

# SF COMMENTARY

ONE HUNDRED NINETEEN



**January 2025**

**84 pages**

# SF COMMENTARY 119

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Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard Street, Greensborough, VIC 3088, Australia.  
Email: gandc001@bigpond.com. Phone: 61-3-9435 7786.

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PHOTOGRAPHS: Elaine Cochrane (p. 9); *Pyrenees Advocate* (p. 13); Leigh Edmonds (pp. 23, 24); William Breiding (p.33); Steven H. Silver (p. 34); Robert Day (pp. 70, 72, 75); Google Street View (pp. 79, 80).

ILLUSTRATIONS: 'Tsunami Time' (Elaine Cochrane + NightCafé) (p. 3); ATom (Arthur M. Thompson) (p. 8); 'Tsunami Time 2' (Elaine Cochrane + NightCafé) (p. 13); 'The Bayeux Folks Celebrate Recent Issues of SFC' (Elaine Cochrane + NightCafé (p. 14); Teddy Harvia (pp. 16, 20, 39); 'War of the Worlds' (Dennis Callegari) (p. 32); Murray MacLachlan (p. 41); David Russell (p. 56, 58);

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# I must be talking to my friends



'Tsunami Time' (Elaine Cochrane + NightCafé).

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# Tsunami time

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I'm on a beach, sitting in my deck chair, shirt on to keep out that Australian sun, reading a book, as relaxed as I've ever been. I'm looking out to sea. The water starts disappearing from view. There is a shadow on the horizon, rising higher and higher from the sea line into the sky. I'm about to be hit by a tsunami.

As the sea water roars in, I expect to be swept away, my body to be fetched up dead on a hill somewhere. But as the water surrounds me, I feel not threatened by a roaring torrent but becoming the centre a mighty universe of blue water, buoyed up not drowned, ecstatic not injured.

The water turns into a glittering mountain — all tumbled together — people, fanzines, books, CDs, movies, artwork, messages, photographs, all part of a new wonderland. In short ...

## A tsunami of goodies

After I sent out the notices and copies of *SF Commentaries 116* and *117*, I had expected to sit back in my metaphorical deck-chair on my metaphorical beach for a fan-editor's holiday. I enjoyed publishing *SFCs 116* and *117*, but no more than usual. I thought they were up to standard, but not more so.

Over the 57 years since *SFC 1* went into the mail, I always expected that I might get sick of publishing fanzines. This did not happen. However, nothing could have prepared me for rediscovering the sheer enjoyment of publishing in 2024, the magazine's 55th year and my

78th year.

Nothing can explain the tsunami of response to *SFCs 116* and *117* — 120,000 words of letters and articles, plus books, magazines, CDs, other disks, and artwork, most of which came by mail, but some also delivered by hand.

## Celebration

So here I am, celebrating you, the supporters of *SF Commentary*. I don't have room to mention everybody. I might even forget somebody. If I leave you out, sorry in advance.

The direct response to *SFCs 115*, *116*, and *117* has been made up of articles and letters of comment sent to me during the last four months, plus a further 14,000-word letter of comment from Robert Day.

The first half of my tsunami response can be found in *SFC 118*, with contributions from **Elaine Cochrane**, **Dennis Callegari**, **David Grigg**, **Sue Woolfe**, **Tony Thomas**, **Leigh Edmonds**, **Colin Steele**, **Anna Creer (Steele)**, **Mark Fraser**, **Rich Horton**, **John Hertz**, and **John Newman**.

Now *SFC 119* is the second half of the tsunami response.

**THE DITMAR RESPONSE:** Elaine and I would like to offer our major thanks to all the people who have accepted the gifts of **DICK JENSSEN (DITMAR)** after he died on 7 March. You have taken away from our house boxes and boxes of books, LPs, DVDs, Blu-rays, and CDs from the vast moun-

tain that **JUSTIN ACKROYD**, **CAREY HANDFIELD**, **MURRAY MACLACHLAN**, **ROB GERRAND**, **GLADYS WILLIAMS** and the team packed to be transported to our place the day before Dick died. Thanks for the enormous amount of work **ELAINE** has put into cataloguing the boxes and seeking to carry out Dick's wishes as expressed in his Will. One person or couple after another has visited in order to help to level the box mountain into a low hillock. Elaine hopes that the front living room will be ours again.

Unfortunately, many people who might have been interested in items from Dick Jenssen's magnificent library have told us that they are themselves either no longer accumulating or 'decluttering'. For instance, decluttering **IRWIN HIRSH** has sent me some of my own fanzines and several boxes of fine books, especially film books.

**DAVID RUSSELL** continues to send me cartoons for *SFC*, and his usual hand-drawn Christmas card. **STEPHEN CAMPBELL** sent me some of the preliminary sketches for some of his paintings.

Particular thanks to **DAVID** for sending me a fannish document I thought I might never see: **JACK HERMAN's DUFF REPORT (WAHFULL TRACKS 1985)**; 58 pp.; covers by Catherine McDonnell and Mel White) about Jack's 1985 trip to the Los Angeles world convention of that year funded by **DUFF (DOWN UNDER FAN FUND)**. Jack has delighted in telling me



in ANZAPA that I will never see this legendary document, legendary because copies were distributed only to those who contributed to the 1985 DUFF Fund (it seems that I failed to do so) or attended the 1985 national convention in Sydney that was Jack's last hurrah as a convention organiser. Needless to say, Jack's trip report is as entertaining as all of Jack's other fanzines, so it's not clear why he doesn't reprint it or allow others to do so.

**COLIN AND ANNA STEELE** (Anna writing here as **ANNA CREER**) keep contributing their fine review columns. I find them useful as both a guide and an anti-guide to books I should know about. From time to time Colin has sent me copies of books that he has enjoyed but does not need to keep. His gift of his copy of **Peter May's A Winter Grave** last year had led to a major collecting interest of mine. **PETER MAY'S 'Lewis' trilogy, The Blackhouse, The Lewis Man, and The Chessmen**, is one of the best crime/mystery trilogies of recent years. These non-routine books deal with the climate and landscape of the far Orkney island of Lewis as much as it does with the characters and crime mysteries.

Other books Colin sent me include the collected **Ann**



**Leckie** stories, **Lake of Souls**, **Angela Slatter's** recent **The Briar Book of Death**, and what looks like a merry short fiction anthology, **Death Comes at Christmas**.

Thanks also to **PERRY MIDDLEMISS**, who brought back for me from his recent visit to the Orkney Islands the first in the 'Lewis' series, **The Blackhouse** — complete with bookmark from The Orcadian Bookshop, Orkney, Scotland.

**JUSTIN ACKROYD** called in recently, bringing back with him a copy of **A TRAVELLER IN TIME**, the collection of essays by **MAUREEN KINCAID SPELLER**, who died recently, very much too young. (She was twenty years younger than me, but had written far more reviews and critical articles than I have, in a style I much envy). Justin has been trying to obtain a copy for me from USA, but as he said the other night, 'the American shipment has not come in'. Last item into his luggage back from the **Glasgow Worldcon** was Maureen's book, edited by **NINA ALLAN** for **PAUL KINCAID**, the famous British fan left behind when Maureen died. A rich treasure house of criticism, not in academic style



but in a personal style that will be enjoyed by readers of **SFC**.

**BELINDA GORDON** from Western Australia continued to offer me some treasures from the collection of her father **LEE HARDING**. She sent me some DVDs of classic movies I've never seen in shops. The 1946 version of **The Three Musketeers**, for instance, is very interesting, starring as it does Gene Kelly in his first major movie, although the plot doesn't quite make sense. A few weeks later, Belinda sent me some of



the few books that Lee kept with him after he downsized and moved to Perth. Some years ago he had offered me Volume 2 of **Norman Sherry's** biography of **Graham Greene**, but later withdrew the offer. I owned the well-publicised **Volume 1**, but **Volumes 2** and **3** had slipped into Australia without publicity. Now, thanks to Belinda and Lee, I have the full set.

On 29 August I received a surprise copy of the **PROGRAM BOOK** for this year's **WORLD CONVENTION IN GLASGOW**. It was sent to me by **JAMES BACON**, with whom I hadn't traded emails since just after the 2010 worldcon in Melbourne. I discovered in the Program Book my tribute to **CLAIRE BRIALEY** and **MARK PLUMMER**, the Fan Guests of Honour at Glasgow, plus many other tributes. It turns out it was **CHRISTINA LAKE** who made sure I received a copy of the Program Book. Sending it to me must have cost somebody a fortune, whether it was James, Christina, or the convention itself. That's fandom!

Christina gave me permission to reprint my tribute to Claire and Mark from the Program Book (see **SFC 118**, pp. 10-11).

Wonderful books from **ANSIBLE EDITIONS (DAVE**



**LANGFORD)** have been flowing into my mail box over recent years. Thanks to Mark and Claire, who still hold quite a few pounds in Croydon for me, for sending Dave the payment. Dave places the proceeds of such sales into the **TAFF FUND** instead of pocketing them himself. (See his letter of comment in this issue of *SFC*.)

The most recent book he sent me is **NEW WORLDS PROFILES**, edited by Dave himself. These page-length profiles of contributor writers are culled not from the more famous New Wave-style *New Worlds* edited by Mike Moorcock, but the very important **NEW WORLDS** that was the centre of SF short story publishing from the early 1950s until 1964, when **E. J. (TED) CARNELL** stopped editing it. In most issues, Carnell would include a page-length short bio of one of his authors, plus a photo. In many cases this was as much as any of us in Australia ever found out about those authors. Two of them in the book are Australians, **A. BERTRAM CHANDLER** and **LEE HARDING**, and one, **DAVID ROME (DAVID BOUTLAND)**, who was about to emigrate to Australia when his profile was written.

## NEW WORLDS PROFILES



1952 to 1963

**JOHN DAVIES** has given me some Blu-ray packages bought at the invaluable **PLAY MUSIC/VIDEO** shop in the city (Liverpool Street, in from Bourke Street). Not just any old Blu-rays. These are packages imported from Britain and America and Europe, often remastered films that have been unavailable in any form for many years, or have not been remastered until now. It's hard to remember all the Blu-ray sets John has obtained for me. They include **The Lavender Hill Mob** (fully remastered, with three hours of extras, plus a commentary); **The Philo Vance Collection** (crime mystery movies from the earliest sound era; the first of them made in both silent and talkie versions); **Michael Powell: Early Works** (some of the best of his 'quota quickie' movies from the 1930s); and the super de luxe package of **Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid**, with umpteen extras. Plus two CDs of a re-formed Melbourne group **THINGS OF STONE AND WOOD**, whose work I had not heard.

**GEOFF ALLSHORN** has been involved in many fan activities

## WASSAMATTA U.



The Fannish Education of Randy Byers

over the years. Heedits **FAN-LORE**, a very active blog about Australian fandom and SF publishing.

**ANDY HOOPER** from Seattle is someone I haven't mentioned much, although I do owe him favours from over the years. He is one of those many editors who posts his fanzine regularly every month as a PDF on **EFANZINES.COM**. His own fanzine **Captain Flashback** includes Andy's column, a letter column, and a semi-regular piece from **William Breiding** (much mentioned in the fanzine you are about to read). Andy is also well known for being part of the team who published **Chunga** until one of its editors, **RANDY BYERS**, died in 2017. In October, out of the blue, Andy sent me paper copies of some fanzine-style tributes to Randy. You can read about my admiration for Randy in **American Kindness**, my Bring Bruce Bay-side report of 2005. I wasn't prepared, however, for the reminder of the brilliance of his writing until I read the publications Andy sent me: **WASSAMATTA U.: THE FANNISH EDUCATION OF RANDY BYERS** (36 pp.) (published by Randy for his TAFF campaign in 2003); and his contributions to **FABULOUS! LAS VEGAS' CORFLU HISTORY (AND A TONER)**, edited by **NIC FAREY**



(2024; 104 pp.). The other publication Andy sent me, **BARTY COLLECTED** (24 pp.; 2024), is a collection of **NIC FAREY's** columns under the heading of 'Everything I Know about Seattle I Learned off Barty's Telly'. The collection seems to have been inspired by Randy Byers some years ago. I appreciated the packet of fanzines, but I couldn't help thinking of the postage cost from Seattle to Melbourne.

I caught up with **ALAN STEWART** after he (and what seemed like the rest of Australian fandom) returned from the **GLASGOW WORLDCON**. He brought with him from the world convention **WOOF 49**, the latest edition of the apa compiled for the worldcon each year. Since there is no Contents page, it's a puzzle to work out who is in it or how many pages it has, but it looks good. It begins with a contribution by Claire Brialey and ends with one by Alison Scott and others, so the in-between bits must be interesting.

Before he left for Glasgow, Alan moved house at last, from his long-time Richmond residence to a modern two-bedroom flat, so he has had to put most of his huge book collection into storage. However, he had mentioned that he had spare copies of books by **PHILLIP**



THE WORLDCON ORDER OF FANEDS



**MANN**, the prominent New Zealand SF writer who died recently. I no longer owned most of Mann's earlier books from Gollancz, but prominent Melbourne New Zealand expatriate **MURRAY MACLACHLAN** has been lending me some of Mann's excellent later novels. FOMO won. Nice Mr Stewart sold me eight of Mann's novels — all hardbacks — for \$20. Now I'm wondering which other rarities Alan might be willing to part with.

Alan also gave me a wallet of previously unused cartoons by **BILL ROTSLER**, plus **ATOM: A**



**ATom (Arthur M. Thomson).**

**TRIBUTE**, a duplicated tribute to the life and work of Britain's **ARTHUR M. THOMSON** (1927–1990), one of fandom's very greatest cartoonists. This tribute is based on the collection of ATom's cartoons compiled by **ELLA PARKER** in 1961, with written tributes by a wide range of fannish luminaries, such as **Walt Willis**, **Chuch Connor**, **Ethel Lindsay**, and **Bob Shaw**.

A real treasure for the Gillespie fannish bookshelf. Now all I have to do is make sense of the Gillespie fannish bookshelf

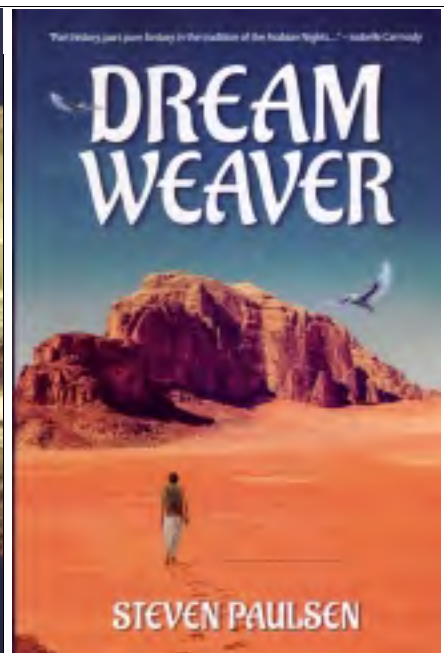
**GUY SALVIDGE** from Western Australia has published three exciting future-Australia SF novels, including the **'Yellowcake' series** (*Yellowcake Spring*, 2011, and *Yellowcake Summer*, 2013), and a hard-hitting urban noir thriller *Complicity City* (2021). They were not publicised well by their very small publishers, and Guy is still looking for a breakthrough.

With **DIEMENS** (2024, Forty South Publishing, Tasmania, 296 pp.; \$30), Guy has changed direction again. It's an historical novel about the very early days of white settlement in Van Diemen's Land (renamed Tasmania in the middle of the nineteenth century). Life was very dangerous. Based on research he has been carrying out in recent years (and for which he has already earned a PhD), Guy tells the story of



George Baggs, one of the seal-hunters, the very first inhabitants of Tasmania and the Bass Strait islands to its north. Life was about as rough and dangerous as during the earliest days of the American West. There was almost no law, the British governor had very little authority, and George constantly faces men who are much tougher and nastier than he is. Guy evokes brilliantly both the tough weather conditions that all the settlers faced and the horrifying process by which the Aboriginal inhabitants were robbed of their lands. This is the way to experience history — being dumped into it.

I hadn't heard from **STEVEN PAULSEN**, now living in Ballarat, for a long time, although occasionally we have said hello at conventions. I have no idea what he has published in the last 20 years. He sent me his new novel, **DREAM WEAVER** (IFWG Publishing Australia). Steve was right in guessing that it might not be my kind of novel (a fantasy set in 'Anatolia, autumn, 1405 AD'). Steve wrote that he didn't mind whether or not I reviewed it, I haven't yet, but that's probably because it's part of the tottering hill of Books



I Must Read Immediately. In his cover blurb, **GEORGE IVAN-OFF** says it best: '[*Dream Weaver* is] a magical blend of fantasy and history [which] takes the reader on a wondrous adventure through exotic locations and amazing dreamscapes, into the furthest reaches of the imagination.' The story concerns empires and conquerors, is filled with adventures, and can be seen as Australia's contribution to a historical magical genre that has been dominated by American and British writers.

**CAT SPARKS** sent me in October **CALVARIA FELL**, a book of short stories by her and **KAARON WARREN** (Meerkat Press, Asheville, Colorado). If it had been published in Australia, the book might have been noticed by Australian readers — but I still would not have heard of it without Cat's generosity. Despite the oddity of the book's title and cover, it is a straightforward collection of **'cli-fi'**: short stories about **life after The Catastrophe**. The stories were first published in a wide range of magazines and anthologies in Australia — none of which I've heard of. The trouble with 'cli-fi' is that stories





from the genre present a uniformly dismal future for everybody who survives the ravages of climate change. On the other hand, Cat and Kaaron are not your ordinary genre writers, so the scenarios stretch the category as far as possible. Not all the stories work for me, because often they feel a bit 'short of breath' — intriguing first chapters of novels rather than complete short stories; for instance, **Cat Sparks' 'Dreams of Hercules'** and **'In the Draw-back'**. The anthology has one perfect story, **'68 Days' (Kaaron Warren)**, which is a major piece of SF that I hope received awards in 2017. Now you have been alerted that *Calvaria Fell* is available as a Print on Demand book, go looking for it.

**CLAIRE BRIALEY** and **MARK PLUMMER** (it's those folks again) were asked to be the **FAN GUESTS OF HONOUR AT THE GLASGOW WORLD CONVENTION** in **2024**. Some Worldcon Fan GoHs are feted by the convention that picks them, and others are not. Claire and Mark carried out their duties with their usual thoroughness. They have been such an important

**SF Fandom:  
Its Part in Our Downfall**



Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer  
Sunday 11 August 2024

asset to British (and world) fandom for so long that, I'm told, their GoH presentation at Glasgow was one of the highlights of a very crowded program. (The other major item, I'm also told, was the tribute program for Christopher Priest, who left the planet recently.) Since I could not travel to Glasgow, I was honoured that **CLAIRE** and **MARK**, via travelling emissary **JUSTIN ACKROYD**, delivered to me a very precious fanzine, ***SF FANDOM: ITS PART IN OUR DOWNFALL: CLAIRE BRIALEY AND***



The most flattering photo ever taken of me (and Apple Blossom), 1977. (Photo: Elaine Cochrane).



**MARK PLUMMER: SUNDAY 11 AUGUST 2024**. This includes most of the text of the joint presentation by Claire and Mark, and lots of photos of their fannish friends. In the talk, they sent greetings to various Australian friends, including **Justin, me, Yvonne Rousseau, and Damien Warman and Juliette Wood** from Adelaide, including the most flattering photo ever taken of me (see below). Claire and Mark had such a great time during their trips to Australia that we hope they return soon.

Recently they have returned to regular publication of **Banana Wings**, usually regarded as the world's best fanzine. In **BANANA WINGS 81**, October 2024 (60 pp.), Mark and Claire retain the format of recent issues — long, serpentine, funny editorials from both of them, a long, delicious Letter Column, and one or two articles from fannish luminaries. In this issue, **SANDRA BOND** contributes the first episode of the tale of her recent TAFF trip from Britain to the USA. This is some of the finest writing of any kind I've read during the year, matched only by Sandra's article in **Idea 13** about surviving Pemmi-con, a badly organised convention in Canada.



**JULIAN WARNER** and **ALAN STEWART** contribute an article about beer drinking. Good writing; boring subject matter.

**MARK** sent the funds to **CAROLINE MULLAN** to arrange the sending of **NEW WORLDS 224**, the Sixtieth Anniversary of Michael Moorcock's first edited issue (72 pp; large format; 32 pounds). Contributors include **Michael Moorcock** himself, **Thomas M. Disch**, **Pamela Zoline**, **John Clute**, **John Sladek**, **Iain Sinclair**, **Allan Kausch**, **John Coulthart**, **Roz Kaveney**, and **John Davey**. It looks great, but I haven't had time to read it yet.

**KIM HUETT** sent me the most astonishing huge publication to lob onto our front door step: **THE BOOK: TOP 40 RESEARCH 10TH EDITION 1950-2018** (**JIM BARNES** and **STEPHEN SCANES**; Top 40 Research/Scanes Music Research; 2020; 632 pp.) It's huge; it's black; the type face is tiny; and it's the kind of book I would have loved to have had during the 1960s, when I was supposed to be doing my homework but had my ear hovering over my transistor radio so I could catch the name of the latest hit and



write it down. *The Book* is totally fascinating, at least while I can still read 6 or 7 pt type. Section 1 is a **'Chronological Listing: A week by week account of the new chart entries'**. It starts at 6 January 1950, when Lisa Brown's 'I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm' was No. 1, and ends with Ellie Golding's 'Close to Me' (24 December 2018). I've never heard or heard of either song. Other categories in the book include **'Alphabetical Artists'**, **'Alphabetical Song Titles'**, and **'Yearly Top 20 Songs'**. These annual charts don't differ much from the Weekly Top 40 Charts that I compiled from 1961 to 1969, but now I have the Top 20s for all the other years.

What did charts chart in those days? I have heard that the rankings in the 1950s were based on music manuscript sales, not 12-inch 78 rpm discs. By the time I became interested in 1959 when I was twelve, the charts were based on sales of 7-inch 45 rpm singles. Now, I'm told, they are based on 'downloads' for which listeners don't pay.

Thanks to Kim for this book. It's too late to take up Top 40 charts as a hobby in old age, but it is good to have a factual musical memoir of the best



years of my life.

