. I've never really had to go through the agony of finding a place (apart from when we were renting, when there are different considerations) because we bought this house from my parents. And we like the area here a lot (it's much less suburban than much of Melbourne; plenty of trees; very close (5mins) to open farmland with cows and sheep; yet close to school, kinder and shops), so there's never been much incentive to move away, apart from the fact that the house itself is less than perfect for our desires and needs. I hope all goes well for you and John. It can be a testing time in a relationship, finding and moving into a house.

Fanatic 30

Lyn McConchie

I'm sure you're correct about how to write fantasy (or any kind of fiction, for that matter), that is, to make sure it deals with real pain and fear, and that characters' actions arise from real motivations. See my earlier comments to Jenny Glover. Maybe the trouble is that the word "fantasy" is used far too

loosely. To some people like Miss Norton (umm, excuse my ignorance, but is that Andre Norton?) it obviously means fluffy stuff with fairies and all sweetness and light. To someone like Ursula Le Guin, it is grim and unyielding exploration of the mythic consciousness. To others it is just adventure fiction with the right kind of props - demons to hack about instead of Nazis, for example. To you - well, I don't know. One day I'd like to read one of your books to find out. You seem to be having (or at least on the verge of having) a great deal of no-doubt well-earned success.

An Island of Dubious Sanity in a Sea of Cannibal Yuppies

Terry Frost

Swapping vasectomy stories... what will Leanne make of *this*? Oh, what the heck...

I had my vasectomy done under a general anaesthetic in a private hospital. I would, I think, have been happy enough to have had it done under a local, but the surgeon didn't actually offer me a choice, and by the time I realised I would be completely out to it, it was a little late in the proceedings.

I don't recall being so sore that I had to wear special trousers, but things were certainly tender for a while. However, the absolutely worst thing about it was the hair growing back after being shaved for the operation. It felt like I was sharing my underwear with a pincushion, for a couple of weeks.

I have to say that being rendered sterile was not without some (admittedly mild) psychological effects, too. Realising intellectually that I would never be a father again is one thing; coming to terms with it emotionally took a little longer.

Lynx #15

LynC

Your description of your brother's room sounds remarkably like our bungalow before we decided to have our mammoth garage sale.

\*brg\*

Bruce Gillespie

I find it extraordinarily hard to comment on your contributions when they deal with books, authors and critics that I've never heard of. Never mind.

I did pick up on something you said about fairy tales: "The point about a fairy tale is that the 'happy ending' is always the reverse of the ending you would expect from the events that are in the tale."

I'm not sure that you're right about this. Have you read Bruno Bettelheim's book *The Uses of Enchantment?* It's a long while since I did, but he discusses fairy tales in great detail, and seems to be saying that the stories are essentially templates for growing up, that they allow children to encounter and defeat their fears. For example, he sees "Snow White" as a story which allows young girls to come to terms with sexuality and rivalry with their mothers in adolescence ("Evil Step Mother" of course always being a mechanism to allow children to consider without trauma the punishing, disciplining side of their own real loving mothers).

So I'm not quite sure why you consider that fairy tales do not in fact truly have "happy endings" - some of them I would have thought do so unambiguously, while others (like "Rapunzel") have unambiguously "unhappy endings".

(Typeface freaks: these mailing comments were set in 10pt Goudy)

This was *Megatheriums for Breakfast* 8, a bastion of yuppie fan-publishing.

I've spent 551 minutes working on this issue, it comprises 30943 characters and 1302 words, I started work on it on October 8, 1992 and printed it out on December 1, 1992. There have to be some real benefits in using a computer to produce fanzines, don't there?

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