**ROB JACKSON** from Chichester, England keeps sending me print copies, with illustrations in colour, of **INCA**, although all I can send him these days is a PDF of each *SFC*. I've never praised Rob's work enough. All I can do is point out that **INCA 24** (July 2024; 54 pages) is very much the kind of fanzine I would like to publish if I my editorial personality was different from Rob's, and contributors sent me only fannish and general articles. The last four issues of *Inca* seem to be a pinnacle of achievement. Who is this **KEVIN WILLIAMS**, who keeps sending Rob one brilliant article after another? In *Inca 23*, Williams took us of a tour of the tripods' tromping through East Anglia, as described by H. G. Wells in *The War in the Worlds*. This time he writes about **'Fleming at War: Fantastical Schemes, Gadgets and the Making of James Bond'**, based on the recent biography of **Ian Fleming** by **Nicholas Shakespeare**. I haven't had time yet to read my copy of the biography, but I greatly enjoyed Kevin Williams' article. This is followed by **GRAHAM CHARNOCK**'s memoir of **Christopher Priest**, recently lost to us; and a magnificent autobiographical

article by **TARAL WAYNE**, who died unexpectedly only a few months ago. Taral hit a high point of fannish achievement with this memoir of a particular place and time in his life (Willowdale, Ontario, an area that has changed completely since Taral lived there). ∴ **ROB**'s memoirs (footnoted by **MURRAY MOORE**) of the recent **LAS VEGAS CORFLU** don't work quite as well as his other Corflu accounts, but perhaps it's just that I couldn't be there at the time.

The ubiquitous **Kevin Williams** (in Rob Jackson fanzines, at least) leads the letter column, followed by even more ubiquitous **Leigh Edmonds** (in every fanzine I read) telling us what he does in his retirement.

**GERI SULLIVAN**'s *Idea 13* didn't win the Hugo for Best Fanzine in 2024 at the Glasgow Worldcon, but it should have! Once again a real fanzine has been trounced by other entities called 'fanzines', blogs and podcasts and the like that I've never heard of. Not that that has stopped Geri from producing an issue (*IDEA 14*, June 2024; 164 pp.), that is even more beautiful than No. 13. **CECILIA ZIEMER**'s cover alone gives distinction to the issue — and it is followed by articles by **GERI** herself and **PETER YOUNG**, as well as contributions from **SANDRA BOND**, (that great writer again; see my note about *Banana Wings*); **RADOSLAW 'RYNVORD' POLANKSI** (a new name to me), **DAVID DYER-BENNETT**, **JOSH MOORE**, **LIZ PHILLIPS**, and **HOWARD WHYTE**.

67 pages of the issue are devoted to **DEB GEISLER** (1957–2024), a fan of whom I had not heard until she left us. Her achievements have been very important to many people, and I can enjoy the tales of her life



and times.

My favourite article in the issue is **PETER YOUNG**'s own favourite scary airplane story. Pete earns his living as an airplane attendant on international routes. These don't often go wrong, until something does.

I enjoyed greatly the letter column (including an issue of **PETE YOUNG**'s own current loc-disguised-as-a-fanzine) and the most unusual item: the wedding photos and diamond anniversary celebrations of **ARTHUR HLAVATY**, **BERNADETTE BOSKY**, and **KEVIN MARONEY**. I would have enjoyed even more an article telling how this famous fannish trio marriage came into existence. (It's probably been published already, but not where I could read it.) This trio were a major part of the publishing team of *The New York Review of Science Fiction* during Dave Hartwell's editorship, then kept it going after his death, but now seem to have stopped. Like **William Breiding** before her, **Geri** is sure to find she has unleashed a magnificent monster by reviving *Idea*. I hope she enjoys riding the fanzine.

**VAN IKIN** is that Australian fan and academic over in Perth,

Western Australia, rarely met by fans in the eastern states, who has cast a web since 1975 by editing **SCIENCE FICTION**, a magazine that is an academic magazine in many aspects, but is also a fanzine because Van has never been able to persuade universities or government funding bodies to pay for it. It is above all a Beautiful Object these days because of the devoted efforts of Van and his designer brother Dane. The publication schedule for *SF* has always been even more irregular than mine, but in recent years the schedule has been obstructed by ill health in Van's family and the time it takes to produce his Special Issues. These issues, such as those for **PHILLIP MANN** and **TERRY DOWLING**, are the most elaborate literary productions that the Australian SF field has ever seen — but hardly anybody I know seems to see them. I'm just lucky, I guess, that Van puts me on his masthead and has sent me the most recent three issues this year. Two of them, **53** and **54**, are the closest I've seen to the old regular/semi-regular issues (the ones with the yellow covers, you might remember).

**SCIENCE FICTION 53** (82 pp.) features **LAURA COLLIER**'s article on **Marion Zimmer Bradley**'s *The Mists of Avalon*. **LAURA E. GOODIN** writes about recent political disputes within the worldwide SF community; and **BRUCE SHAW**'s article is about *Journey Into Space*. **ALAN STEWART**'s interview with **Neil Stephenson** from 2004 has finally been published; and **STEPHEN DEDMAN** reviews **Damien Broderick**'s *Under the Moons of Venus: The Best Science Fiction Stories of Damien Broderick*. No letter column in No. 55; but Van does write an editorial. Compared to

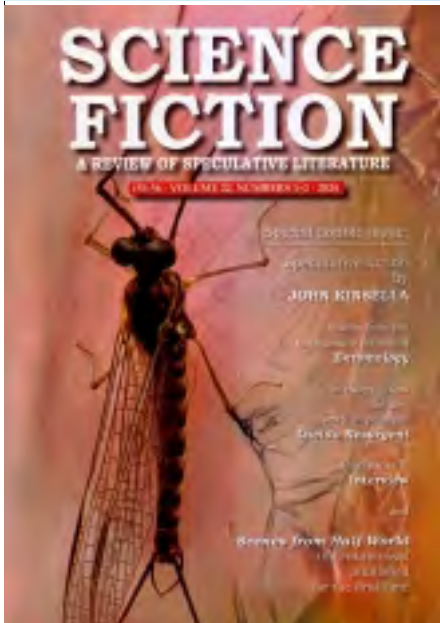


other Australian fanzines, there's a stiff upper lip quality to *Science Fiction*, but it also occupies a high-quality space that defies categorisation.

The formula is much the same in **SCIENCE FICTION 54** (84 pp.), i.e. not a formula at all, but something exceptional among fanzines. In 'Ageing in SF' **CATHERINE GILLARD** examines three authors on this subject. **FRAZANEH PISHRO** takes a look at a classic Australian SF novel I know and love: **M. Barnard Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow***; and **COLIN YEO** looks at **Stephen King's** work. **ALAN STEWART** interviews **Ben Bova**. No reviews this time; but Van does write an editorial.



So, to the Van Ikin Special Issue of the Year, **NOS. 55–56** (188 pp.): '**SPECULATIVE FICTION BY JOHN KINSELLA**'. You've never heard of John Kinsella? Probably, if you don't live in Australia. If we in Australia see his name from time to time, it's because he's one of Australia's most recognised and honoured poets. But I've not heard his name connected to science fiction before! Indeed, being caught within a kilometre of the terms 'speculative fiction' or 'science fiction' can spell reputational death among Australian literary academics. Full marks to John Kinsella for taking part in this exhaustive study of his connections with SF: **VAN IKIN's** own interview; ten of Kinsella's short stories from his recent collection ***Entomology***; extracts from ***Lucida Resurgent***; and the complete text of a short novel ***Scenes from Half-World***. I'm not sure that these three items have ever appeared in bookshops in the eastern states of Australia, so Van could well be a pioneer in more ways than he anticipated.



If you're not one of Van's friends and traders, **SCIENCE FICTION** costs a fair bit, although not nearly as much as for academic books: 2 issues for \$40 for Australian subscribers; 2 issues for \$90 for overseas subscribers. Van suggests payment through PayPal to **van@ikin.net**. If you have difficulties, get in touch with me and I'll try getting in touch with Van by regular email.

## Personal

Many of your responses have been personal and not necessarily in direct response to issues of SFC. For instance, my sister **ROBIN MITCHELL** and her son **COLIN ROUT** sent me a copy of ***THE PYRENEES ADVOCATE***, 15 November 2024. It's an example of what has become a rare object in Melbourne suburbs — the local newspaper. When Covid descended, Murdoch Press, which owned most of the neighbourhood newspapers in Melbourne, closed them all and has not resumed publication. But ***The Pyrenees Advocate***, based in Beaufort in the Western District of Victoria, is a lively, fascinating, fully functioning weekly newspaper covering a wide area including Avoca, Skipton, and Natte Yallock. I get the impression that **CRAIG WILSON**, the Publisher, writes the copy for the newspaper, takes all the photographs, and drops copies into various towns in the area. (A super-fanzine?)

He's done an excellent job of covering the 150th anniversary of the **Natte Yallock Primary School**. And how does that affect Robin and Colin? Because in the 1980s, when Robin and her first husband were living in Natte Yallock, Colin attended the local primary school. Next page is a photo of Colin pointing to his 1980 class photo when he

was a five-year-old prep student at the school. (So that means Colin, my nephew, is coming up to his 50th birthday!)

Yes, I know this has nothing

to do with science fiction, but I like to promote print publications wherever I can find them. Cheers to *The Pyrenees Advocate*!



Colin Rout points to his 1980 class photo when he was a 5 year old prep grade student at Natte Yallock.



**'Tsunami Time 2.'** When Elaine plays with NightCafé, she often gets very different results from the one main concept.

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## Friends talk back

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The Bayeux folks celebrate this issue of *SFC* (Elaine Cochrane + NightCafé.)

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## Feature letter: 'Everything's online': no, it isn't!

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GREG PICKERSGILL

3 Bethany Row, Narberth Road,  
Haverfordwest,  
Pembrokeshire SA61 2NG, Wales

We have a **pretty small house** — it is in an old 'estate' terrace (built in the 1880s for workers in the 'Big House' nearby — and although it was extended a bit in the 1980s it is still just four rooms (biggest 12 x 12 foot) with kitchen and bathroom. There's a corridor running front to back that is shelved, which is good, but also makes getting large things in or through (there's no outside back entrance) a problem. Some people would say we have too much stuff, but our view is the house is too damned small.

I've just remembered I have a webpage about the house (well about the stuff inside anyway) at: <http://www.gostak.co.uk/crows/crow1.htm>. It is password protected — enter CORVID as username and JACKDOOR as password.

The pics show the house as it was about 20 years ago, but in general it is pretty much the same today, except for a lot less human furniture and more cat furniture. Back then we had outside cats, but today little Marro and Per are inside cats, and we provide them with as interesting a world as possible (our vet strongly disagrees with this approach, being an outside cat advocate, with several of her own, but then she lives in a quiet country village not on a main road).

You know that despite seeing the scanned fanzines section of Fanac.org a lot, I hadn't noticed they had *SFC*. I guess for a lot of people that will mean they won't want the real things. Which I tend to think of as shortsighted folly — the internet is a very fragile thing in many ways, and unless you're actually copying and saving everything you think valuable in any way, there's no certainty you will ever get it when you want it. I've seen many good, useful, or just plain entertaining websites vanish without trace (the Wayback machine is not perfect).

And yes, I really really do enjoy *SFC* — even though I admit you sometimes run very long pieces on books or writers I have absolutely no interest or engagement with at all. (Mind you, it's the same with all magazines — for example, 90 per cent of

an issue of *Record Collector* can be uninteresting but it's that little gem in the last 10 per cent that makes it worth getting.) My interest in sf is now in a sense historical — I rarely read anything from the twenty-first century, and I stopped buying any of the magazines long ago, even though I count myself as an sf magazine fan with complete or long runs of all the twentieth-century magazines. I actually tend to spend my time reading the departments — editorials, reviews, letters — and only checking the fiction for those forgotten little gems by forgotten writers, of which there are more than you think. I get an immense amount of pleasure rooting through a stack of prewar *Amazing* or 1950s *If* or *Galaxy*, or any of the Robert Lowndes-edited magazines. (If there were anyone in sf who needs a proper biography it is Robert A. W. Lowndes!)

(20 August 2024)

Hoy hoy —

I just thought I'd tell you — never too late for egoboo nor is there ever too much — that I've been rereading issues of *SFC* over the last few days and enjoying them enormously, as well as feeling that I have been for a moment in the company of intelligent commentators on sf. It's a joy; I'll do more of it.

The other thing, and I may have asked you this before long ago — did you ever write a short piece about the film *It's a Wonderful Life*, but from the 'other side', portraying it as a chronicle of the protagonist's failure in his ambitions and his return to a small confined safe space, convincing himself that it gives him everything he needs and he is happy as a medium-sized fish in a small pond. Or was it someone else? I have of course websearched this and found nothing. Was it all a dream?

**[\*brg\* I wrote about *It's a Wonderful Life* in an issue of some Gillespie fanzine I can't find at the moment. I saw many parallels between the exemplary but disappointed life of George Bailey and that of my father. I always felt that Dad had personal interests that were never expressed because of his devotion to his family and his church. I'm not suggesting he ever was afflicted by the kind of despair that causes George Bailey**



**to wish he had never been born. Dad's Christian faith assured him that everything in his life was worthwhile. But did we ever tell him all the reasons why he was important to us and many other people? I doubt it. So *It's a Wonderful Life's* George Bailey does have a special personal meaning for me.\*]**

Catherine was offering some of our old fanzines to those who'd take them and pay the postage, and she did get an offer. But some mook got in touch to say he didn't need them because 'they're all on the web'. I think people have completely fantastical notions about that. I have a lot of opinions about this, mostly around the **fragility of the on-line ecosystem**. For a start, remember that the user is entirely at the mercy of the supplier all the time; things can be withdrawn either by contract expiry or just 'editorial' whim; charges can increase or conditions worsen (like enforced advertising) or there can be usage limits. Importantly, it depends on the whole internet working first time every time. Speaking as someone (well a double someone really) who had **two outages** in the last couple of years caused by physical cables being cut, lasting the best part of four weeks cumulatively, I know what this is like. Massively inconvenient in simple comms terms,

and the total loss of all online music and films. If we hadn't had a Very Large Amount of DVDs and other stored digital video as well as our CD collections we'd have had a pretty dismal time of it. Obviously there's actual broadcast TV but when you want a Korean detective story there's no adequate replacement on BBC1 ...

'Everything is online.' No, it isn't, even if you had the money to subscribe to a hundred niche providers as well as Amazon and Netflix. Now, I'm willing to concede that a lot of music I know and like is on such sources as Spotify, but see above for permanence issues; but with films and TV it is a different proposition. A lot of films aren't available from legitimate streamers, and even getting them from the grey area operators would be impossible with an internet outage. And so on.

And as far as **personal websites**, enthusiast websites, the ones about stuff we like, well, they're the most fragile of all; could be lost for a dozen different reasons (I know this from my own observations over the last 20 years), and if you think the Internet Archive is all-encompassing then think again, it isn't now, and was worse in earlier years. That's why, when I can, I copy whole websites to local storage. I cling to my physical stuff, especially things I really treasure.

Obviously if the power grid failed none of this would work anyway, but if that happens not being able to watch a copy of *The Long Day's Dying* (one of my absolute favourite films) would be a minor concern. However in daylight hours I could read *SFC* ...

(3 September 2024)





[\*brg\* I agree with you completely. Everything online could disappear in a moment at source, and probably will.

As I've written elsewhere I've been in a state of mourning because my CD supplier, Dave Clarke has been 'let go' by my main independent book store, Readings, whose current incarnation is a result of the merger of the original Readings Book Store and Professor Longhair's Record Store in the 1970s. The store is suddenly no longer selling CDs, so I can't submit my usual monthly list of CDs I want. Music that's nothing but a shitty little file on the Internet is worth nothing. Music must have a physical existence to go on a shelf or it might as well not exist now, and it certainly won't in 40 years' time.

Fanzines pose quite another problem. Bill Burns at efanazines.com saved the fanzine from extinction because of rapidly rising postage costs in 1999 and 2000, combined with the concurrent development of the PDF. So right at the time when I thought I would have to give up on any fanzines sent overseas, along came Bill. Every issue of *SFC* from No. 76 was then generated in PDF by me, although the files were so big compared to the internet's capacity that for a year or two I had to send them by CD ROM to Bill in America.

Postal costs are now much worse than in 2000. It now costs as much to send a regular letter within Australia (\$1.50) as it took to send

print copy of a 40-page fanzine overseas in the 1990s and early 2000s. I'm still printing a few copies for those Australians who are interested, but have not sent any print copies overseas since just before the Covid lockdowns (during which time only one jet per week was carrying mail between USA and Australia and back, and mail could not be sent to many European countries). I feel as if I'm insulting people by not being able to send them print copies — especially as much of the interest in *SFC* is outside Australia. But that's how it will have to remain.

As for *SFC* on the Web: that's part of the vast project by Joe Siclari and Edie Stern aimed at putting on Fanac.org a scanned copy of every pre-digital fanzine they can find. A few years ago Mark Olson from Boston scanned as many print copies of my duplicated fanzines as he could find, and Perry Middlemiss from Melbourne has scanned the others. So now all the duplicated *SFCs*, especially from the heyday of the 1970s, are up on Fanac.org, plus all issues of *The Metaphysical Review*.

As for streaming, I still can't do it. Elaine promises we will get a proper Smart TV, provided we can find a store that will provide a tradie who will know how to solve the current technical problems.

Thanks as always to Catherine for her posts on Facebook, and best wishes for all your interests and hobbies.\*]

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## Feature letter: The new game of 'Chase the Reference'

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**STEVE JEFFERY**

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

We are well, or as well as we can expect at our age and general state of mental and physical decrepitude. Still working, but no longer much enjoying it or even regarding it as an interesting challenge — it now feels like a never-ending slog — and thoughts are more and more circling round to retirement. The monthly church book sales and Saturday coffee mornings on the way back from the shops are our main (only) social events, and the dining table is still under a constant cycle of jigsaw puzzles.

I'm currently reading **Viv Albertine's** (of the Slits) auto- biography *Clothes, Music, Boys*, having recently finished **Pip Williams' The Dictionary of Lost Words**, which I picked up at the last but one book sale. (Set in Oxford, between

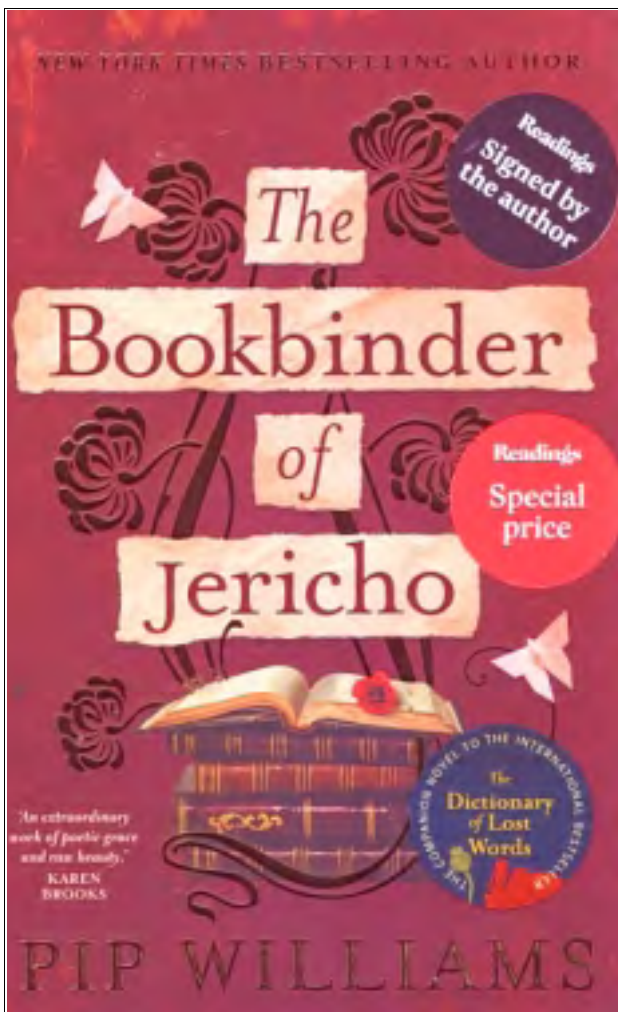
1900 and 1950, around the birth of the original Oxford English Dictionary.)

Also on the go is **C. V. Wedgewood's The Thirty Years War**, following up on **A. C. Grayling's** book on the seventeenth century. Wedgewood is drier and a bit of a long slog through this period of European history, and Grayling has better jokes, though CVW does not spare on his opinions of the intellectual and political shortcomings of many of the Hapsburg rulers.

Sometime back there I also read **Nick Kent's The Dark Stuff** collection of essays on self-destructive and/or ill-fated rock musicians. Fun, in its own macabre way. Interesting to compare Albertine's view of Sid Vicious with Kent's. But then Sid never went for Viv with a rusty bike chain after a bad review.

(25 September 2024)

[\*brg\* Thanks for your books suggestions. *The*



*Dictionary of Lost Words* is one of my favourite novels of the last few years, so I hope you enjoy it as much as I did. *The Bookbinder of Jericho*, the sequel, is even better.

2024 has been a good year for reading — 72. Usually I can read only about 70 books per year, but in 2023 I got through 95. I don't even want to speculate how many more books I bought or received in the mail than I read. I've read five or six Mick Herron 'Slough House/Slow Horses' books, but they are starting to blur in my mind. Thanks to Colin Steele's book review column, I discovered Peter May, a fine Scottish crime/mystery writer, although only a few of his books are available in bookshops here. Perry Middlemiss bought me another when he was on Orkney recently. I've enjoyed the latest Chris Brookmyre and Kate Atkinson novels, but I my favourite novels for the year have been by Sebastian Barry: my re-reading of *The Secret Scripture*, my favourite novel for years, and a first reading of *A Long Long Way*, one of the very best books about the ordinary soldier's experience of World War I. My favourite SF novel has been Martin McInnes's *In Ascension*, which won the Clarke Award.\*]

I didn't know there was a sequel to Williams' *The*

*Dictionary of Lost Words*. I will definitely look out for that and put it on my Christmas list.

The sudden influx of 250 boxes of books and CDs taking over your house dwarfs even the book sale, when we only put out a few dozen crates for each sale. I can't imagine what it must be like. I'm worrying about the growing piles of books building up in the study and by the sofa, and I'm trying to slowly winnow out books I know I'll not read again to the church and charity shops. I'm reading a lot more slowly these days. The years when I could read 70 to 100 books in a year are long gone, and I probably manage to finish two to three books a month, although I've usually got two on the go at any time. Instead Sudoku and crosswords have taken over my bus commutes and lunchtimes (when I'm not working through, which is more usual).

I remember reading and enjoying an sf novel by **Chris Brookmyre**, but I'd have to check back for the title. (It may have been a library book as I can't see it on the read books pile.) [\*brg\* *Places in the Darkness*] It prompted me to look out for other books of his, but as is the way, nothing by him has turned up in any of the charity shops since. I did find a copy of **Angela Carter's** *The Magic Toyshop*, but that was quite a gruelling read — and more than once I started to wonder if I really wanted to finish a book that revolved around coercive control. It was a welcome relief to turn to Williams' novel.

(27 September 2024)

[\*brg\* Pip Williams' *The Bookbinder of Jericho* is even more powerful than *Lost Words*, in my opinion, although it hasn't picked up the number of glittering prizes that attached themselves to *Lost Words*. *Jericho* is more of a twin novel to *Lost Words* than a sequel, and culminates in one of the best descriptions of life in Britain during the worst period of World War I. But the novel also has that sense of high spirits that illuminates *Lost Words*, of people enjoying what they do best, no matter what.

Yes, I never see Brookmyre's novels in charity shops (and there are almost no secondhand book dealers left in Melbourne), and I thought he must have died. Ruth Rendell/Barbara Vine novels disappeared after she died. I now wish I had kept all the ones I read, but instead I have only about ten, mainly Barbara Vines.

I'm not sure whether I've read Carter's *Magic Toyshop*. I know I have a few of her books, mainly unread, and that's unfair, because she is one of the great stylists among British writers.\*]

A nice set of tributes to **Dick Jenssen** in *SFC 116*. Sad to read about the decline in his health and

mobility towards the end.

Back in the days when I used to subscribe to **Computer Shopper** magazine in the 1990s I tried both **Bryce** — I can't remember if it v2 or v4 — and **Poser**, when they came on a free disc. I could never get on with Bryce's weird interface. Poser models (which I hoped might work as digital mannequins for figure drawing) all too often ended up looking like someone who had come off second in an argument with a large truck and been rebuilt by Victor Frankenstein's less talented and blind younger brother. Plus it took an age for anything to render on an underpowered 286 processor and I lost patience with both programs.

(27 September 2024)

I've just invented a new game called '**Chase the reference**'. I was just reading **Jerry Kaufman's** loc in **SFC 116**, where he writes:

You talk about *Light from Uncommon Stars* and *The Cartographers*, among others. Both books have been choices of a book club I'm in. We discussed the first several months ago, and the latter is the subject of our next meeting. I'm entirely in agreement with you on *Stars*; at the halfway point in *The Cartographers*, I'm wondering who will play Nell and Felix in the movie version.

and I'm going to have to back track to **SFC 115** to find out what you said about **Light of Uncommon Stars** there. Except what I find there is my own loc, which mentions your review of this and also of **Peng Shepherd's** *The Cartographers* in **SFC 112**, with the comment that I need to add these to my reading list, and that leads me back further to a download of that earlier issue where I do eventually find your review of *Stars* along with that of *The Cartographers*, and also of **Pip Williams' The Dictionary of Lost Words**, which for some reason must have completely escaped me at the time.

This is a bit like unravelling a jumper — though less frustrating than playing the same Chase the Reference game between Microsoft Teams documents at work, where the references themselves get changed while you're searching for them.

Your reviews in *SFC 112* also included **Anthony Doerr's** *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, which I added to my Xmas or birthday list when Vikki decided I didn't have enough stuff in my wish list to justify a visit to Waterstones, although having read it I tend to agree that it meanders around rather too much and will probably be one of the books on the read pile that will make the journey to the book sale stock at some point. Perhaps I ought to have opted for **Emily St John Mandel's** *Sea of Tranquillity*

instead. I'll make a note.

But what I did get from Vikki as a birthday present, totally out the blue and unexpectedly, was a copy of **Alan Moore's** massive *Illuminations* collection of short (and several not so short) stories. Opening it and finding the first story in the collection is Moore's enigmatic 1992 story '**A Hypothetical Lizard**', which I remembered (though not enough to prevent me re-reading it) from one of the early **Datlow and Windling Best Fantasy and Horror** anthologies, was an added bonus.

Still not sure about *The Cartographers*. The idea is brilliant, and it's what grabbed me and kept me going, but I'm not sure that the McGuffin hunt plot completely held together to the end payoff.

Vikki has discovered **CMAT (Catherine Mary Ann Tate)** from Radio 6music and a later BBC '**Live Lounge**' session on TV, and has become a huge fan (also, more curiously, of **Beth Ditto**, although in the event that proved only to really hold as far as one particular track by her band Gossip). Anyway the CMAT album was added to Vikki's birthday list while we wait for a new release from Swedish duo **First Aid Kit** (and the only just announced new **Cure** album, back to their dark and gloomy best.)

(27 September 2024)

**[\*brg\* Dick Jensen had to have the Latest and Greatest, so he usually updated to a computer with power enough to run Bryce and Poser. However, Bryce did not keep up software upgrades for the latest systems, so he changed to Vue d'Esprit. Eventually his arthritis wouldn't allow him to sit up at the main computer, so he stopped generating new images. But I do have the library of all the illustrations he created, and a good selection of the abstract images created with DJFractals, the fractals-producing program that he wrote.**

Answering your letter backwards ... like your quest through back issues of *SFC*. I don't think anybody before you has bothered to play this game, except for Mark Plummer, who does fannish research of this type all the time.

I would agree with you about *Cloud Cuckoo Land* if only it were not one of the few large novels I've read over the last few years where I can remember the whole shape of the story. It does have a satisfying architecture.

I've heard of Alan Moore's *Illuminations* but not actually seen a copy for sale in an Australian bookshop. Maybe Minotaur Books in the city sells it.

I don't know the name CMAT, but my musical horizons have been cut sharply now I don't have a reliable source of CDs. I certainly want anything new from First Aid Kit.



**Is Prophecy still going? — I had the impression that members provided quite a few book reviews. In Melbourne I find lots of interesting suggestions from the two competing review-zines from Melbourne, David Grigg's *Megaloscope* and Perry Middlemiss's *Perryscope*. Both are posted to efanazines.com when they come out. Also useful is the book talk among the 30 members of ANZAPA every two months. Always plenty of disagreement, of course, but I love disagreeing about books.\*]**

**Prophecy** is still going. I'm in the middle of writing mailing comments for issue 121 for next week's deadline. It is still by-lined as 'The fantasy apa', but far more honoured in the breach, except for Vikki. (I wrote about **Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*** — I haven't seen the film yet — and **Crispin's *The Moving Toyshop*** — in the last mailing.). Distribution is now via pdf over email, with mailings every other month except December, cos of Xmas. We've just got one re-joined member bringing us back up to seven; otherwise the membership is an almost complete overlap with what used to be our local pub meets (now occasional curry nights), with the exception of **Freda Warrington**, who lives a bit further up north. And it's another place for reviews of interesting books, films, and series, though more limited in the latter, as we're not on any of the subscription channels.

Vikki can bang out her contribution, including a long review of a 600-page fantasy novel, in one sitting, but she has to nudge me a week in advance as I'm a slow (and wildly inaccurate) typist having no idea what I'm going to write about, and have often forgotten what I've just read, until I'm well into the middle of a paragraph.

I've clipped my own reviews from the last half dozen mailings of the Prophecy apa into a new Word document and sent it to you and you can work out what's useful.

I found a treasure trove of book reviews when I skipped back to **SFC 115** and also in **SFC 117**, so I'm looking forward to reading through those. *SFC* is pretty much my main source of sf/f and related book reviews and recommendations now. There is **Locus Online** when it comes to checking the awards each year, and sometimes (when I remember or it comes up in somebody's feed in Facebook) the monthly round-up of new sf and fantasy by **Lisa Tuttle** in the **Guardian**. I'm sure there must be good book review blogs out there, although Goodreads isn't it.

(28 September 2024)

**[\*brg\* I behaved badly by you when last you sent me a lot of reviews from Prophecy a few years ago. I enjoyed the reviews greatly, but kept being diverted by whichever other material I felt was more urgent at the time. Thanks for your latest reviews. I'm particularly interested in your view of Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*. I loved the novel. I was able to obtain the Blu-ray from overseas, but I find the film more than a bit tedious, and have stopped halfway.\*]**

Just catching up on your 'busy social whirl' in **SFC 117**. 'Ah, a life quite crowded with incident, I see.'

Meeting people for lunch. How decadent. I'm used to stuffing a sandwich in the rough direction of my face — not always accurately — while staring at the PC screen and typing one-handed — even less accurately — at the keyboard. Not sure Gordon Gecko would approve of either of us.

That was a convoluted journey back from Continuum by tram and bus. I sympathise. My journeys to and more usually from work have become increasingly unpredictable, as it seems to be silly season for roadworks on the route between Kidlington and Witney. (I suspect underspent road repair budgets have to be used up or they won't get renewed next year.) Currently I can count five sets of temporary traffic lights on the S7 route (which does a weird longwinded dogleg through Woodstock and Blenheim Palace) and four if I try coming back using the alternative S1 route.

And then we had a month's rain in a single day, which flooded several of the outlying villages,

making the roads impassable. A fact I only discovered when the early morning bus to work (already an hour late) turned back out of the Blenheim Palace roundabout, circled it several times and then went all the way back it had just come on a diversion back in to Kidlington (now going the wrong way to the confusion of people waiting at the bus stops) and straight into the end of the morning rush hour stop-start crawl into Oxford. At which point, as it passed the stop by my house, I got off, walked back to the house and called in to say I would be working from home that day. Apparently I wasn't the only one, and only one of the team managed to get into the office that morning.

Weird thing about the mangled index of Leigh's book *Proud and Lonely*. Did you eventually sort it? Indexing of a sort is my current *bête noir* at work. Actually it more trying to provide a one-to-

one traceability between my test cases and the requirements document when both are being edited and revised (and worse, renumbered and repaginated) by different people at the same time as shared documents in Microsoft Teams. Hint: don't ever do this, even if you have no hair to tear out anymore.

**Rising postal costs.** Same here. When was the last time I posted an actual letter in the mail? A cheque to Rob Jackson for next year's Corflu membership. And the one before that? A cheque to Rob Jackson for last year's Corflu membership.

What happened to those days when people in Regency and Victorian novels wrote long letters to each other two or three times a day, and expected a response by return of post?

(7 October 2024)

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## Feature letter: Legacies and life

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**LEIGH EDMONDS**

**60 Park Street, Wendouree VIC 3355 (coa)**

A quick note to thank you for the paper issues of *SFC* that arrived in mail box today. I see that they were not cheap to post and I guess that they were not cheap to print, either, so I thank you for favouring me with them. I had seen that they were available on efanazines.com and I was about to start reading them there, but you have saved me that trouble.

What I want to know is whether or not fandom is conspiring to keep me away from those other everyday tasks that I'm supposed to be performing. A few weeks back a paper copy of *Inca* arrived from **Rob Jackson** around the same time as an email from **Claire and Mark** attaching a link to the latest *Banana Wings*. Then there was **David Grigg's** three-week warning for the **ANZAPA deadline**. To add to all that, **Geri Sullivan** sent me the latest issue of *Idea*, which arrived last Tuesday, and now your issues of *SFC* arrived this afternoon. Then, of course, there are the regular issues of *This Here ...* and *Perryscope*. It seems that all the world's best fanzines have lobbed into my room all at once and it's almost as though you guys don't want me to get on with the research for the second part of the history the way you keep tempting me with the distractions of your fanzines.

I suppose, however, that there will now be a

drought that runs on for months while you all get your strength up before producing your next issues. I might get some work done on the history but there is still the issue of selling this place and buying another one that will suit my needs for years to come — at least that is the plan. It has been a real trial by ordeal disposing of so much of the stuff that Valma and I have accumulated over the past half-century that it hasn't done my head any good. In the past three or four weeks I've condensed down four filing cabinets of paperwork into one, mainly because a great deal of it was company and financial stuff that I should have been disposing of routinely rather than stuffing into the cabinets and not thinking about it. There is also a lot of other stuff that I'd prefer not to take to my new place, boxes of stuff from our overseas trips that might contain memories but also take up more space. The shredder has been going rather hard ripping up all the stuff that might (but almost certainly will not) be of interest to people who steal identities and scanning anything that I think I might want to know about in the future but don't want to carry around with me any more.

There are *SFCs 116* and *117* to keep me interested. I reckon that I prefer **Dick Jenssen's** cover over **Alan White's**, and I've spent some time wondering why. Perhaps it is that Dick's is simpler and more surreal than Alan's, which looks more steampunk in character. Was Dick using any AI

in producing his artwork? I don't know whether Alan has used it either, but it looks like the kind of art that an AI machine would produce. It has lots of lovely complexity and intricate colouring, and the title looks very spectacular, so perhaps it's not a matter of one cover being better than the other but that both are great but different in style and execution.

Now I suppose I'd best have a look inside to see what the content looks like.

**PS:** I've skipped over all the material in **SFC 116** about **Dick Jenssen**. I still find it hard to read about dead friends. But this brought me to the first page of your letters and the comment from **Mark Nelson** wondering if people are still being taunted for reading SF. My feeling is that they are. Well, not so much taunted as thought to be odd, which may be similar to how things were in the past. My experience has been that when I say I'm interested in sf people immediately think that I watch the TV shows like **Star Wars** and **Star Trek**, not that I actually read words on a page. (I don't actually do that either; I listen to audiobooks, but I think that's a technicality because they are text based.) It seems to me that sf has become quite accepted on the screen, but reading is still not considered 'normal' by most people, and that being a sf reader still puts people outside the normally acceptable bounds of respectability. Consequently I still don't really broadcast that I like sf because trying to explain to them the difference between **Luke Skywalker** and the works of **Adrian Tchaikovsky** is just too much like hard work.

(9 August 2024)

**SFC 116:** First, it was great to read letters, long and short, from so many people that I've known or known of over the years. I was pleased to read that some of them are doing well and upset to read that so many have problems and life-redefining changes. One example was the letter from **Creath Thorne** who, like you, I remember from the days of APA-45. I never knew his wife, as I guess he never knew Valma, and I am sad to read that his spouse of 52 years died. All I can say is that I know how he feels. **Valma** has been dead for over a year now and I'm getting over her loss, but she still inhabits my dreams because she had such a profound effect on me. I'm sure it is the same for Creath. I was glad to read that he is contemplating dipping his toe back into fandom because it would be good to meet him one of these days. We can tell stories about our wives and cheer each other up a little. Perhaps, when I get up to Queensland next, I will also get together with John Litchen for some quiet remembering too.

Then there is **William Breiding** moving to **Albuquerque** into a tiny little apartment. I'm not planning anything quite so drastic. Somehow I'd been given the idea that as one got older life settled down to a period of quiet relaxation and reflection, and all that good stuff that comes with living happily every after. But, reading *SFC*, it seems that it is not so for our cohort. Perhaps mundanes settle down to a quiet recline into senility but apparently that is not our lot.

I enjoyed **Mark Nelson's** long letter a lot but the only significant comment that came to mind was his comment that ideas can be dangerous and that it is a **liberal arts education** that best equips us to deal with them. Then he goes on to ask how long it will be before the idea/threat of a liberal arts education occurs to the Republican Party. I don't know about what it's like in the United States, but the Australian government is doing its best to wipe out liberal arts educations with its HECS policy, which is now loaded to force kids into STEM subjects and away from the liberal arts. I forget the exact figures, but I did hear it summarised on the ABC recently that the HECS debt for getting to be a dentist is now lower than it is for a liberal arts degree. Sure, we need dentists (well, I do anyhow) but we also need sociologists, historians, etc, etc, to tell us how our society is going. Or perhaps politicians would prefer that we did not know.

I'm pretty sure that I'm one of those folks who got a hand-crafted Christmas card from **David Russell** and did not respond by sending him one in return. My bad. However, if I had to go out and buy a card to send back to him that would have meant I had to think about Christmas, and I'd prefer not to these days. That's probably not quite right; better to say that Christmas has no relevance to me except as an inconvenience because it means the shops are shut if I forget to stock up my fridge. And trying to go to and buy something is Melbourne in the week before Christmas is just intolerable.

Strangely though, when I was talking to my sister the other day about how things were going I said, without thinking, that I hope to have the whole moving process '**over by Christmas**'. I wonder if that is because, in Australia at least, Christmas is the beginning of the long holiday period that stretches through until the end of January with Australia Day. While many business are still open, it is much more difficult to get anything major done until the beginning of February. I understand France is the same way for August. So maybe when I said that I wanted to be moved by Christmas I meant I wanted to be settled before Australia closed for business for the following month.



It was nice to see the letter from **Lesleigh** and to see the photo of you, her, and Lee in 1972. You can bet that it is one photo that will be in the second part of the history.

Thanks also for all the reviews at the end of this issue that, I assume, were all written by **John Hertz**. Among them I particularly liked his comments on *A Treasury of Science Fiction* edited by **Groff Conklin** and **Asimov's The End of Eternity**. I am pretty sure that I once owned, and still may, a copy of the *Treasury*. I bought it before I left Dimboola, and thought it was one of the best things I'd ever spent money on, with so many great stories on it. (I went out to the big book shelves to see if I still have it but little Izzy decided that we needed cuddles instead, so I had to attend to her instead of checking if it is still there, and I will be disappointed if it is not.)

Among other things, recently I decided to reacquaint myself with some of **Asimov's** writing, and listened to the first couple of original '**Foundation**' books. They struck me as being very economical in their structure and prose, not great writing in a literary sense but clean and honest. Then I went back and listened to the two prequels that he wrote later and was disappointed by how

slack and unfocused they seemed. As far as I remember I've only read *The End of Eternity* once, and still remember it very fondly, so, with John's recommendation, I will go and have a look at it again.

**Talking about science fiction**, which I seem to be doing and which is perhaps appropriate to this fanzine, did I mention that I recently ended up adding about 200 sf books to my collection (see photo above)? A friend was emptying out his father's house and his father had been a member of Science Fiction Book Club for many years. I was not too happy to take them, seeing as how I need to cut down on my books, but many of these books date from a time when I was reading a lot so many of them are familiar to me already. I originally went out to the shelf (picture attached) to see if *The End of Eternity* was among them, but instead got distracted by all the other interesting and enticing titles. Here are five titles that I just picked out next to each other: *Rite of Passage* (**Panshin**), *Babel-17* and *Nova* (**Delany**), *Gunner Cade* (**Judd**), and *The Grain Kings* (**Roberts**). It goes like this for five shelves. The other thing I like about these books is that they are all hard covers with flexible spines so they won't blow apart if I try to read them. My paperbacks from that era are very fragile. What am I to do? The only solution is to buy a bigger house so I can keep them all.

On all the material by and about **Dick Jensen** in this issue of *SFC*: I've already seen some of it, and I will read the rest that follows his career after his return from the US when I'm in a note-taking frame of mind. I've already landed on the concluding section of the history (at least this is my current plan), which will refer back to the friendship between **Dick, Race, Lee, and Merv**, and the renewed friendship and gatherings in the 1990s. I've already been to see **Race and Iola Mathews** to gather material for that section and what you've written here, and the photos, will contribute to that final section too.

Before **Valma** died I didn't get out much, partly to help take care of her and partly because it was upsetting to her that she could no longer go out and be social, and she was a much more social person than I am. I'm told that loneliness is a very real problem for old people who can't get out, though people like you and I keep ourselves busy writing, reading etc. After Valma died I thought that I could either stay at home and be miserable by myself or get out with other people. Sometimes it takes an effort, but I regard it as being necessary. **Rose Mitchell's** recent birthday party was something I really thought about not attending because



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it involved getting to Melbourne and staying overnight. I was feeling terribly tired by the time I got there but had a great time even though I didn't stay long enough to see the cutting of the cake. I also do other non-fannish stuff and sometimes, to quote Elizabeth Foyster as she was at the time, 'Why bother?' On the other hand, why not?

You and Elaine have my sympathy about all the work of sorting out **Dick's estate**. I know these things take a lot of time, and it was only last week that Valma's estate was finalised and her money is in my bank account. That's 16 months after she died. What this means is that, no matter what happens with buying and selling houses, I can now most likely afford to get to Britain next year for Eastercon and Corflu, and I can probably also afford to buy my fannish friends a round of drinks at her expense and in her memory.

**Books!** What a problem they are. I look at all those lovely sf books and realize that I will probably never read any of them. As you know, I've been consuming a lot of sf through **Audible** and will probably continue to do so, since I can listen to them in the evening while I'm doing other things. It seems that making scale models and listening to books occupy different sides of my brain so I can do both at the same time. Strangely, if I decide to read something, even if it's some specifications for an aircraft I'm making, I suddenly can't listen to the book that's being read to me, so I sometimes have to go back and listen to that passage again. This means that I really don't need those books that were given to me, and most of the other books I own too. But getting rid of



The new Chez Edmonds in Ballarat. (Photo: David Grigg.)



books demands a very hard heart, and I seem to have lost mine at the moment.

(9 August 2024)

**I've sold this place and bought another.** My place here has a 'Sold' sign on the front and I'm waiting for a similar sign to go on the other place before showing the pictures on Facebook. Some time this week I hope.

Look up 60 Park Street, Wendouree. It's two or three minutes' walk from Ballarat's major shopping mall, about 20 minutes' walk from the Wendouree railway station, and in a very quiet and relaxing location. Settlement in on 11 December but it is currently unoccupied, so I can start

moving stuff into it as soon as some initial formalities are completed. This should make the process fairly painless, but I am not looking forward to it.

**Justin Ackroyd** is already lined up to take away about half my books, and lots more also has to be disposed of between now and then.

(25 October 2024)

I'm expecting my first visitor on Wednesday when **David Grigg** is going to come up for a few hours.

We will look at the sights of wonderful Wendouree and possibly visit a pub. I'm picking him up from the Wendouree station, which is much easier to get to than the main station in Ballarat.

(29 October 2024)

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## Feature letter: *Man in the High Castle* (TV series) and the long perspective

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**JOHN LITCHEN**

**3 Firestone Court, Robina QLD 4226**

Thanks for sending me **SFCs 116** and **117**. The issues are looking better than ever, which is great. Congrats on winning the FAAN Award for Best Genzine, an award well deserved. Great photo on page 6.

Taking a quick glance through **SFC 117**, I was astonished to see a whole section with material I'd sent you, some of it as far back as 2011. I'd forgotten about it, especially the 2011 piece. As an addendum to what I wrote about **The Man in The**

**High Castle**, I did watch the **TV series** on Amazon Prime. At that time we both agreed it was substantially different from the book it was based upon. However, I subsequently watched (binge-watched) the following three seasons last year on **Amazon Prime**, and decided it was much better than I'd originally thought. It basically takes Philip K. Dick's premise, updates it slightly— using newsreel films that the Germans are desperate to get their hands on for The Führer who collects them, instead of a book that postulates an America where they won the war, and we see flashes of these newsreels in which some of the protagonists



I couldn't find a copy of a central image publicising the TV series of *Man in the High Castle*, because it was released only to streaming and never released on DVD, at least in Australia. This is a Wikipedia image accompanying its entry on the TV series. The caption reads, 'Though Denver is the capital of the Neutral Zone, Canon City is a major setting.'

are in situations they could not want or imagine taking place in one of the alternate realities — and extrapolates much deeper into the consequences of an America occupied by both the Japanese in the west and the Germans in the east with a no-man's-land in between, while developing the concept of parallel worlds in which radically different outcomes to the war have happened. There is an interesting subplot suggesting the Germans want to eliminate the Japanese by using their newly developed atomic bomb to destroy the Japanese headquarters in San Francisco to push them out of America altogether. They don't like the idea of Japan dominating half of the world; they want it all.

The overall impression of the occupied America is almost steampunkish, in the sense that while there is much old-fashioned technology in use (TVs and radio), the Germans travel across the world in rocket-propelled planes that go to the edge of space as they travel from Europe to the Americas, while on the ground much is very old-fashioned late 1940s looking, although the events taking place are supposedly in the early 1960s.

I liked the idea that there are several characters who can travel across from one world to the other, either knowingly or sometimes accidentally, while the Germans are building a device in a massive bunker under a mountain that will enable people to cross from the occupied world to the other alternative. There is just so much going on that it becomes hard to keep track if you don't sit down and watch it in several long sessions. The colour scheme is brilliant, with muted grey and bronzed colour creating a dingy unhappy look to the occupied world while bright sunny cheerful colours illuminate the alternate reality where the USA wasn't conquered and occupied. What the book doesn't show is the examination of the family story of the leading German officer in the USA, and how indoctrination creates a tragic family situation, and ultimately how his thinking and beliefs are slowly being changed as the story progresses.

The overall production was beautifully done, cinematic in appearance compared to many TV series. This one had high production values and was executive produced by **Ridley Scott**. If it were shown on a big cinema screen, it would look fantastic. I think P. K. Dick would have been proud of how his story became the genesis for this production, since it expands it and gives much more relevance to the book if you re-read it after watching the TV series.

The ending seemed abrupt and unexpected, I think, because there was to be a fifth series, but it was cancelled, resulting in a less than satisfying

ending left open for a further series if it ever gets under way. (This is the fate of far too many promising TV series; very few ever get resolved. Some don't even have any kind of ending at all, they just stop, leaving the viewer waiting for a conclusion that will never come. At least the producers here were given enough notice to be able to write some kind of ending.)

Overall, I liked the series, and will watch it again to see if I can make sense of some parts that seemed confusing to me at the time.

Incidentally, there is a sequel to **A. E. Van Vogt's *Slan (Slan Hunter)***, which was written by the prolific **Kevin J. Anderson**, who doesn't only write books in the 'Dune' universe, but seemingly in every other franchise as well. I read this out of curiosity, only to find it lacked the spontaneity and surprises of the original and seemed a bit flat by comparison. There will be those who will love this sequel. Kevin J. Anderson always writes well and guarantees an entertaining story; it just didn't appeal to me.

I have finished writing three small books, but don't have the funds to finish setting them up for publication, so they are simply sitting in my computer (since January 2024) and will stay there until I can manage to pay the electricity, the rates, and other major expenses. With a bit of luck, by the end of the year I may have enough spare cash to finish setting them up to print a few copies. Living on a pension doesn't allow for such activities now. It's a constant battle to make ends meet. It's a good thing I still have heaps of books on my shelves that I can re-read, because I just can't afford any more new ones.

I've been feeling a bit low the last few weeks because I had an attack of the **shingles** (which is a reactivation of the chicken pox virus). I had chicken pox as a kid, measles too, and it never occurred to me I would get shingles. The reactivated virus attacks nerve cells, which is extremely painful. It can be brought on by anxiety, stress, old age, any number of factors, but the doctors don't really know what causes it to reactivate. I guess I fall into the category of being old, and probably stressed about the high cost of living these days, but who knows?

Still, these things only make me realise how vulnerable I become as I age. Nothing much we can do about that, though.

It's sad to read how some spend their last days, and I refer to **Dick Jenssen (Ditmar)**, whom I barely knew, other than through recent communications via email over the last few years. He did a wonderful illustration for your cover when you

printed the segment of my articles about stories set on Mars while that book was being written, and he generously allowed me to use and modify that cover image to be the cover of my book. I also remember clearly your reports on **Bill Wright** and the problems he had in his later years. Bill, of course, I knew from way back when we shot the first film to promote Australia in '75. I consider myself fortunate to have had relatively good health with only a few minor injuries over time through the study of Aikido and other martial arts. This is not because I've lived a healthy life or have done anything in particular to foster that. My life has been no more remarkable than anyone else's, so all I can attribute my reasonable physical condition is what I've inherited from my parents, and not because of any 'lifestyle'. Getting shingles was a minor inconvenience. Fortunately, I'm over that now.

(14 August 2024)

You created a nice promotion for **Leigh Edmonds' Volume 1 of *Proud and Lonely: A History of Science Fiction Fandom in Australia***. I will have to get a copy of it when I can get some spare cash. I love the cover. Having known **Merv Binns** since I was a teenager going to University High School, it is a fitting tribute to his contribution to fandom in Melbourne in particular, and in general in Australia.

I'm also curious to see the forthcoming second volume (although that may be a year or two away) and how Leigh treats the making of the **first fan film to promote our bid for the Worldcon in 1975**, since he was involved in the making of that film. He and Valma appeared in several scenes, along with Merv Binns, Bill Wright, and Lee Harding, among other notable fans, including the star of the film, Paul Stevens, as Antifan. Those were the days!

(16 August 2024)

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## Feature letter: The legacy of Michael Coney

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**CASEY WOLF**

**Vancouver, British Columbia V5M 4P5,  
Canada**

I am sorry that your good friend **Dick Jenssen** has died. It's hard to know what to say more than that. I know you've been friends for a very long time, and he is far from the first of your friends that you have lost. It's hard, isn't it?

I can't say I envy you and Elaine the task of being his executors. It sounds quite daunting. I think that the people who moved the boxes for you got off easy in comparison. No doubt an interesting task, but very labour intensive.

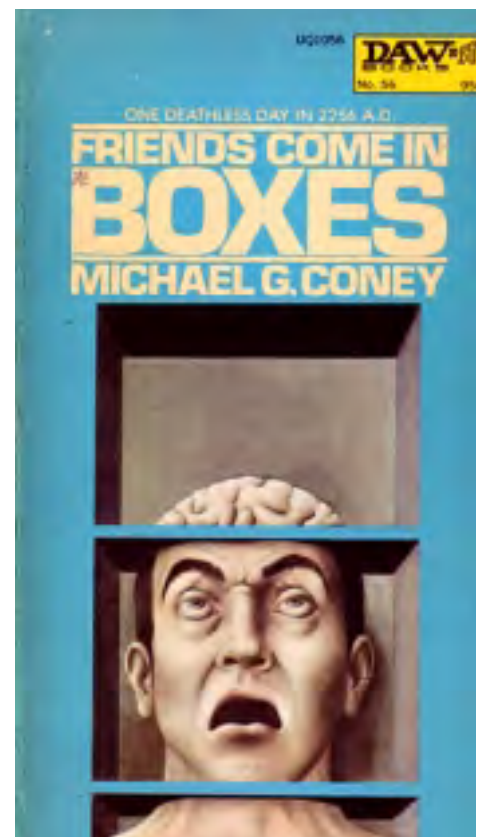
It's always seemed ass-ackwards to me that the instant someone dies, when we are most in pain and in need of self-care, we are catapulted into a strange and complicated world of admin. For most of us, this is exactly not what we need at that moment.

I suppose that slowing down a bit at 77 is not too unreasonable an ask. It's lucky Elaine is up to the work on forms and whatnot. I hope she at least somewhat enjoys that sort of thing.

**[\*brg\* She doesn't.]**

My apologies for confusing you. I was referring

to your **cats when I said 'kids'**, because cats end up requiring a lot more taking care of than people often assume, as well you know. And because they



are family members, even if human society does not always see them as such. They play the role of beings we interact with every day, and God knows they can bring as much amusement as small children can. Or at least, the cats I have lived with made me laugh a lot. And cry, less desirably. So, although I don't actually anthropomorphise cats I do see them very much as part of a family. Speaking of which, apparently the law in Canada has changed from seeing pets — is it just dogs? I don't know — as not merely property but as members of the family. We've just had our first court case deciding the custody of a dog.

(29 April 2024)

I was scanning **SFC 115** and to my delight saw a section named after a **Michael Coney** book, **Friends Come in Boxes**, although the subject covered in that section is not enormously delightful. I was surprised, though, that you didn't credit the title. Maybe that is because you know that people generally get the reference. It would surprise me if they did, but yours is a particularly well-educated group, in terms of the history of science fiction. These days I can't seem to scare up a recognition of Mike from anyone but the people who personally knew him.

Regardless, I thought I would do a brief Internet search and see if Coney himself had gotten his title

from a well-known phrase that I, in the backwaters of Canada, had never heard before. I didn't find this well-known phrase, but I did find a review of the book on a site devoted to reviews of SF from the fifties to the eighties. The review itself I have mixed feelings about. I don't like reviews that mostly summarise a story, which this one does a lot. I generally only want to have the vaguest idea of what the story is about, so that I can be surprised as things come along. On the other hand, I can understand why **'Joachim Boaz'** (the author uses a pseudonym, for some reason) does it in this case; the brief summaries lend weight to the final paragraphs, in which he says, 'Once the whimsical veneer wears off the true horror of the [sic] Michael Coney's world shows through like some mordant and decrepit core.'

Although I have read a number of Coney books, I've never actually seen this one, so it was interesting to get to learn a bit about the novel and what Mike may have been getting at when he wrote it. Obviously, he is a writer I enjoy, and so it is interesting to get others' perspectives on his work. The review, which came out in 2015 on the website **Science Fiction and Other Suspect Ruminations**, links to a then-new publication from **Gollancz** of the **Michael G. Coney SF Gateway Omnibus**, which contains **Mirror Image**, **Charisma**, and **Brontomek**. So it was good to learn about, too.

Thank you for sending me off on this little adventure. A new website, a review, and knowledge of a recent Coney publication. And it turns out 'Boaz' has written several other reviews of Mike's work. What fun! The links:

**Review of Friends Come in Boxes:**

<https://sciencefictionruminations.com/2015/03/15/book-review-friends-come-in-boxes-michael-g-coney-1973/>

**Michael G. Coney SF Gateway Omnibus:**

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/9780575129320>

(29 April 2024)

I have been rolling along through the most severe ongoing insomnia of my life, which is really weird because this is by far not the most stressful time I have lived through.

Apart from that, things are going very well. I am still in this weird shift to 'retired' in which I attempt to put joy more toward the centre of my life. More time with loved ones, more time hanging out in the garden with the birds, a book, and a cup of tea, more time being creative for the pleasure of it, not for publication nor education nor contributing something to society. But the reality is I still can't



seem to shake all those other time-consuming things that add to the stress and get in the way of this laudable program. Doesn't matter. I get to be alive and I get to be happy; who cares if I can't get the schedule straightened out?

(12 August 2024)

Thinking about you today, and missing my scientific spaces. My endeavouring to slow my life down is not quite working, yet. As I guide myself away from taking on work I get all yippity and start welcoming in a ton of other activities, all of which add up to me being as busy as ever if not busier. So I clearly have to continue streamlining the practice.

What are the many things I have taken on recently, you ask? Well, I am doing a little vocal training for old folk; I'm taking a live Irish class out of Belfast, which I just love; I am doing a course for folk with chronic illnesses; and a whole bunch of other stuff. Still exhausted all the time, but having more fun and I can't say no to all of that. Just have to get choosier.

Jumping straight to the egoboo before my limited energy poops out, I backed up a bit to read **William Breiding's** letter of comment. What a delight that he is also interested in Michael Coney! And a happy moving anniversary to you, William. Hopefully you are unpacked by now. Some of us never really do. Your patch of riparian beauty reminds me a bit of the Canadian prairies. The cottonwood trees that form little oases on the riverbanks and the golden grasses and prickly shrubs that abound. Of course, the ground is generally more lush — really, the second photo shows scrub more like the area around Lillooet, BC, where I have spent a fair bit of time. Coming from the temperate rainforest biome, I found it shockingly dry at first, and dry it certainly is, but there is so much beauty and wonder there. I'm glad that you found yourself a little paradise to live in.

**VCon** is partially reincarnating as a one-day con next month. The last batch of young people that I used to take are all happy to be going again, so I'm really looking forward to it. After many hitches and glitches, there seems to be enough energy left in local fandom to try to resurrect it. That is happy-making.

Of course, it will be a very different event with the deaths of **Michael Walsh** and **Fran Skene**. Fran in particular was a friend of mine, and a lot of what I did at VCon I did with her, particularly the turkey readings she put on every year to raise funds for the **Canadian Unity Fan Fund**. But I'll be happy to go and listen to people sound off about

this and that, do some gaming with the kids, and maybe throw a little money around at the vendors. I wonder if they will do anything in the honour of the fans we've lost.

I am pleased to hear that William is going through his backlog of books that he's been dragging around for years and reading them. I wonder if anyone else is. I have a little bit of a tough-love situation with myself as far as books go. For every one that I buy or get out of the library I try to be sure to read something that's already sitting on the shelf. There's no point in collecting books around you if you're only going to let them take up room.

I have become a little bit overindulgent in the **book apartment department** these days, in that I can't seem to just sit and read one book but always have several on the go. Usually, but not always, only one novel. I have had as many as three novels going at one time, although eventually one of them sucks me in the most and I finish that one first. But it's so lovely to have your chosen poetry book sitting ready to offer something up when suddenly the mood hits, and different non-fiction books appealing to different moods as well, and so on. Right now I'm reading two novels because one of them is about 150 years old and the language is so longwinded and elliptical that I need to be on my mental toes to be able to follow it very well. Whereas the other one isn't intellectually challenging at all, so I can read it whenever I want.

I confess that I have not been reading much in the way of **speculative fiction** for quite a long time. There are different things that have fed into this, one being the integration of horror into a lot of science fiction, so that I think I am reading an SF story and it suddenly turns out to be quite revolting. I hate horror, written or in film. I find I can be anxious enough about life without adding to it. I think the shift from SF is also just what has been around me: what I pick up in the free libraries, what I hear talked about on the radio. Then I get used to mostly reading books that, if they are speculative at all it's in a slightly more magical realist sense, and I find myself less drawn to traditional science fiction.

Back to **Michael Coney**. I downloaded one book of his from his website many years ago that I haven't gotten around to reading yet. And you know why that is! Unfortunately, it's now been so long that the technologies are all different. I still have the floppy that it is saved to ... This one was non-speculative. I think it may have been a detective novel. Should I search around and see if I ever thought to upload it onto my computer? Would

you be interested if I do have it? He was giving it and *I Remember Pallahaxi* away as free downloads because he hadn't found publishers for them and wanted to make them available to readers. Of course his wife took *IRP* off the website when whatsiedoodle decided to publish it after his death, and I don't know if the other one is still up or even has a website still. I think I'll go check.

Yep. Gone. And I am reminded that he died in 2005. Cripes. Not just yesterday.

So much has changed since then. It's weird to think of life just coursing on when someone dies. I mean, of course it would. But it's like their ending is a stick poking out of the water and everything else goes rushing forward, but they never do. As metaphors go it's not a very good one because, of course, something can come along that makes the stick go swishing down the river, and that's less likely to happen if we're talking about reversing a death. But I'm sure you know what I mean. It's like there is no way to avoid carrying on and changing — everything changing — so that the further you get away from that stick, the less you have in common with it.

It's been three years since my brother died. I will never be the same as I was then. Not just because of the river swishing along thing, but because of how profoundly his illness and death affected me. So maybe I'm contradicting myself here, in a way.

It's interesting, **when you lose a sibling**, to discover how little support there is out there for sibling loss. Most of us had at least one sibling, and many of us have several. Except when we grow up in different generations, our siblings have at least as much of an impact on our lives as our parent or our friends. But when it comes to death, when it comes to bereavement support, the focus is on deaths of parents, partners, and children. Going to bereavement support groups, I found that very few people came because of their siblings. I don't think that's because it's less important or even unimportant. I think we just don't make the mental space for it to be as important as it is. When Victor died I felt eviscerated. I can't describe it. It's only this year I am not actively grieving, though it is still in the background. A friend who lost both of her brothers to suicide described it like this: it is seismic. That's exactly what it was is.

I see that I told you I was in terrible pain from a pinched nerve in my pelvis. From my spine on down I've had all sorts of things happening in the last five years that have made my mobility pretty bad a lot of the time. However, I am doing so much better now. I trace the beginnings of my recovery to when I was out east before I went to Ireland the

first time last year. I was having a hell of a time getting around. I had a walker, which of course is not much use in a three-floor house. I was sleeping in the basement and my mother and the bathroom were on the second floor, so I had to get up and down the stairs quite a few times a day. But the wonderful thing was that there were banisters on either side and I could grab on with both hands and pull myself up without putting too much weight on my feet and back. This allowed me to get moving enough that things started to heal. And, fingers, eyes, and nose crossed, in the last nine or ten months I've only had one serious setback, and that was last spring. I am for the first time in five-plus years able to walk for an hour or more, which I am so happy about. As a lifelong walker you know how hard it is to lose that ability.

You will be happy to know that the bay laurel came back to life gradually over the summer and I have purchased burlap to wrap it in if it gets too cold this year. Speaking of being astonishingly on top of things, I have just gotten all of my scissors, my pruning shears, and my secateurs sharpened professionally! I have tied notes to the secateurs and the pruning shears that say, 'really sharp!' I even cut a little slit in my thumb when I was oiling them. Really really sharp!

(28 October 2024)

I have found it! Them! I will attach the books I downloaded from **Mike Coney's website** years ago: *I Remember Pallahaxi*, the sequel to *Hello Summer, Goodbye/Pallahaxi Tide/Rax*; *The Flower of Goronwy* (which I had completely forgotten about); and *Foul Play at Duffy's Marina*. The latter two have never been published, and I would share them with anyone who wanted them, as Mike intended when he put them up for free online. People can email me at caseyw@duck.com or you can give them out, if you like. Perhaps I will send them to William as an anniversary present. I grok, as well you know, the dislike of reading online. If you were very tempted to read any of these, you could have them printed out, I suppose. But don't forget bookfinder.com.

There are a few different authors named Coney in this list, but since Mike changed his authorial name so many times I just searched his surname. He appears a little way down the page. At the bottom are ones that were mis-shelved and are listed as 'author not set'. There are a bunch of his in there, as well: [https://www.bookfinder.com/search/?st=sr&ac=qr&mode=basic&author=Coney&title=&isb=&lang=en&destination=ca&currency=SD&binding=\\* &keywords=&publisher=&min\\_year=&max\\_year=&minprice= &max-price=&classic=off](https://www.bookfinder.com/search/?st=sr&ac=qr&mode=basic&author=Coney&title=&isb=&lang=en&destination=ca&currency=SD&binding=* &keywords=&publisher=&min_year=&max_year=&minprice= &max-price=&classic=off)

Gasp! I just did a little fact-checking. *The Flower of Goronwy* was posthumously published. This is what Mike had written about it on his website, which **PS Publishing** used as a blurb and which is all the description it gets on Goodreads:

Author's Note: An impossibly perfect young woman appeared in my novels *Charisma* and *Brontomek* and generated a lot of fan mail. People asked if she was based on a real person; and if she was, what a lucky guy I was to know such a woman. Well, unfortunately she was not real, and I emphasized this point by having her disappear into nothingness at the end of each novel. She was an impossible male dream. Her physical appearance was based on the movie star Susanna York (a clue to that is her fictional name Susanna Lincoln) but her personality was all my own erotic imaginings.

She puts in a guest appearance in *Flower of Goronwy*, the story you are, I hope, about to

download. It is not my usual kind of story and the basic premise gives rise to possibilities that require a much longer book — which I don't have time to write. I feel there are too many issues arising, too much conflict and there are parts of it that are much too creepy for my taste. It also has a strong sexual theme, unlike my usual writing, which tends to have a strong love theme.

One thing hasn't changed. I'm still a sucker for a happy ending.

I am pleased to be feeling much more yippy, as you say. It is a huge relief. Gods, what a gorgeous day. It's cool and damp but not raining, the hedge and wild currant remain green but the magnolia and the maples above them have gone bronze and gold. There is a sweet breeze and my feeders are bouncing with birds.

(28 October 2024)

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## LLOYD PENNEY

1706-24 Eva Rd. Etobicoke,  
Ontario M9C 2B2, Canada

Congratulations on 115 issues, the **55th Anniversary issue**. Thumbs way up for a celestial career in fanzines — and don't stop now! What's 55 years?

A fabulous **Alan White** cover tops the issue, followed by memorials to friends. We've had a number of local fan deaths here, and it is no fun. I have had enough of funerals and celebrations of life. We also have far too much stuff, and we are looking at getting rid of my fanzine collection, but no one seems interested. Those who might have shown some interest are looking to get rid of their collections, too. Now that we're getting close to those ages (I turn 65 in less than a month), I am trying to prepare myself for one of us to go. Not the happiest of ideas, but it is smart.

On page 29, **Colin Steele** mentions a book on **Douglas Adams**, with no further details. (Ah, there's the review on pages 36, 37, and 38.) I have a few other books on Adams; I should look into buying this one. First, I have to get the **Chicago Manual of Style, 18th edition**, with the ick price of US\$75.

(5 May 2024)

SFC 116: Our condolences to Australian fandom on the passing of **Dick Jenssen**. Looks like he was like most of us — reading takes us to wondrous and even impossible places to meet charming and improbable beings. (Some of those beings lived in

Australia, by the looks of it.) He had the most SFnal life — would we all receive such glowing praise from our friends when we pass.

I am feeling a little wistful because fandom in Toronto has lost two of its major players. **Taral Wayne** passed a few days ago, and **Jim Caughran** just the other day. Our world continues to get smaller.

We did go to the **NASFiC** in Buffalo, NY, and we did some *Amazing* business, not only for what was on our table (books and back issues), but also for the amount of business we did. We had a fine time at this convention — many familiar faces and names, hugs from old friends you didn't realise how much you missed them until you saw them, and the first real SF convention in more than a few years. I am now indeed retired, and receiving my pensions from the government, and wondering about how much I should ask for from my own investments. We all still need to keep an eye on Covid-19. We are a little behind on our current shots, but we intend to catch up soon.

(I took a little time to download the first issue of the revived *Galaxy* magazine. **Jean-Paul Garnier** brought back *Worlds of IF* a little while ago, and he has now done the same with *Galaxy*. Both first issues are complementary pdf downloads.

Mention of **Geri Sullivan** reminds me that thanks to meeting her at the NASFiC, I am now *Idea's* Canadian distributor. (If you'd like to see the pdfed return issues of these two old/new titles, let me know.)



Hello to **Jeanne Mealy**! Great to share some time with you at NASFiC, and especially at the Minneapolis in '73 party.

**SFC 117:** Great steampunk art from **Alan White**.



The poem is pretty good, too.

Looks like **Ditmar** got a good sending off from the friends who miss him. Don't you wish that the passing of a friend wasn't the only reason for everyone getting together these days? I went to two Celebrations of Life in one day last year, and the passing of friends was muted by the joy in seeing old friends for the first time in ages. Emotions definitely mixed.

I really need to go onto **Dave Langford's** *Ansible* page, and pay for some of the books available as downloads. I think I'd be busy for months. I wish I could send you a book. I do get many of the fanzines you receive, and I am pleased to download them and look at them that way. Printouts? Where would I store them all? I applaud the idea of giving **Idea** and **Geri Sullivan** a Hugo! She celebrated her birthday at the NASFiC with a huge party.

Bravo to **John Litchen** for having an Apogee Books copy of *Edison's Conquest of Mars* by **Garrett P. Serviss**. Apogee Books was an imprint of CG Publishing, run by an old friend of ours, **Robert Godwin**, from his home in Burlington, Ontario. He published all kinds of space, rocketry, and popular culture books, and the Serviss book was one of his attempts at publishing science fiction. His edition of the Serviss book came out in 2005. Another **Serviss** book, *A Columbus in Space*, was published in 2006, and even was mentioned by the 64th Worldcon (LAcon IV) and the fact that it is a first edition. I also like this second Serviss book, because it has three vintage covers from *Amazing Stories* on the back cover.

In these two issues, there's been lots of chat about books and anthologies, and I have the distinct honour of having one out myself: *Amazing Stories: Best of 2023*, edited by me, contains 29 of the best stories we published on the *Amazing Stories* website. An old dream was realised with the publishing of that book, and hard to believe, we are planning the Best of 2024. Sales have been brisk, and we sold a dozen copies in Buffalo.

(8 August 2024)





**DENNIS CALLEGARI**  
159 Kilby Road, Kew  
East VIC 3102

Here are three of the images I generated recently trying to illustrate the Martian war machines from **H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds***. There are some differences between the prompts for the images — mostly, Nos. 2 and 3 attempt to introduce the 'red weed' that is mentioned by Wells.

A further word about **AI-generated images**: I don't know if I've mentioned it before, but one way to think about the human 'artist' in the process is more like a cross between a photographer and the manager of an art gallery, while the AI itself is a technically skilled artist who is also an idiot.

My further observation that some of my recent AI images have seemed a bit 'stale' to me is (I think) because the prompts that I've been writing for the AI have become a bit formulaic ... which I guess is more evidence that it's not just about the AI. In fact, some of the fresher results I get have come from my 'real life' drawings/paintings that I've uploaded for the AI to work with.

(17 July 2024)

**KEVIN BROPHY AM**  
Emeritus Professor Creative Writing,  
University of Melbourne  
kevinjb@unimelb.edu.au

[\*brg\* Kevin, it's many years since we've corresponded. I'm pretty sure we arranged to trade *Going Down Swinging* for my magazine *SF Commentary* in the 1980s, but I had a publication gap of eight years (1981–89) and I think you moved on from the *Swinging* editorship during that time.

Suffice to say that I have kept *SF Commentary* going now for 55 years, although most copies are distributed by PDF file now rather than in the print edition. One of my favourite correspondents has been Alex Skovron during the last 40 years, so it was with great pleasure I saw that he had won the Patrick White Award and I was able to attend the investiture. Alex sent me the link to your article in *The Conversation* about him and his award.\*]



Thanks for your email. In fact, I edited ***Going Down Swinging*** until 1994, 14 issues in fourteen years, then moved on. I am impressed that you are continuing, and am amazed by the breadth of the reviews in the .PDF you've sent. I've jotted down a number of books I will follow up. I am not a committed fan of SF but read it steadily (**Emily St John Mandel's *Sea of Tranquility*** the latest).

If you can send me a copy of the .PDF with my re-issued article in it, that would be much appreciated.

(5 February 2024  
)

**WILLIAM BREIDING**  
PO Box 10726,  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87184, USA

I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed your piece in **Leigh Edmonds' *Ornithopter***, which he distributed at Corflu 41. I thought, 'the man's incapable of writing a bad essay!' Thanks for writing that.

I admit I feel guilty for not loocing *SFC* in recent times. I'm afraid I've succumbed to your worst fears, digital-only distribution making it more difficult to loc such a hefty zine. I'm hoping to rectify that in the future. Now that I'm no longer publishing I can no longer rely on my laurels. Gotta do the right thing and loc!

The **photo above** shows what it's looking like in Albuquerque this early summer.

And thank you for your amazing tribute to ***Portable Storage***. It makes every publishing/editing tribulation I suffered (and the silence from

so many!) worth every moment. Thank you! (I'm still blushing.)

(13 June 2024)

**ALAN WHITE**  
Las Vegas, New Mexico, USA

Just saw your splendid issue on eFanzines this morning. Always a nice job.

Speaking of splendid: that splendid pic of the **girl with the rat on her shoulder**, isn't mine. Wish it was, but alas, no. Art done by **Live4Create** at **NightCafé**.

I sign dang near everything that leaves the barnyard. Things happen.

(21 June 2024)

**JOHN HERTZ**  
236 S. Coronado Street, No. 409,  
Los Angeles, California 90057, USA

Just started looking at **SFC 117**. Thanks. I'd call it meaty if I felt sure you weren't a vegetarian. Thanks for your kind treatment of Vanamonde and me.

At **SFC 117 print edition, p. 13**, you seem to have cut off 'No. 1584' from your reprinted first page of that issue of *Van*. Can this be cured? Perhaps you thought the text made clear which issue it was.

Since many people outside APA-L receive *Vanamonde*, I must write **APA-L** comments, if I can, so a reader needn't have seen the other side of the conversation. Some folks say I succeed. I do hope readers won't simply disregard this part of *Van*, or figure-figure-figure 'What does it mean?'

People send me wonderful fanart. I'm proud to publish it. *Van* may have more fanart per square inch than many other fanzines.

Also **Brad Foster** does a new header each year.  
(15 July 2024)

**PAMELA SARGENT**  
Delmar, New York 12054, USA  
[www.pamelasargent.com](http://www.pamelasargent.com)

**On December 20, 2024, George Zebrowski, my beloved companion of almost sixty years, died peacefully in his sleep at the age of 78. George had been ailing for a while. On the day before his death, I visited him for the last time at the nursing home where he had been since late August, never imagining that it would be for the last time. Right now I have no more words.**

(22 December 2024)

**[\*brg\*** The above email arrived just as I was finishing this issue. I'm one of many people in the SF world who will feel very downhearted to hear that George Zebrowski has died. We corresponded only during the last twenty years, but I have the impression that Pam and I have been writing to each other for much longer than that.

I hope Pam will agree with me that I should print the letter she sent only a few months ago.



George Zebrowski (Photo: Steven H. Silver.)





THE ROSE SERIES, P. 586

FLINDERS STREET RAILWAY STATION, MELBOURNE, VIC.

**Melbourne's Flinders Street Railway Station, 1920s. It's hardly changed since, although the trams and cars have. I'm not quite sure where to point to the precise location of the old Ballroom and Victorian Railways Institute library.**

**It was encouraging to hear from her of the plans she has for the rest of her writing career.\*]**

Maybe it's time to pass the torch.

(27 July 2024)

George [Zebrowski] and I are still writing, although we're slowing down, I hope temporarily. I've been messing with a novella for a couple of years now. Working on it, or writing anything, seems to take a lot longer. This particular novella may or may not become part of a novel. At my age, I'm reluctant to set out to write a novel, so for now am sticking to sneaking up on any novel in pieces. There's also the fact that publishers aren't much interested in writing by old-timers like me. My last novel, *Sea-son of the Cats*, came out in 2016 from a small press and seems doomed to total obscurity. Lots of nice blurbs, but no reviews at all.

But at this stage of life, I can't let this discourage me. I did just come out with a new short memoir and have attached the cover for that. **Centipede Press** is bringing out an 845-page collection of my short fiction, with an intro by **Pat Cadigan**, in their '**Masters of Science Fiction**' series, and a French publisher is bringing out a new edition of *The Shore of Women*, so things could be worse. And almost all my stuff is available as e-books, even though I personally still much prefer books on paper. And I'm finding some of the new sf by writers like **Lavie Tidhar**, **Tade Thompson**, **Annalee Newitz**, and **Ndeni Okorafor**, to name just a few, worthwhile reading.

**JAMES (JOCKO) ALLEN**  
**PO Box 104, Coburg VIC 3058**

I have been meaning to write to you for some time about the sad loss to Covid of **John Bangsund**. I didn't know him, although I have seen him at conventions a few times and may have spoken with him. However, reading his article '**Glimpses of a Golden Age or How I Became an Editor**' in *SF Commentary 103* and *\*brg\* 130* (Lyn showed it to me in ANZAPA), I realised that his work did have an effect on me. I would love to be able to talk with him about his time as **Victorian Railways Institute librarian** in the early 1960s.

**My father** worked for the **Victorian Railways** from 1949 to 1975 and was an enthusiastic member of the VRI. He used to catch the train up from where he worked in the railways Lost Property store at Spencer Street Station to Flinders Street Station, go upstairs to the library and borrow books. I remember him taking me, by train of course, a couple times on Saturday morning to have a look at the library. I would wander around this large space, seeing what was there on the shelves. He knew all the library people and even sometimes got a lift home in the early '70s with

one of them.

The library was upstairs in the **Flinders Street Railway building, underneath the Ballroom**, I think. It certainly had children's books, as one of my primary school friends paid to join the VRI so he could borrow all their Biggles books. That got me interested in visiting, as I knew my father was a VRI member. I was amazed when I visited. It was a big private library that was only available to members of the Institute. Suggestions were sought, and the library collection adapted to their needs and wants. This is the sort of library I want for the **Melbourne Science Fiction Club**; a specialised place for the members to come, talk about books, and borrow what interests them. I would like to thank John Bangsund for giving me ideas of what is possible and inspiring what I strive for the MSFC Library to be in the future.

(6 August 2024)

[\*brg\* And this was the visionary aim of Bill Wright for Meteor Inc., but he had no way of raising sufficient cash to set up the Meteor collection. Maybe one day somebody will donate the funds to the MSFC so that it can resurrect its library from storage and run it as it should be run.\*]

**JOHN CLUTE**  
221B Camden High Street,  
London NW1 7BU, UK

**Dear Colin Steele:**

**Rob Gerrand** has sent me a galley of your heart-warming review of my **Book Blinders**. Thanks for the acute attention.

I did clock one **Typo** by Repetition, which you might want to catch if you haven't already: 'Edgar Snow's 1937 *Red Snow over China*' should read 'Edgar Snow's 1937 *Red Star over China*'.

It is good, here in Scotland for a gig, to awaken to something like this.

(9 August 2024)

**ROB GERRAND**  
11 Robe Street, St Kilda VIC 3182

Thanks for the generous mentions of **Norstrilia Press** and our books **Leigh Edmonds' Proud and Lonely** and **John Clute's The Book Blinders**.

I enjoyed reading **John Litchen's** reviews of **A. E. Van Vogt** and **Philip Dick**. He says he read **Slan** and **The Weapon Shops of Isher** as a teenager and loved them; but had recently reread **Slan** and decided that it was, as his English teacher had said back then, garbage, though su-

perior garbage. I recommend he re-read the *The Weapon Shops of Isher*, as it is a fine novel, possibly Van Vogt's best.

He also says that **Dick's The Man in the High Castle** is not sf but mainstream, this despite it being set in an alternative universe where the US was defeated in World War II, and the novel within the novel, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, postulates a world in which the Germans and Japanese lost WW2. Saying it's not sf reminds me of the Robert Conquest verse:

'Sf's no good,' they bellow till we're deaf.  
'But this looks good.' — 'Well then, it's not  
sf.'

(9 August 2024)

**ALEX PIERCE**  
somewhere in Ballarat, Victoria

Thanks for the mention of my new **Speculative Insight** magazine.

My Vietnam protest podcast is now live: **www.women-conscriptionwar.com** — all episodes are about 30 minutes long, and they can be heard via the website, or via iTunes/ Spotify/ other podcast platform, if you're interested.

I'm currently in **Glasgow** for the **2024 World-con**, selling print versions of *Speculative Insight* that are exclusive to the convention! I've spoken to a lot of interesting people, and seen even more — **Joe Haldeman** went past my table yesterday, so that was exciting, and of course I've seen **Bob Silverberg**. I've got a few autographs: **Simon R. Green** and **Arkady Martine** and **Emily Tesh**. It has been warmer in Scotland than in Ballarat, so that has been very pleasant.

(11 August 2024)

**STEPHEN CAMPBELL**  
Flat 7, 4 Sturt Street, Koroit VIC 3282

The last few months have been hectic for me. Trying to produce something worthwhile in paint on canvas is about the least literary pursuit I can do, although my reading has been constant — and quite eclectic. For instance, **George Gurdjieff's** book *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* is almost like science fiction, but extends deeply into metaphysics and philosophy.

**A. S. Byatt** has been a new fresh voice to read. Her books contain profound intelligence and loving descriptions of the nature of the English landscape and English-educated people. I've found that any book that has been on the shortlist for

the **Booker Prize** is worth reading.

A reading of *Don Quixote* surprised me with a new understanding of the beauty of its language — at least, the English translation.

Recently I have watched a good many of **Ingmar Bergman**'s films on DVD, subtitled in English, and all of extraordinary quality. A rewatching of *The Seventh Seal* reminded me of the first time I watched it, which was around the time I was becoming interested in science fiction. With the same impulse and wonder I had with all things strange and unusual I still pursue watching and reading, but I find it difficult to uncover art that conveys meaning above that banal temporal survival and its ancient complications, which contains little 'newness'. This newness is what I discovered in science-fictional thinking and its imagination of the future. The believable science has already manifested itself in our current civilisation, but I find that imagination has been subdued because of the attempts to make things 'believable', The 'unbelievable' is also useful for stimulating adventurous minds. I always regarded SF fandom to be populated by adventurous minds, because I met them as such. I feel sometimes that modern fandom is enduring its time in a sort of stasis, rather than advancing in curiosity. I was surprised to find that the first 15 pages of the recent **Continuum** (annual Melbourne convention) booklet contained instructions about safety and security, as if we did not already have a common knowledge of how to behave at conventions. This seems to me a subjection to the rules of paranoid authority rather than the activity of a respectful organisation of intelligent people in an intellectual pursuit. Posting so many reminders of rules is the pursuit of the mundane, making me wonder if the organisers of Continuum are SF fans at all, or just people seeking a position of authority over others.

I see with pleasure that **Rob Gerrand** has re-raised the flag of **Norstrilia Press**. May he and his publications be a success! But many of the fans I knew are now gone, and missed. With some sadness I read of the passing of **Dick Jenssen**, whom I liked and respected although we had little discussion. Thanks for the trouble Elaine and you, as executors, are taking in dealing with Dick's legacy.

(15 August 2024)

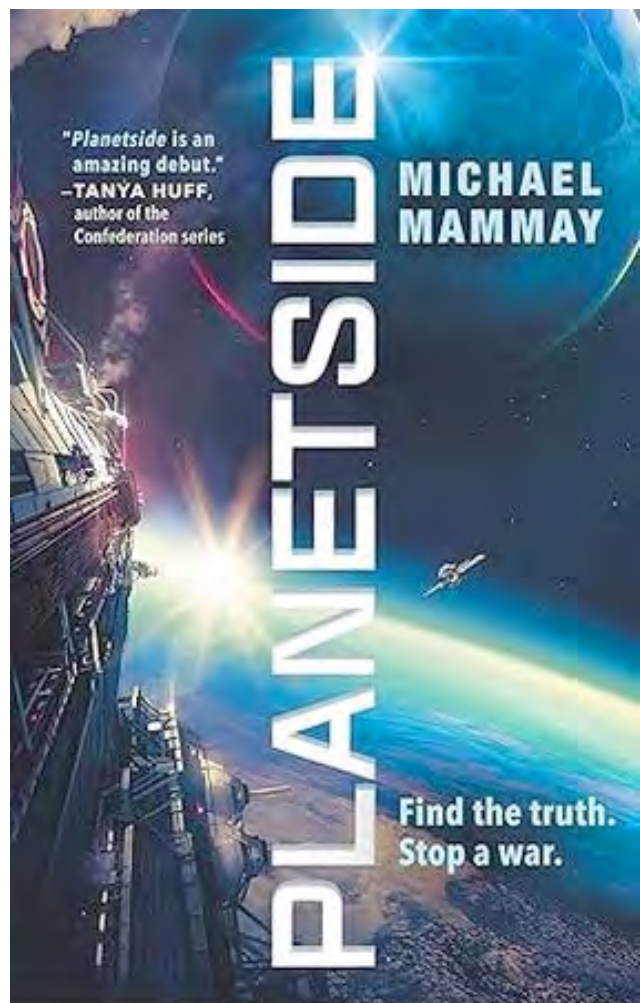
**PATRICK MCGUIRE**  
7541-D Weather Worn Way,  
Columbia Maryland 21046, USA

Here are some comments on my recent reading:

## ZEROGLYPH

by Vivek Pravat (originally as by Vance Pravat) (self published; 2019)

This is not, in my opinion, a good novel in an objective sense, but it still has the best discussion of machine consciousness in fiction that I've come across recently. I think it had the makings of a good book, but that it was published in an unfinished state. It has a reasonably engaging plot, plus much expert discussion of issues associated with a conscious, self-aware, computer-based artificial intelligence. It almost redeems its structure as a near-future thriller, but does not quite pull it off. The current edition is evidently reorganised from the original, with transcripts and other documents from a court trial banished to an appendix. I suspect that this works better than interspersing them in the main text, but it leads to a clumsy structure, with almost 100 pages of fictional documents constituting part of the novel left to read after the plot is over, followed by a short author's afterword and a bibliography. The thriller part before the appendix also uses a plot dodge that bothered me a lot (but I won't discuss it here because of spoilers — but the device seemed acceptable to other members of my book club who



read the book, including some who did not attend the meeting but later commented by email. The author, a software engineer, writes well. I'm disappointed that his next book (so far unread by me) is another sf thriller. I think he's capable of writing proper future-set sf that would please me more.

### **PLANETSIDE by Michael Mammay (Harper Voyager; 2018)**

Here we have the fairly rare case where it worked out well to pick a book at random off a library shelf. The one thing I knew in its favour going in was that it had a blurb from **Jack Campbell**, an author with a good track record for me. Even that blurb was mostly unreadable through library stickers on the back cover. *Planetside* is the author's debut novel. Considering that, it is remarkably well written, both in style and structure. Per the acknowledgements, before publication it did get materially revised in response to feedback from various quarters.

The plot combines sf mystery with military sf: At the behest of an old friend, now a general high in Space Command, crusty Colonel Butler is pulled from a teaching billet and travels to Capra Three to investigate the mysterious disappearance in action of a lieutenant who happens to be the son of a high political figure, thus drawing official attention on an MIA case that otherwise would have been shrugged off. The plot thickens from there, both with ground-combat incidents and detective-type ones. Something is being covered up with high level support back home, and a willingness to see soldiers killed planetside in the combat zone to aid the deception.

Pretty far into the story, I wondered if it wasn't a Bat Durston (a story from another genre with only the names and scenery changed to make it look like sf). It seemed it could as well have been set in Afghanistan (where the author had served, as he had in other hotspots). Then significant sf elements appeared. Some of them looked rather arm-wavy, but not entirely inconceivable for fictional purposes. Other elements of the resolution depend on its turning out that the large military space station where Butler is temporarily working has resources for which I recall no basis having been established — but possibly I missed a key sentence or two.

The book is a bit more cynical and noir than I usually prefer, but the author brings it off. I have an interlibrary loan request in for the first sequel. *Planetside* is not labelled as the start of a series, and it ties up enough knots that it could easily

stand alone. In any case, it seems to have started a successful career. It is now part of a series with three sequels and another forthcoming. **Michael Mammay** has also published two unrelated novels with **HarperVoyager**, and yet another independently.

Finally, here is a bit of news that I passed to **Mike Glycer** in case he wanted to use it in *File 770*, although I noted that its relation to sf was only tangential. He evidently did not think it was sufficiently relevant, since I have heard nothing back and have seen nothing related on the site.

I read the below-linked Reuters piece on remaining possibly swappable prisoners after the recent spy swap (recent as of August 2024, that is). One of the names was **Boris Kagarlitsky**, a onetime politician, later a sociologist and dissident. I knew something about him, but I had lost track and had not known he had been arrested. As far as I know, he has no sf connection himself, but his father was **Yulii (or Julius) Kagarlitsky**, a once-prominent Soviet/Russian sf scholar. I thought Julius was fairly well known in Anglophone scholarly sf circles in his day, although today I found little about him online in English. I met Boris, for all of a 'hello, goodbye', as a kid of 13 or 14 the one time I visited the family apartment to interview his father, in probably 1975, when I spent academic 1974-75 in the USSR doing dissertation research.

On Boris:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris\\_Kagarlitsky?wprov=sfla1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Kagarlitsky?wprov=sfla1)

<https://www.reuters.com/world/who-are-prisoners-who-could-feature-future-east-west-swap-2024-08-02/>

On his father Yulii, who went by Julius in his English publications: unfortunately, the only Wikipedia citation that I could find for him is in Russian (unless you prefer Ukrainian or Hungarian).

But here is a mention in **Science Fiction Studies**: <https://www.depauw.edu/sfs/notes/notes32/notes32.html>

Here he is in **isfdb**, which however lacks mention of his book *What Is Science Fiction?* (in Russian only), one of his two major books on sf, the other being the biography of **H. G. Wells**, cited in **isfdb**, which has an English translation: <https://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi?90865>

(18 August 2024)

**DANIEL KING**

420 Spencer Road, Thornlie WA

**SFC 115:** Leafing through, I see that **Christopher Priest** has died. I remember commenting to you in one of my recent emails that I thought his novel **Expect Me Tomorrow** was well below par, so perhaps his illness was already taking its toll back when he was writing it. I haven't read his last novel, **Airside**, and I'm not sure I will. *Expect Me Tomorrow* rather put me off his work. But as for the subject matter of much of Priest's writing, perhaps he has a previously unknown twin brother, who is at this very moment writing novels suspiciously like those of his twin, leading one perhaps to question whether Christopher Priest has in fact died ... The final ambiguity.

Re the other reported death — that of **D. G. Compton** — I attempted to read only one of his novels — **Synthajoy** — and found it so tedious I threw it aside in disgust.

I note the grim irony in the emptiness of your 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' column. Pace Barbra Streisand, people who need people are the unluckiest people in the world.

(2 April 2024)

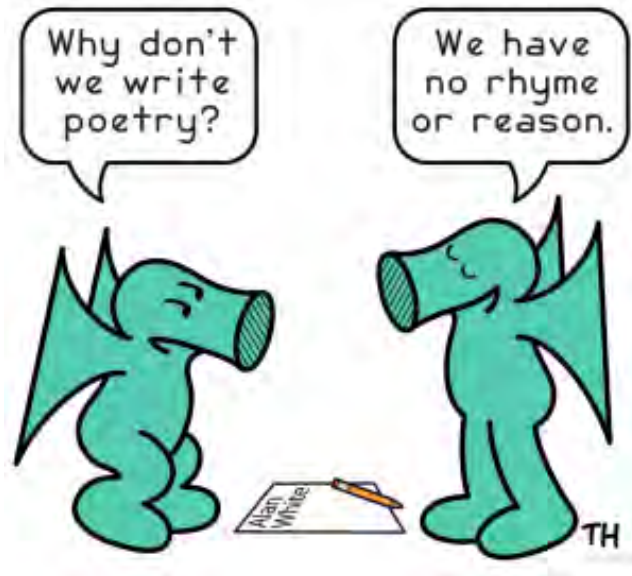
[\*brg\* If you didn't like *Expect Me Tomorrow*, which I did enjoy in a quiet way, you would find *Airside* a real plunge in quality, a rather sad epitaph. It's hard to imagine Chris Priest being old, though. I did enjoy greatly one of his more recent novels, *American Story*, which subtly makes fun of the whole set of 9/11 conspiracy theories.

I enjoyed most of Compton's SF novels, especially *The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe*. Good clear understated ironic prose, and an ability to give a socko to readers' expectations. A grim sense of the future, I grant you.

The main subject that interests me these days is SF people, rather than SF. Very few SF books seem interesting these days, except some classics with which I'm just catching up. The newer interesting SF books are those that are not labelled as such. For instance, Australian publishers regard the 'SF' label as commercial poison, even though the same sniffy readers flock to the cinema to watch SF movies.

Each of the people who has left us comprised a vast world of experience and history. None more than our friend Dick Jensen.\*]

I've been in **hard SF** mode recently; and an idea came to me that to my knowledge hasn't been explored by hard SF writers (or the scientific community, for that matter). It concerns **building a base on Venus**: as is well known, Venus is one



of the hottest places in the solar system. What is less well known is that around 50 km up the temperature is quite comfortable (and as the air pressure at that height is also OK there would only be the problem of sulfuric acid to deal with!) The scientific literature popularises the idea of balloon bases at this height; but it occurred to me that constructing a 50 km high tower on Venus would be a much more reliable solution. The highest mountain on Venus is Skadi Mons, in the Ishtar Terra region, and stands over 10 km high. I imagine if one could deflect asteroids on to this area a tower could gradually be built up. (Venus's crust is thinner than Earth's so the base would have to be quite wide to support the pressure.)

I was considering writing a story around this theme, but the idea of sending it to somewhere like *Interzone* or *Asimov's Magazine* did not appeal. In the end I turned it into a poem, '**Ashen Light Command**', and it has just been published in the August issue of **Adelaide Literary Magazine** (which, misleadingly, is not based in Adelaide but is located, rather, in New York and also Portugal). I'm pasting the poem next page, but you can also read it online here (or buy a hard copy). It's the second in the batch of five poems by me that they published this time: <https://adelaidebooks.org/equale>

As with nearly all my poetry, the words are set to music by **Project System 12**. The piece of music for 'Ashen Light Command' is called '**An Angel Made From Sugar Cubes**', and it can be downloaded or listened to for free here: <https://www.jamendo.com/album/84261/seven-windows>

(12 August 2024)

## Ashen Light Command

All those asteroids now careening through  
bright Venus clouds  
All those monoliths now descending  
through the solar glare  
Gargantuan blocks soon expanding on to a  
soft lava  
To form our base  
And they interlock, chondrites combating  
so hard against acid,  
The sulphur rain  
Gales that can never wreck femtotech  
software  
Regal code for the retroing thrust on each  
huge rock  
Royal signs for the Ashen light swirls of the  
night side.

See the vapour trails now arising from  
Maxwell Montes  
See the smoke and dust now emerging like  
bright nebulae  
Titanic updrafts soon arriving at our  
desired target  
The cooler clouds  
But they pass away, showing the progress  
made now by our tower,  
The fifty K  
Height that we know provides angular  
balance  
Crust now thickened by nuclear blasts to a  
great width  
Mars' Olympus inspiring great Hive Men  
from day one.

Ishtar Terra now within range of this famed  
satellite  
Ishtar Terra now a plateau for our prime  
landing craft  
And Skadi Mons, cruel peak but centre of  
our sublime project  
Awaits our rule  
And the warriors waiting to battle wild  
worlds in this system  
The galaxy  
Ever inspiring dark infinite visions  
Spiral vast with its globular swarms and  
their red light  
Spiral cold but a smouldering goal for the K  
men.

(12 August 2024)

I did approach one scientist who has written about Venus's geology, but received no reply. Coincidentally, there was a paper published last week arguing that the crust in the Ishtar Terra area may be thicker than was thought (thus making my idea more plausible): <https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1029/2012JE004237>

(13 August 2024)

**MARK PLUMMER**  
59 Shirley Road,  
Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, UK

We were actually still in **Glasgow** for the **Worldcon** when your email arrived on Monday. That was the last convention day and we travelled back on Tuesday 13 August. Aside from our travelling companions, **James Bacon** was the first person in Glasgow to greet us and the last to wave us off.

It was a pretty intense weekend — well, week actually, as we arrived on the Monday before the convention — and inevitably we didn't get to see anywhere near enough of some people. Great fun, though. I could get used to it. There were several photo-calls in the fan lounge for past fan fund winners, and we also managed to arrange one for past and present ANZAPAns. I'm not sure who actually took the photos, but they're out there somewhere and will doubtless come to light.

For now, **Justin Ackroyd** arrives here in a few hours and will be with us on and off until September. I believe we'll also be seeing **Perry Middlemiss** at some point.

Thanks for the links to recent issues. I will endeavour to make time for them in the coming weeks.

(15 August 2024)

**CHRISTINA LAKE**  
4 West Rise, Falmouth,  
Cornwall TR11 4HI, UK

Thanks for the links to *SFC*. Great to have them in one place. I've read parts of the latest in **ANZAPA**, including the review of my **Nowhere Fan**. Many thanks for your kind words about my writing.

The rest of the issue looks good too, especially the bits about **Janeen Webb**, whom I saw in a restaurant in Glasgow last week (talking to **Justin**, of course).

**Alan Stewart** should be bringing you back a copy of the latest **WOOF**, which I collated at the convention.

(16 August 2024)

**[\*brg\* 'Fans' = 'Good people'. Not only did Christina arrange for Alan to deliver to me WOOF, but she also arranged to send me the Souvenir Book for the 2024 Worldcon in Glasgow. I have an uncomfortable idea that somewhere in the back of my crumbling cranium I have a whole list of publications Christina has sent me over the years.\*]**



	Author	Title	Team Perry	Team David	&c
1	Ursula Le Guin	The Left Hand of Darkness (19)	The Left Hand of Darkness		
1	Frank Herbert	Dune		Dune	
2	Walter M. Miller, Jr	A Canticle for Leibowitz	A Canticle for Leibowitz		
2	John Brunner	Stand on Zanzibar		Stand on Zanzibar	
3	Philip K. Dick	The Man in the High Castle	The Man in the High Castle		pinched from David
3	Clifford Simak	Way Station		Way Station	pinched from Perry
4	Ursula Le Guin	A Wizard of Earthsea	A Wizard of Earthsea		
4	Roger Zelazny	Lord of Light		Lord of Light	
5	Samuel Delany	Babel-17	Babel-17		pinched from David
5	Kurt Vonnegut	Slaughterhouse 5		Slaughterhouse 5	
6	Thomas Disch	Camp Concentration	Camp Concentration		
6	Jack Vance	Star King		Star King	
	The best team - which list for YOUR Christmas stocking?		15	7	
	Mob vote				
	? The best book		The Left Hand of Darkness	Dune	
			reserves	reserves	
			Pavane (Keith Roberts)	Rogue Moon (Budrys)	
			Do Androids Dream... (Dick)	Nova (Delany)	
			Solaris (Lem)	Black Easter (Blish)	
			A Clockwork Orange (Burgess)	Man Who Fell to Earth (Tevis)	
			where are they?	Echo Round His Bones (Disch)	
			Heinlein		
			Clarke		

This diagram was supplied by MURRAY MacLACHLAN, organiser (Bossa Nova) of Melbourne's Nova Mob, which held a discussion about the Best SF Novels of the 1960s at the March meeting. The discussion was organised by PERRY MIDDLEMISS and DAVID GRIGG as a team contest between two lists of Best 1960s novels. Thanks to CAREY HANDFIELD for his clarification in his letter below.

### CAREY HANDFIELD

4 Meliodora Place, Yallambie VIC 3085

The Nova Mob monthly meeting was a discussion of the best SF in the 1960s. **Perry Middlemiss** and **David Grigg** nominated and talked about their Best Six titles.

#### Perry:

- 1 **The Left Hand of Darkness** (Ursula K. Le Guin)
- 2 **A Canticle for Leibowitz** (Walter Miller Jr)
- 3 **The Man in the High Castle** (Philip K. Dick)
- 4 **Babel-17** (Samuel R. Delany)
- 5 **A Wizard of Earthsea** (Ursula K. Le Guin)
- 6 **Camp Concentration** (Thomas M. Disch)

#### David:

- 1 **Dune** (Frank Herbert)
- 2 **Stand on Zanzibar** (John Brunner)
- 3 **Way Station** (Clifford D. Simak)
- 4 **Slaughterhouse-Five** (Kurt Vonnegut Jr)
- 5 **Lord of Light** (Roger Zelazny)
- 6 **The Star King** (Jack Vance)

I am sure your Six would be a different list. At the end of the meeting people voted which list they preferred. Perry's list won.

The rules said that a title could not appear on both lists. David thought this was unfair, as he liked some of Perry's titles.

The following is **David's personal list**:

- 1 **Stand on Zanzibar**
  - 2 **The Left Hand of Darkness**
  - 3 **A Canticle for Leibowitz**
  - 4 **Slaughterhouse-five**
  - 5 **Rogue Moon** (Algis Budrys)
  - 6 **The Man in the High Castle**
  - 7 **Lord of Light**
  - 8 **Way Station**
  - 9 **Cat's Cradle** (Kurt Vonnegut Jr)
  - 10 **Babel-17**
  - 11 **Dune**
  - 12 **Flowers for Algernon** (Daniel Keyes)
- (4 May 2024)

[\*brg\* I had expected the meeting to be reported on extensively by Perry or David or both in Perry's Perryscope, but it can only be found in an episode of Perry and David's Two Chairs Talking podcast. All discussion welcomed for SFC 120. I might have worked out my Best 6 by then.\*]

### ANDREW DARLINGTON

Spa Croft Road, off Manor Road, Ossett,  
West Yorkshire WF5 OHE, UK

I'm still watching old re-runs of **Star Trek: Voyager**. I love Captain Janeway (Kate Mulgrew); she stands for no alien nonsense. And of course it's true. It just hasn't happened yet. But it will. It's getting increasingly difficult to tell what's true

and what is false. We live in an Einsteinian relativistic world. I was wearing my **Moon Landing** T-shirt this morning and I got into a dialogue with a man in the café. With a knowing look in his eye he says, 'Yes, but did the Moon Landing really happen?' Yes, it did. I was there. I watched it happen. But now there are conspiracy theorists who think it was all fiction! Thing is, it wasn't only Americans who were tracking the Moon landing; it was tracked around the world, in Britain, in the USSR, in Australia, in China ... would they all conspire together to fabricate the story? And ... at what point did the fabrication begin? Were all the previous orbit probes faked? Were Yuri Gagarin and Alan Shepard's space-shots faked? Were the subsequent Moon landings all faked?

There's a brilliant sequence in one of the James Bond movies, ***Diamonds Are Forever*** (1971), where Bond is escaping the bad guys and he stumbles through a NASA replication Lunar surface ... which, they hint, is where the Moon Landing was faked. Great movie. Tongue very much in cheek. There were two lethal girls called Bambi and Thumper. And that is conclusive proof that the Moon Landing never happened! Truth is malleable. **Ridley Scott** made that movie ***Napoleon*** last year. During the press reception, one of the reporters pointed out that there were various historical inaccuracies in the movie. Ridley Scott roared out 'Were you there?!?!?'

Truth — it seems, is open to negotiation. Are you real? Am I real? Or are we figments of each other's fantasy?

(16 August 2024)

## KENNEDY GAMMAGE

1234 Upas Street, San Diego,  
CA 92103, USA

Sincere congratulations on a major milestone! **55 years!** Looking back, my own involvement with fandom started 50-plus years ago now, and while it's true that my friend **Brett Cox** and I pubbed our ish shortly thereafter, it needs to be said that ***Locomotive*** was no *SF Commentary!* Quite the opposite, in fact — but I'm glad we have shared this wonderful 'way of life' for more than half a century.

I had heard of you and *SFC* and your many fellow Australian fans for decades before my friend **Wm Breiding** hooked us up through the pages of ***Portable Storage***. And now I can finally read your wonderful publication through the auspices of Facebook, efanazines, and fanac.org. Cheers! Well met!

'**Stop dying, everybody! Please!**' I second the

motion. You know, it's a very strange thing. I have a large and very close group of college friends, fraternity brothers from U.C. Berkeley — who started dying about 25 years ago. Two in a small plane crash, followed by heart attacks, suicides you name it. More than a dozen, I believe. We were actually thinking of consulting an actuary to see if it was out of the ordinary. But good news — no one has croaked in a while. I hope your many friends also call a moratorium.

Sadly my reading list has very little overlap with yours and **Tony Thomas's** and **Colin Steele's** et al., but I did very much enjoy **Ray Nayler's *The Mountain in the Sea***, which included a very frightening evocation of China's worldwide predatory squid fleet.

**[\*brg\*Many local friends recommended reading *The Mountain in the Sea*, so I bought a copy, fully intending to make it the next book to be read. But it wasn't read right at that moment, so it went into one of the 52 boxes of books for which there is no room on the shelves, and I'd almost forgotten about it until now. But thanks to Elaine, I do have an up-to-date list of all the books in the boxes — all books I meant to read as soon as I bought them.\*]**

I loved seeing ***Asteroid City*** in the movie theatre. ScarJo was particularly good in **Wes Anderson's** huge cast.

Let me mention a memoir not on anyone's list (though you may have read and reviewed it years ago): **Phil Collins' *Not Dead Yet***. As a Genesis fan, I inhaled the book with gusto after finding it in someone's Little Free Library in Pacific Beach. One thing I learned from the book, which I was insufficiently aware of, was that for more than a decade he was one of the biggest pop stars in the world. Besides fronting Genesis, he had all those solo albums and collaborative projects. His third LP ***No Jacket Required*** sold 25 million records! That's the one with '**Sussudio**' and '**One More Night**'. He toured constantly all over the world. That's why he kept getting divorced. And the final section about his descent into alcoholism was shocking. Enough to put you off your pint, mate. Well, yours possibly — I'm still loving our strong Cali IPAs.

My wife has that **Richard Osman *The Last Devil to Die*** book on her nightstand but I haven't read it. We mainly read different books. I recently enjoyed **E. Jean Carroll's *Hunter S. Thompson*** bio, **Karl Ove Knausgaard's** latest, ***The Wolves of Eternity***, and re-read several of **Frederik Pohl's 'Gateway'** books.

I'd like to see **Blow Up** again. David Hemmings

was also great as the narrator of **Rick Wakeman's** *Journey to the Center of the Earth*.

Loving the **Dennis Callegari** illo '**Leonardo's Flying Omnibus**' on page 100 of the Landscape edition.

(26 March 2024)

**SFC 116:** Farewell, **Ditmar**! That's what this issue is all about: saying goodbye to your long-time close friend Dick Jenssen. He was certainly a talented bloke, as your colourful cover '**Beyond the Klimt Universe**' attests. And a very nice man. If you recall, in *Back to School* a guest at Rodney Dangerfield's fancy party tells him 'Your wife just showed me her Klimt.' 'You too?' Rodney replies, tugging his collar. 'She's been showing it to everybody!'

Loved seeing my name on your Contents page. **Taral Wayne** is also there, and sadly he has just passed, kicking up a lot of dust on Facebook and my fannish emails. Like Dick, Taral was talented and widely admired, unlike myself. **Wm Breiding** asked who would be next to go, and I replied it might be me because I drink heavily and smoke a lot of pot. Only mitigated by the fact that I'm super-happy.

Your tribute starts out with the family photos. Good-looking parents! He was born in Shanghai in 1935 and moved to Sydney in 1941 by Shell Oil. Thanks for '**Paradise**', the Ditmar graphic from the early 2000s, showing a dirigible and an eighteenth century sailing ship in an idyllic locale!

Next-up: a good-looking 1999 group shot of your **Melbourne SF Club** at **Aussiecon 3**. Twenty-five years ago! Then: **Ditmar** holding the Ditmar! How cool is that, to have an award named after you? Which reminds me of something Wm published in *Portable Storage 6* (Autumn 2021), a long letter from Ditmar in which he said he was rather proud and excessively chuffed to be featured as a scrawny raccoon named Ditmar in **Jenner's** (**Craig Hilton's**) *Doc Rat* internet graphic. A strip Wm reprinted was '**Ditmar Does MoCA**' ([www.docrat.com.au](http://www.docrat.com.au)) — so Dick got both an award and a raccoon avatar named after him.

Your 2024 tribute made me realise what a huge debt of gratitude your whole circle owes to **Elaine**. She has truly been an angel, a true friend, and a hard worker for those who needed help. **Justin Ackroyd** was also mentioned — many other good-hearted people in your group. Well-deserved kudos to all.

The lettercol is fun to read, moved along by clever illos ('AI art lacks the human touch. That's the beauty of it' — **Teddy Harvia**) and I see there's a letter here from **Taral** and also full-page color

photos of Albuquerque taken by **Wm** — and stunning full-colour art like **Alan White's** '**Robot and Dragon**' and '**Bob Holds a Party**'.

**SFC 117:** I printed the exquisite **Alan White** '**Steam World**' cover on glossy paper and put it in a sleeve in my binder. He wrote an accompanying poem — but I wanted to give him a shout-out for his poem about you, Bruce! Congrats on your **FAAN Award** for Best Genzine from COR41U in Las Vegas. Handsome devil! I think my friend Gary Mattingly was there. Yes, it's '**The Great Spaceship Gillespie**' by **Alan White** on page 8: 'Bound by the stars, a legacy bold/In the chronicles of space, its story is told.' For 50 years mate! Sincere congratulations. On course Captain.

A tribute lunch to **Dick Jenssen**. That's how you do things. I mentioned in my last LoC that none of my fraternity brothers from Cal had passed recently, but now that's no longer true. My friend and housemate on Totterdell Street in Oakland recently died of cancer. He was a world-class athlete, a runner, a 'rabbit', in that he set an insanely fast pace that helped his fellows get off to a fast start. They called him **Peter Rabbit**. RIP.

**John Clute** and **Michal Dirda**: Who knew the Library of Congress and the British Library strip off the book jackets? Can you imagine what Tintin's friend Captain Haddock would call them? Bashi-Bazouks! Vandals and Vulgarians, totally unclear-on-the-concept of preserving books as they were published. Sheesh! Shaking our heads in disbelief!

I'm glad *SFC 117* wrapped up with **Frank Herbert** and **P. K. Dick**. And **Slan** — though **John Litchen's** article failed to quote 'Fans are Slans'. That was a popular saying when I was young. I have a paperback copy of *Slan* handy, but haven't read it in decades (I'm reading a lot of **Jack Vance** these days). I still love **Van Vogt's** *The Weapon Shops of Isher* and *Voyage of the Space Beagle*.

I appreciated your kind words about **Wm Breiding**! It was fun being part of *Portable Storage* with you Bruce, and I hope Wm returns to pub his ish.

(17 August 2024)

**DAVE LANGFORD**  
94 London Road, Reading,  
Berks RG1 5AU, UK

Many thanks for the kind words in *SFC 117*, which I confess I furtively read at [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) when I first heard of it. The egoboo is much appreciated. You will be glad to know that **New**

**Worlds Profiles**, partly because its word count is relatively low, uses a larger body type; and that I've abandoned the thinner, more spidery font traditionally used for quotations (Zapf Humanist) in favour of a smaller version of our usual Charter ITC, which is designed for legibility in small point sizes.

A couple of trifling corrections.

- The **Ansible Editions** paperbacks are not generally available through Amazon, because Amazon insists on taking a huge share of the proceeds. They can be found at **Lulu.com** or, more easily, via the **Ansible Editions website** at <https://ae.ansible.uk/>.
- Not all AE titles are sold in aid of TAFF. Those by **Algis Budrys** and **John Sladek** generate royalties for the authors' widows, and royalties for Rob Hansen's **Then: Science Fiction Fandom in the UK 1930–1980** go to the author himself. I'm pleased that the **TAFF-benefit paperbacks** are continuing to help the fund, with about £100 raised this month (August 2024) by various such sales.

(18 August 2024)

## JERRY KAUFMAN

PO Box 25075, Seattle,  
Washington 98165, USA

I've been reading through **SFC 115** bit by bit, and have come to your movie reviews. Has anyone yet mentioned that it's missing page 82 in the Landscape version, the first page of your Favorite Movies Watched?

(24 April 2024)

**[\*brg\* Nobody has, which suggests that the Landscape edition is not downloaded by many. Apologies; and I hope you could read the missing material in the Portrait (Magazine) edition.]**

**SFC 115:** I liked the art by **Dennis Callegari** quite a bit, especially the back cover depiction of '**And He Built a Crooked House**'. Thinking about art leads me to say that I will miss **Ditmar**'s appearances in **SFC**.

I don't overlap with you on your reading, viewing, or listening. I did see **The Fablemans** (watched via a streaming service), and enjoyed it. I'm a sucker for movies about moviemaking (like **Day for Night**). I saw **Freaks** for the first time a year ago, or so, and wish I'd seen it much earlier.

In the letters, **Steve Jeffery** notices that both **Andy Hooper** and I have read **The Night Circus**. This is because we belong to the same book club, **SF Without Borders**. Andy and his spouse **Carrie**

**Root** belong to the club because it started in Madison, Wisconsin, and many of their friends stayed active in it when it changed from in-person to Zoom. They talked about it enough to interest me in joining. Steve might note other not-so-coincidental readings of the same book, with me posting in **Facebook** and Andy writing in **Captain Flashback**.

(2 May 2024)

I'm reading my way through **SFC 116**, and your comments to **Mark Nelson** on page 39 of the landscape version need responses now, before I forget.

First, you have confused **Gregg Calkins** and **Greg Shaw**. Shaw was the publisher of **Who Put the Bomp** and an even earlier rock fanzine called **Mojo Navigator**.

Second, you talked about fanzine publishers going to cheap offset printing in the early 1980s. I can't dispute that some took this route, but my recollection is that many of us went to cheap or free Xerox or other photocopying methods, especially if our workplaces had such machines. Suzle and I had our own mimeo equipment, and stuck with it longer than most, but eventually we too switched as the physical rigours of home mimeography got to us.

Third, you and Mark discussed dedicated **classical music shops**, something I have never seen in the US. The only time I've visited one was not in the UK or Australia but 15 years ago in Paris, and that was an outlet for a French classical and jazz label. (I've just checked a list of French labels to refresh my memory, and found **Harmonia Mundi**.) I didn't know it existed, but found it by chance during a slow walk I took near our hotel.

(19 August 2024)

**[\*brg\* I agree that the first people who could afford to go offset or photocopying are those who could use equipment at the places they worked. I don't know how many fans bought their own offset printing machines — in Australia they have always been much more expensive than duplicators. So I suppose photocopying came in with home computers during the 1980s.]**

About 1990 I gave up trying to arm-wrestle my duplicator into producing good copy. I did have my own dot matrix printer that came with the computer, but it was useful only for 20-page fanzines for apas. After that, each page cost as much as it did to take the computer file on disc into Copyplace in the city and get them to convert SFCs into fanzines fully printed, folded, stapled, and trimmed. The cost was then, and remained, about 10 cents per side printed.

I'm wondering how Americans bought their

classical LPs and CDs if there were no specialist classical shops? The big chains had classical sections, but in Melbourne they were never as replete as the shelves of the great classical shops, such as Allans, Brashes, Thomas', and Discurio. All gone. There was at least one in every capital city. When Charles Brown visited Australia in about 2007, he got me to show him the way to the three that remained in Melbourne, but he was much happier with a shop he found later in his trip in Fremantle, near Perth, in Western Australia.

The only chain still selling CDs is JB Hi Fi, but they seem to reduce their stock every few weeks. The local store features only a few classical CDs. In other words, there is nowhere to browse anymore, now that even Readings in Carlton has stopped stocking CDs. I can order classical CDs from Presto in Britain, and their website is set up for browsing, but it is no substitute for that glorious feeling of riffling through large numbers of actual CDs.\*]

For a long time, chains like **Tower** had good classical sections, but as you probably know, they're long gone. In Seattle we have a three-shop chain called **Silver Platters**, which started out specialising in CDs and DVDs — it had an excellent classical section in one shop and pretty good sections in the other two. They have reduced the classical sections now, and expanded used books and vinyl sections now.

I went on a tear of buying classical CDs a few years ago through a mail-order service called **ArchivMusic** and still get weekly emails listing sale items, but I don't buy much. (Early in my relation with them, I won a contest. The prize was \$1000 towards purchases. Boy, I bought a lot.)

I believe that relatively few Americans listen to classical music.

(20 August 2024)

On page 82 of the Landscape edition, **Dennis Callegari** talks about **Babel** by **R. F. Kuang**, and wonders why Kuang worked hard to build a world but immediately 'deflate[s]' her world. I read it, too, beyond the revelation of a group of plotters aiming to tear down the tower of Babel, and believe Kuang's aim in building the world of the silver-magicking translators was to show how horrible she thought it was (as well as the real-world British Empire) and how it might be, or might have been, torn down through violence. She kept this world working throughout the novel, with the anti-Babel faction taking over the narrative only towards the end.

(24 August 2024))

**SFC 117:** You talk about things that you've received in physical form. Suzle appreciates your comments about her and the **Bee Gees** (embedded in your review of **Nowhere Fan**). She knows about their career in Australia, and has shown me a number of YouTube videos of them performing on Aussie TV before they had hits of their own.

[\*brg\* The Bee Gees spent several years in the early 1960s touring Australia but not having much success with their own singles. They did write many hits for other Australian pop singers. Suddenly they had a No. 1 hit in Australia, their first, 'Spicks and Specks', in 1968 (my favourite of all their singles) — just as they arrived in London to become part of the Robert Stigwood Organisation. Their first single for Stigwood was 'New York Mining Disaster 1941', about as unlikely a major hit as anybody ever produced. And off they went. However, Festival Records in Sydney maintained its rights to 'Spicks and Specks', which explains why it did not appear on any English-produced 'Best Of' LPs. It does appear on their concert LPs.\*]

Further on, you mention **Justin Busch**, with the hope that his zines have been scanned to Fanac.org or efanazines. I wrote to Justin's partner after she published the final issue of his fanzine about doing this, but she never responded. Perhaps someone else will some day try her again and get her permission.

(30 August 2024)

I like **John Hertz's** reviews, and find myself wanting to read **A Connecticut Yankee** and **Mushroom Planet** — somehow I've missed reading either — and rereading **Past Master**. I have the **Xero** book, but would like to read the fanzine itself, which I hope and assume is available at FANAC.org. (Goody: all but issue 2 appear there.)

(31 August 2024)

This is a good time to talk about **SF poetry**, because the **2025 Seattle Worldcon** is placing an emphasis on it by having a **Poet Laureate (Brandon O'Brien)**, and awarding a one-time Hugo for best poem. Like **Cy Chauvin**, I like poetry, and like Cy, I wonder if SF and poetry are a good combination. I believe fantasy mixes well with verse; in fact, poetry springs from sources that most of us recognise as fantastic, like folklore, mythology, and religion. SF shares these well-springs, but also derives from ideas of progress, discovery, and societal concerns.

But when I consider some of the examples Cy gives of bad and unclear imagery and therefore bad poetry, I wonder if he's locked himself into too

rigid a view. I don't have the issues of *F&SF* or *Asimov's* the poems were published in, so I have to make conjectures about the context of his quoted lines. (I tried to find them on-line, but it appears one can't read single pieces from them, unlike the many online zines. One has to buy the complete issue.)

From '**Notes From the Interplanetary Ambassador**', Cy quotes 'sequined horizon of February cities.' He says this is unclear. Yet I get an image of cities with multi-coloured lights trimming their towers, spread along the horizon. I don't know how February fits in, but maybe in other lines we find out it's winter where the ambassador sits, writing their notes.

About '**Letter from a Wren**', Cy supposes that the wren can't write, because in our current reality it's not possible for various reasons. I'm willing to allow the poet some leeway, and suppose that the 'genetically resurrected' creature has also received some upgrades. Cy supposes the poet might think the bird types this letter with its beak, but complains about the word 'peck' in the second line. Without the complete second line (or the complete poem), I can only guess that a bird using its beak would peck at the keys. Does the second line contradict this? How does the word 'patter' get used?

I'm not sure that imagery in poetry has to be as clear and concrete as images need to be in fiction. I think it needs to be rich, allusive, and open to multiple interpretations.

(10 September 2024)

## SPIKE

Mountain View, California, USA

An article by **Janeen Webb**! We saw her in **Glasgow**, and chatted briefly. (She was leaving a

restaurant as we were being seated.)

At the worldcon I had a long talk with **Perry Middlemiss** and also caught up a bit with **Rose Mitchell** and **Alan Stewart**. Not nearly enough time spent with them! Spent a great chunk of time, happily, with **Justin Ackroyd**. We've been friends for 40 years, having met at the LA Worldcon in 1984.

**Roman Orszanski** recently invited me to a **Critical Mass Zoom meeting**, broadcast from his Christie Walk meeting room. Discussion was about the short fiction on the Hugo nominations list. **Gerald Smith** was on the Zoom! I was thrilled — evidence of how much I miss ANZAPA(ns).

I was laid off this spring. My last work day was May 17 but I'm collecting salary through the end of the year. I sent the work computer back, but I'm still sifting through old work files. At age 71 I'm not going to look for a fulltime job, but I'm reluctant to say I am retired.

(27 August 2024)

## ALAN STEWART

Unit 305, 5 Ovens Street,  
Brunswick, VIC 3056 (coa)

When I visit my storage space I can make a list of the **Phillip Mann** books I have, and any you would like can be yours. I think I've read 80 per cent of them.

I could probably arrange to drive out and deliver them once we know what is required. I am usually working from home most of the time, going into the office about one day a week.

For the moment the Richmond PO Box still works, but you can also send stuff to my new residential (and postal) address: see above.

(27 August 2024)

## Feature letter: Fanzine-based fanzines

### MARK NELSON

School of Mathematics and Applied  
Statistics, University of Wollongong,  
Northfields Avenue,  
Wollongong, NSW 2522

You wrote that the reason why you hadn't finished 'these latest issues of *SFC*' wasn't that you'd been writing your memoirs. But hopefully at some point

you will write your memoirs. Or, if when asked, would you merely wave your hands and say that your memoirs are essentially already available in *SFC* and your other fanzines?

**[\*brg\* You are correct in that assumption. There are also a few interviews that you can probably find online, such as those by Rowena Cory Daniels and Gillian Polack. All you need is the teeth-gritting patience to gather up all my**

personal writing from 57 years of ANZAPA contributions, 56 years of *SFC*, and all the material from *The Metaphysical Review* (14 years) and *Steam Engine Time* (13 years). It's unlikely I will ever do this.\*]

I would be interested to read your thoughts on the **Hugo Award for Best Fanzine**. When did real fanzines stop winning it? Or is that a topic best suited for a conversation in a pub where the attendees agree that the Chatham House Rule is in effect? I prefer fanzines that I can hold in my hands. But I concede that you can produce a fanzine that is distributed in the form of a PDF. For this grumpy old man, something that exists on a webpage is not a fanzine; though that may become the standard format of the fanzine in the not too far future.

The good news is that I already have a catalogue of my CDs and vinyl. But the bad news is that I doubt anyone will find the files on my laptop ... The sad news is that most of my fanzine collection (between 4000–5000), predominantly postal diplomacy fanzines, went into the municipal tip when I was exiled to Australia.

Hmmm, you subscribe to **Locus**. When you mentioned real fanzines not winning the Hugo Award ... the first thought that came to mind was whether *Locus* was an example of a publication winning the Hugo that wasn't really a fanzine. (I'm thinking of its run of wins at the start of the 1980s.)

[\*brg\* *Locus* began as a very useful regular duplicated fanzine of news about the whole of fandom. Charles Brown once described to me the tortuous way in which he converted it from a fanzine into a professional zine, which involved playing the share market. I've never had anything to do with the share market, so I nodded gravely and thought to myself, 'Thank ghod *SFC* remained strictly an amateur magazine.' But people still regarded *Locus* as a fanzine until the Semi Professional Hugo category was invented. Before that, Richard Geis won Best Fanzine year after year under various names (*Science Fiction Review*, *Alien Critic*, etc). He was unapologetic in revealing that he printed and distributed 3000 copies per issue, and subscriptions were his only source of income. But the last real fanzine to win the Hugo category for many years was, in my recall, Michael and Susan Glicksohn's *Energumen* in 1973.\*]

**The Book Blinders** sounds very interesting. A case of what appears to be ephemeral to one generation turning out to be gold to a subsequent one. I read something similar about archaeology.

What was thrown away as being of no interest a century ago is nowadays carefully sifted over. Perhaps an exaggeration, but not so much. A century ago archaeology was about the artifacts. Now it's recognised that there's as much information in the ground surrounding the artifacts as in the artifacts. (I forget what I learnt about archaeological digs from the year I spent studying archaeology as an undergraduate.)

My first attempt to obtain a copy of **Proud and Lonely** was thwarted by **Booktopia** going under. I've yet to order a second copy. I suppose that when I get around to it my copy will be one of the few that hasn't been signed by the author.

**Cadbury's Smash Martians?** One of my favourite ads. I still rewatch them from time to time. A terrible product, but a great advert. Talking about terrible products, how about spaghetti carbonara in a tin? Thank you, Heinz. Now, can someone make a science-fiction advert about that? I passed news about this monstrosity to the Head of Physics, who is Italian. She was so shocked that she ranked it as the number one affront to Italian cuisine, relegating the addition of pineapple to pizza into second position.

I was greatly interested in **Cy Chauvin's** article on the connections between **science fiction and poetry**. This is despite the fact that I've never been a huge reader of poetry and I've never read any science fiction poetry. However, and perhaps it's the academic in me, I wasn't convinced by the contention that there has been a 'mass proliferation of dull poetry in sf magazines'. That may indeed be the case. However (IMO), you don't establish it by picking your least favourite poem from a small number of publications. It appears that the March–April 2023 and May–June 2023 issues of **Analog** contained one poem apiece, and these are both discussed. The May–June 2023 issue of **Asimov's** contained five poems, two of which are discussed. **The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction** 'has also greatly increased the number of poems it publishes'. The numbers are not compelling.

Sometimes you have to read an article at the right time to take the most out of it. This week was the right time to read both **Janeen Webb's** article on **alternate history** and **William Sarill's** reflections on **The Man in the High Castle**. Why is this the right time, whereas last month would have been the wrong time? For some unknown reason **YouTube** decided that I needed to see shorts from **The Man in the High Castle** TV series. This started me thinking about the novel. Unlike William, I've only read it once, about 30 years ago. I know that it won the Hugo Award for

Best Novel in 1963, but based upon my dim recollections of the plot I'd been asking myself whether it's really a science fiction novel. From what I can remember, the answer is no. But if it's a no, why did it win the Hugo Award? Surely not as a sop to Dick.

With these thoughts percolating through my mind, it was the right time to read **Janeen Webb's** article. Clearly (but see later), **alternate-history novels** are not science fiction per se. But, equally clearly, an alternate-history novel could be a science fiction novel. I see that some reviewers have classified *The Five Star Republic* as a science fiction novel, though it is unclear to me from Webb's account of her book why that's so. How far does the technology of the present have to change in an alternate history novel for it to become science fiction? Goodreads apparently classifies alternate history as a subgenre of science fiction. And many people agree with this. That makes no sense to me!

**[\*brg\* My definition of a science fiction story (in its purest form) is 'a realistic novel that is set in the future or an alternative present or past, rather than the present or actual past'. What interests me in science fiction is usually the human future and the fate of individual humans, but I don't see that the future (or alternative past) as necessarily involved with technological change, only with changes in human activities and perceptions. So *The Five Star Republic* is obviously a science fiction novel to me; and *The Man in the High Castle* even more so.\*]**

As I've been having these thoughts I have also realised that the obvious retort is that it doesn't matter if an alternative-history novel is a science fiction novel or not. All that matters is whether it's a good read or not. (Though whether a book is science fiction or not matters from the perspective of science fiction awards.) My other take away is that I should reread *The Man in the High Castle*. On the other hand, the fact that *The Five Star Republic* is the first in a trilogy is a deterrent to reading it.

I learn from the internet that in *TMITHC* Germany 'has drained the Mediterranean Sea, developed rockets for amazingly fast inter-continental and space travel and explored (and colonised?) the Moon and Mars'. I'd forgotten this background information, or is it more important to the story than that? Can a small amount of inconsequential SF background make a novel into a science fiction novel?

(7 September 2024)

I've been involved in **three fanzine-based fandoms**. The first was **role-playing games fanzines**, from about 1984 to 1987. I was a mostly passive consumer of those fanzines. Then starting in about 1985 I've been involved in **Postal Diplomacy fanzines**, being extremely active from 1985 to 1993-94. Postal Diplomacy fandom was started by the New York SF fan **John Boardman** in 1963. In the early years many of the prominent Diplomacy fans were also active in SF fandom. That influence was diluted towards the end of the 1960s when large numbers of incoming fans came from a board-gaming or wargaming background.

I don't know how role-playing game fandom started in the UK. One of the early zines, a RPG apa, was started in the late 1970s by **Pete Lindsay**, who had been active in Postal Diplomacy fandom.

Another early zine was produced by **Hartley Patterson**, who'd also been involved in the early days of the Postal Diplomacy hobby in the UK. Hartley had also been active in **Tolkien fandom** (another offshoot from SF fandom). Patterson's RPG zine, *News from Bree*, started as a Tolkien fanzine.

The word **'fanzine'** was introduced into the nascent Postal Diplomacy hobby (we call it the hobby, or the Postal Diplomacy hobby, rather than postal diplomacy fandom) by SF fans, and the word was retained even when most members of the hobby no longer knew its origins.

I don't know how the word fanzine was introduced into UK RPG fandom, but two of the early zine editors knew the word — one from Tolkien fandom and one from the Postal Diplomacy hobby.

As you suggest, many different fandoms now use the word fanzine.

The technology involved in the production of Postal Diplomacy fanzines has developed similarly to the one you described for SF fanzines. I still receive two Postal Diplomacy fanzines through the post; the rest arrive as PDFs.

One distinction between Postal Diplomacy/RPG fanzines in the 1980s/1990s and SF fanzines in the same period is that if you were not trading with a zine then you received it by subscribing to it.

In a moment of boredom I searched for the word **'fanzine'** in *The Times Digital Archive*, which provides full-text access to *The Times* from 1785 to 2019. Ignoring five false hits, from the years 1800, 1846, 1877, 1908, and 1915, the distribution of hits is as given below.

1958: 1	1971 1	1974 1	1978 1	1980 1
1981 1	1984 1	1987 2		



1988 1 1989 7 1990 12 1991 14 1992  
 14 1993 14 1994 25 1995 16  
 1996 17 1997 20 1998 48 1999 44 2000  
 46 2001 23 2002 21 2003 30  
 2004 23 2005 49 2006 32 2007 45  
 2008 57 2009 34 2010 21 2011 56  
 2012 50 2013 29 2014 30 2015 21 2016  
 24 2017 31 2018 29 2019 23

From 1997 onwards, **the word ‘fanzine’** has appeared in **The Times** at least 20 times each year, with a high of 57 hits in 2008. The data suggests that the word fanzine went mainstream in *The Times* in 1989. I wonder why there was such a high number of hits in 2008? Perhaps one day I’ll find out.

There are sufficiently few hits that one could read the relevant parts of each article to identify the content areas associated with the production of fanzines and then investigate how has the genre of the fanzine being discussed evolved over time.

(There are sufficiently many hits that I’m not considering undertaking this exercise any time real soon.)

I have looked at the first six uses of the word. The 1958, 1974, and 1978 usages are about SF fanzines.

Last year the fifteenth convention of the World Science Fiction Society Inc., held in London, was attended by some 300 people, mainly ‘fans’, and in recent weeks a British Science Fiction Society has been created. Perhaps a dozen local societies already exist in Britain, the larger producing their own ‘fanzines’.

From **Our Special Correspondent: ‘Strange World of Science Fiction’, *The Times***, Saturday, 13 September 1958

The 1974 hit is from a review of ***Science Fiction Monthly***:

I detected no strong editorial theme threading through, which may be just as well, but neither are there any committed appraisals, always useful in igniting argument in a fanzine like this.

**Tom Hutchinson: ‘Science Fiction’, *The Times***, Thursday, 31 January 1974

The 1978 hit is from a review of ***The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction***:

Until last weekend, I would not have known a

combozine from a gafiante, a fanzine from a prozine, and if you had told me that First Fandom was the same thing as First Fan Era, I would not have argued with you.

Engage me in debate now, however, and I will astonish you with the breadth, not to say galacticity of my knowledge. This is because I spent the weekend reading ***The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction***, edited by **Brian Ash** and published, magnificently, by Pan Books, at £5.50.

A fanzine you should know, is an amateur or semi-professional science fiction publication; bind several into one volume and you have a combozine, which is devastatingly logical when you come to think of it. A prozine, predictably, is a professionally produced sf magazine.

If you sever your allegiance to sf, you will be gafiating, and, I doubt if Mr Ash will like you very much.

**PHS: ‘The Times Diary’, *The Times***, Tuesday, 21 February 1978

The 1971 hit was to **rock fanzines**:

Alongside this enormous interest in original recordings is the spread of ‘fanzines’ — rock magazines published by enthusiasts for no commercial gain. These are now widely read and available in many record stores.

The 1980 hit doesn’t supply enough information to identify a fanzine genre.

The 1981 hit was to **punk fanzines**:

All were loosely associated with a musical group called **Total Chaos** and spent much of their time organizing an empty school over the river in Gateshead as a base for gigs (engagements) and rehearsals, looking for grants from charities, local authorities and the like, and producing ‘fanzines’ (fan magazines — samizdat publications not normally shown to older people).

**Some random comments on SFC 116:**

**Kennedy Gammage** wrote that he thought that ***Everything Everywhere All At Once*** was ‘a total ripoff of ***The Matrix***’. I haven’t watched ***EEAAO***, despite having had a DVD of it for months and months and months. I can’t say that when I finally watched the first ***Matrix*** movie that I thought it was

'a total ripoff of *Dark City*', but I did notice some similarity in the underlying idea. (Nothing necessarily wrong in that; the execution is very different.)

**Phil Collins**? When he wasn't playing with Genesis he was the drummer of jazz rock Brand X — which I learnt from a jazz rock compilation I bought many years ago.

I saw on EBAY **Lesleigh Luttrell's *Lesleigh's Adventure Down Under*** (the report of her DUFF trip, 1972) was for sale. I even added it to my basket, but then ruefully decided that I couldn't afford the AUD \$120 that it would cost (including shipping to Australia). I know it's available for free on **fanac.org**, so I will content myself with printing it out from there at some future date. I did suggest to the seller that I'd buy it if the price was reduced below AUD \$100, but they wouldn't budge. Take it, or leave it they said. I left it.

I almost fell off my chair! Absolutely astonished to see that you have two readers in **Spondon, Derby** — the suburb of Derby where I lived from the age of five.

There's a follow-up. I was doing research for an article I'm writing for the next issue of **Mathom** in **ANZAPA** (about Nick Shears and his Postal Diplomacy fanzine, ***Down Alien Skies***). This led me to **Peter Roberts' *Checkpoint 30*** (27 January 1973), where I found the following:

**Lurk 4** (36pp; quarto) **Mike & Pat Meara**, 61 Borrowwash Rd, Spondon, Derby, DE2 7QH (50 p. — sample copy free). *Lurk* is very much

the traditional fanzine — an editorial at the beginning, a couple of articles, book and fanzine reviews, and a letter column to finish up with; it's not bad, but not particularly exciting either. This issue has James White's speech from Novacon '71 and an interview with Larry Niven, Fred Pohl, Brian Aldiss, Harry Harrison, Bob Shaw & Don Wollheim from Chessmancon '72 as its highlights.

**Borrowwash Road**? Just around the corner from the house we lived in, on Moor Street. Three hundred metres according to Google Maps. Must have passed the Mearas' house countless times on my paper round without knowing that it was a den of fannish activity. Though in those days, if I were interested in zines, it was role-playing zines.

I've never read ***A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court***. And I've never been tempted. But, by jove, **John Hertz's** review makes it sound like a cracker. Not to the extent that I will add it to the list of books that I will never order. But if fate should take bring face-to-face with a copy, I will buy it sir.

In fact, I really enjoyed reading all of John's reviews. They made me wish that I had the time to read everything he reviewed. The excellence of the reviews is partly about his selection of books to review, but mostly it's about the style in which they are written and the threads of thoughts that he connects together.

(17 October 2024)

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## The Kim Huett Column

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### Column 1: What we read during the War

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**KIM HUETT**

**Apt 4D, 52 Deloraine Street,  
Lyons ACT 2606**

**SFC 116:** It was nice too see a response to my **Currawong article**. Mostly I find articles such as this garner little but silence. Not that I resent this lack of response because I understand that it would be most unreasonable for me to expect other people to have something useful to contribute on

a topic that they didn't know existed until I brought it up. My approach to writing letters of comment has always been to confine myself to topics that I feel as though I can add something to the conversation. (Which is why there was no Kim Huett in ***Banana Wings 79***. ***Banana Wings 78*** contained no topics I wanted to add to.) And so I prefer silence to bland compliments or vague acknowledgments if nobody has anything useful to add.

Of course a significant response is preferable to silence so I was quite pleased to see **John Litchen**'s letter. From what I've read to date it would seem the **Australian publishing industry** was deeply affected by World War II. Within the pages of ***A History of the Book in Australia 1891–1945*** (edited by **Martyn Lyons and John Arnold**), there is a recurring theme of domination of the Australian book trade by London-based publishers. There are various reasons for this, but the most surprising of all was how cheap it was to export books wholesale to Australia, a fact that might confound anybody living in Australia, given the prices Australian readers of *SF Commentary* have always endured.

However, if you understand the process this situation begins to make sense, but be warned, this knowledge won't make you any happier. For starters, a London-based publisher didn't need to sell in Australia. Let's pretend it's 1900 and the publishing house **Stuffy & Ponce** has released Anthony Leahy's latest action novel, *Mad Jack under the PRIORITY*. Now unless something goes badly wrong Stuffy & Ponce is going to cover its basic costs and make some profit through sales across Great Britain. In 1900 Great Britain had a population of 30.25 million and that's more than enough people to ensure a profit despite factors such as the book being a hard cover and thus is relatively expensive or a shorter version having already appeared in *Pall Mall Magazine*.

Stuffy & Ponce didn't need the colonies to make a profit, but that doesn't stop the company from shipping consignments of *Mad Jack under the PRIORITY* to Canada, to Australia, to New Zealand, and anywhere else where there might be an interested audience. Why? Well the print run has already been paid for and the only new expense is the cost of shipping, so how can it not make some extra profit? Consequently Stuffy & Ponce and other London publishers flood the colonies with books.

According to **Martyn Lyons** in ***A History of the Book in Australia***: from 1891 to 1945 Australian importers of British books received a 50 per cent discount on their orders. (He doesn't make clear if and when this practice stopped.) Combine this with Marty Lyons' further claim that 25 per cent of books printed in Britain were being sent to Australia and it becomes clear why Australian publishers struggled to compete.

**World War II** put a stop to all that. The bombing of London vastly reduced book stocks in Britain. On 29–30 December 1940, for example, fire damaged the premises of 27 publishers and destroyed an estimated 5 million warehoused

books. Some publishers were so badly hit during the Blitz that they didn't survive the war. In addition, paper was rationed in Britain and space aboard Australia-bound ships was in short supply because war-relevant material was given priority.

Thus over 1939–40, because of the situation in Great Britain and the decision to limit banks' ability to convert pounds to dollars (blocking Canadian imports as well as those from the USA, yah boo sucks to Canada), new reading material was steadily disappearing from newsstands and magazine racks. In Australia the Federal Government wasn't entirely out of touch. It understood that the war effort required austerity, but that there was a limit to what the civilian population could be deprived of. Go too far and there's a danger that people would begin to wonder if going to war was worth it after all. And so the Federal Government relented in its austerity just a little bit here and there.

And so it was decided to give the people something to read. To be more accurate, it awarded licences to purchase paper to various people in the publishing industry. The assumption was that these individuals would publish something the general public could buy and read so they would not be bored.

This cunning plan worked perfectly. Newly formed companies such as **Leisure Publications**, **Currawong Publishing Company**, **Transport Publishing**, and **Invincible Press**, churned out hundreds of titles during the war. I've called these titles rather than books because, as noted in my article, they were little more than pamphlets. Better than nothing, I guess, given how little was available, but still they were anaemic little publications.

Although the Federal Government did not fully allow the banks to convert pounds to dollars till 1956, British publishers resumed exporting books to Australia soon after the war ended. However, as it took a while for British publishing to rebuild and for paper restrictions to be lifted, the pressure on local publishing didn't instantly return. I think it's possible to see how British competition increased by gradual inflation of the local product. By the late 1950s those wartime pamphlets had evolved into genuine paperbacks.

Over the same period most of the pamphlet publishers folded, and the most successful of the surviving locals, **Horwitz**, **Cleveland Publishing**, and **Webster Publications** mostly focused on the **hard-boiled detective genre**. John Litchen remembers one of the unholy in the form of **Carter Brown**, but he had a rival called **Larry Kent** and a horde of other Aussie hard men snapping at his

heels. Carter Brown was king, though. According to **Toni Johnson-Woods** in her book *Pulp*, collectively the many Carter Brown titles sold over ten million copies. What makes this figure even more astounding is the small size of the Australian

population during the 1950s and 1960s.

Such is life.

(4 December 2024)

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## Column 2: History or alternate history?

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**SFC 117:** It shouldn't surprise you to learn that **alternate history** invariably raises a red flag for me every time. In theory it should be possible to create a plausible (but never perfect) alternate history and it's entirely possible that one or more authors have indeed done so.

However, the concept of alternate history has long since sunk under the enormous mound of lazy thinking which has been heaped upon it.

Consider the following common, but poorly thought out, scenarios:

The idea of a **scenario where Alexander invades Italy and fights Rome** makes very little sense for three reasons. First, Alexander had better things to do than invade Italy. Before he inconveniently died, Alexander was making plans to to conquer Arabia, a project that would surely have kept him occupied for some years. Second, would Alexander's army even be up for an invasion of Italy? My understanding is that by the time the Macedonian army reached India the veterans were tired of Alexander's constant campaigning. I can't imagine the Macedonian army would be in a better frame of mind after an Arabian campaign, even if Alexander excused most of his veteran units from that project. Third, assuming he successfully added Arabia to his empire, I can't see how Alexander would have the resources to spare for another major campaign.

Besides all that, by the time Alexander was in a position to mount an invasion of Italy, Rome had only just bullied the other Latin cities into submission. At this point the Romans just didn't have the resources to compete against a major power. This wasn't Imperial Rome and the heyday of the Roman legions after all. If Alexander had shown up with his main field army it would be a tough fight but one that would have been over in short order.

Sticking with **Rome**, the idea of it **industrialising** is as impossible as it is popular to imagine. Again I can see three good arguments as to why the

Romans wouldn't industrialise. First, apart from Rome itself, the population wasn't dense enough to make mechanised manufacturing a desirable goal. Necessity is the mother of invention, which in this context means demand needs to be outstripping supply in order for clever individuals to explore ways of increasing production.

Of course the counter to this is to argue a factory employing steam-powered machinery could export its excess production to various parts of the empire. This is a not unattractive proposition, given there was considerable trade across the Roman Empire. The problem was that transport was slow and expensive. For example an ox-drawn cart would take up to five days to travel between Naples and Rome, a journey that would likely negate any savings made by mechanised manufacture.

According to **Gordon Childe** in *What Happened in History*, the Roman Senator Cato bought an olive press at Pompeii for 384 sesterces. To transport that olive press to his farm, about 110 kilometres away, cost him a further 280 sesterces. It was possible to keep costs down by using water transportation, but delivering to most markets required at least some expensive land transport. Although there was significant trade across the Roman Empire, it mostly fell into two categories: luxury goods, for which cost was much less of an issue, given that such goods were bought by the rich; and food, which, regardless of cost, needed to be transported from point A to point B if point B could not produce enough food for its population. So unless we're talking about manufactured goods that could fall into either of these two categories, I can't see them being an attractive proposition for development.

Finally, there is the fact that slavery in the ancient world made manufacturing by hand sufficiently cheap that nobody with the means to fund the development of steam-powered machines would see the point in doing so.

Then we have the proposition that the **Chinese**

**might have forged an overseas empire.** I've also seen a version of this idea based on the Mongol empire expanding across the Pacific. This particular scenario seems to be popular because of a general fascination with the idea of the US being divided into several smaller nations. However, the basis for this version of history is exceedingly slim. During the Ming Dynasty, Admiral Zheng He undertook seven voyages of exploration, voyages that were mainly intended to impress foreign peoples with the superiority of China and expand the tribute system. The fact alone that after the completion of Zheng He's seventh voyage this outreach program was permanently terminated should make clear how little the Chinese were interested in an overseas empire.

Also, everything I've read about Confucian thought and tradition is at odds with the idea of a Chinese Emperor controlling overseas territories. As for the Mongols, it's true that their attempts at invading Japan demonstrated a willingness to expand overseas. On the other hand, even if they had conducted a successful invasion of Japan, why would that translate into a North American empire? Assuming their ships follow the coastline north, and that seems far more likely than striking directly east into the depths of the Pacific, what the Mongols would discover would be the Aleutian Islands and Alaska. Given the Mongols already have access to all the Siberian cold and misery they could want, I doubt any such expedition would be tempted to make it as far as Oregon, let alone California.

That brings us to the most inexplicable alternate history scenario. Inexplicable if only because I don't see how contact between **the Aztecs** or some other **South American empire** could survive contact with Europe. Even if the South Americans were shown to somehow possess superior technology, surely the story would end in an identical manner to **H. G. Wells' *The War Of The Worlds***, with the invaders coming into contact with smallpox, measles, influenza, and dysentery — and dying in droves.

Before an author has to worry about that consideration, there is a need to explain how people with no real seafaring tradition would manage to cross the Atlantic and progress from obsidian-tipped spears to military technology superior to that of Europe. In short, the sheer number of developments an author would have to justify is so numerous I doubt it can be convincingly done.

Lastly there are the old favourites; the **Confederacy winning the US Civil War** and **Nazi Germany and/or Imperial Japan winning World War II.**

All these have been so done to death. I don't think I need to explain why defeat was inevitable except to note that in all three cases the losing side simply wouldn't have the resources to outlast the eventual winners.

I suspect the problem with far too many attempts at alternate history is that they are based on changing the direction that whole nations might take by **reversing the results of certain battles or political decisions.** These scenarios don't work because, to be convincing, they requires the attitude of hundred, if not thousands, of people to be changed. **The Ming Empire** was never going to extend overseas — it was run by a bureaucracy that adhered to a Confucian philosophy .

**Great Britain** was never going to form an alliance with the **Confederacy** because popular sentiment of the time among the general population was anti-slavery and the majority of parliamentarians did not want an expensive war.

In order for to create a **believable alternate history** I suspect the first step must be to find a genuine choke-point. This is a tall order, because most events and most individuals line up with the direction the nation involved was going to travel in anyway. If **Joseph Stalin** had suffered a fatal heart attack when Germany invaded the Soviet Union, would that have made much difference to subsequent events? I think not, because the Soviet Union was controlled by the Communist Party, which saw Germany's Nationalist Socialist Party as a direct threat. Details might have been different, but the struggle would remain the same. In much the same way I can't see the absence of **Winston Churchill** would have made much difference to a British desire to resist a possible German invasion.

On the other hand the rise of **Napoleon Bonaparte** might have been a viable choke-point.

Before Napoleon's rise to power, France was being run by one anti-royalist administration after another. Without the intervention of Napoleon it seems likely this state of affairs would have continued. If so, it seems entirely possible that a succession of such governments would have increasingly lost control of France, in which case it would only be a matter of time before royalist forces reinstated Bourbon rule.

That might be believable alternate history but I'm not sure there is an interesting story to be hung off it.

Which is probably the key problem here. Historical changes that make for a good story are hard to make believable, while believable

historical changes are not interesting enough to base an interesting story upon — a conundrum

far beyond my ability to solve I'm afraid.  
(15 December 2024)

## MARCIN KLAK

Poland

<https://efanzines.com/A~Zyn/index.htm>

My main fanzine is in Polish only, but I have published so far two English issues: <https://efanzines.com/A~Zyn/index.htm>

For the **Glasgow Worldcon's WOOOF** mailing I published a new zine, which I plan to continue. It is small and will remain as such: <https://efanzines.com/WOOOF/index.html#w49>. Future issues I will send to eFanzines. I will consider e-mailing to people who may be interested.

(7 September 2024)

## GARY HUBBARD

Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA

**Bill Breiding** forwarded me a copy of your fanzine. Thanks for the kind words. I haven't read the whole thing yet, but I was stuck by **Ditmar's** comments on *Moby-Dick*. This is one of my favourite books. I've read it three times now, and I'm always on the lookout for interesting editions, old or new. It makes sense to me that it appeals to SF fans broadly. The way I see it is that back in the nineteenth century — before Jules Verne came along — **sea stories** were where young Romantics went to get their Sense of Wonder fix. Consider: sea stories were about voyages in the most scientifically advanced vehicles of the day to explore strange new worlds, encounter strange creatures and alien people; heady stuff for youngsters and stay-at-homes. (Am I being too obvious here? Of course, this POV is simple-minded; not all of SF are jacked-up sea stories, after all.)

When I was in high school, I gave a book report on *Moby-Dick*. It was weak stuff, man's inhumanity to man; is *Moby-Dick* God? Etc. As you may recall, **Herman Melville** alternated the narrative with passages about the economic/legal aspects of whaling and whatever other rambling thoughts occurred to him as he wrote the book. When I was younger, I avoided those chapters, but lately in more recent times I've formed a new interest in those parts. Of historical interest, they provide a snapshot of the workings of early capitalism in America, built upon the backs of whales. Before petroleum, whale oil was supremely important to the economy: it provided light and lubed the wheels of the Conestoga wagons that allowed settlers to go inland and carve new lives. In addition, whaling ships were more than vessels,

you know; they were floating corporations set up to make money and financed by shareholders, and those shareholders included widows and orphans who invested their meagre savings in ships like the *Pequod*. **Ahab** may have been the captain of the *Pequod*, but he wasn't the owner. He was an employee, and an irresponsible one at that. Instead of attending to *Pequod, Inc.*'s business, he went off on a tear and ruined the business. Looking at it that way, Ahab's real sin wasn't against God, but against all those widows and orphans back on land.

(10 September 2024)

I live in the **State of Michigan**, the gem of the Old Northwest, in the fabled, dream-haunted city of **Kalamazoo**. I used to live in Detroit, but then I had a gal in Kalamazoo, so I moved here. When I lived in Detroit I couldn't breathe. As far back as I can remember I had respiratory problems. I lived on antihistamines. But when I moved to Kalamazoo I threw the Dristan bottle away. I wouldn't go as far as to say there's no pollution here, just less than in Detroit.

(3 October 2024)

## FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

Marchettigasse 9/17,

A-1060, Wien, Austria

Sorry for being so late in acknowledging receipt of the links for your latest *SFC* issues. As always I read with envy the many reactions you get for your publications. I get none for Quarber Merkur.

Yes, **young Rosa** my granddaughter is growing and enhancing her abilities, and it is a joy to watch her. It is only that I see her too rarely, although she and her parents are living quite near. But we all spent some weeks together in Poland, which we visit every summer. Otherwise the air around gets thinner and thinner — many of my old friends and relatives, many of them much younger than I, are already gone.

But I cannot complain. I am in a privileged position. I spent a glorious summer in my country house, away from unbearably hot Vienna, and did much renovation, especially of the wooden parts. And I am still working, although on a much slower pace, and was not affected by Covid 19 or the economic crisis.

I still move around and visit flea markets in search of books. It becomes ever more difficult to

find interesting old books, but Vienna is still a paradise in this regard in relationship to Germany. But I am buying few new science fiction books. Much of what is being written today doesn't interest me, least of all the many fantasy hybrids. And I don't watch any more what is happening in the field.

The pension system in Austria seems much better than in many other countries. By American standards I would be considered poor, but you can live better here than with much more money in many other countries, especially because I don't have to spend a lot of money on health care.

(8 October 2024)

My son is a teacher of physics and mathematics at a gymnasium. Some time ago he acquired a very modern house in Vienna where he is now living with his wife (also a teacher of mathematics) and his daughter Rosa. She is now nine months old and I see her regularly. She seems to be a very alert and curious person and has beautiful black eyes.

It hasn't been decided yet who will form our next government. I don't care for those people who call themselves 'patriots' but are Putin's fanboys. Our political parties are now haggling over a coalition that excludes the right wing. They have to solve a lot of problems with future budgets, including the pensions, which take up around 25 per cent of the expenditure of the government.

It is a pity that **George Turner's** books seem to have completely disappeared from the market place.

You may know that I published two of his novels decades ago when I edited an SF series for **Suhrkamp**, albeit they were little noticed. The SF scene has completely changed, and what I did in the seventies until the end of the century would not be possible today. Especially short stories have completely disappeared from the big publishers, and appear only from small amateur houses in a few hundred copies, if at all. But what I am doing now is still the result from my beginnings in the seventies of the last century, by completely unexpected turns that nobody could have planned. I had a lot of luck, and by and large, the rewards were much bigger than the disappointments, and I can be content, although in retrospect I would make some things quite differently.

(31 October 2024)

And there are more photos of me on the net than I care (plus house, etc.). I attach another photo of me with Rosa. I look a bit different than I was in

the nineties.

The number of book stores and secondhand shops is decreasing, although recently there have been (in Vienna) some new ones opened, sometimes very specialised ones, by young, enthusiastic people who care about the books they sell. Flea markets used to have a lot of science fiction, mostly the popular **Heyne SF**, but now they are very rare, unless a collector has died and the heirs have donated the book collection. In general, books are almost worthless, or they are so rare that they command fancy prices. In many cases costs of postage are a multiple of the book price.

And **mail services** everywhere seem to be bent on preventing the sale of books. In Germany, the conditions for boxes to send books are so strict (in regard to re-use) that many dealers refuse to send books abroad. Gone are the wonderful days when dealers like Dick Witter had whole sets of rare magazines for a few cents and a complete mail bag cost only a few dollars! The problem then was only that few of us had then the money to buy books in bulk.

I also have a **house full of books**, most of them unread, many of them bought for the sake of completeness, with no intention to ever reading them. But there are so many books that I should read and cannot get around to it. But in theory it is now possible to get any book from all over the world, though perhaps at great cost. And since book production is now so easy and costs little, a lot of classics (i.e. any unreadable sufficiently old book) are now back in print.

But it is gratifying that a 1972 book like **Roadside Picnic** still sells better every year than many new releases, in USA and UK, despite all the political problems with Russia, and even taking into account inflation, much better than the whole Lem list did during my time as his agent. But its sales are nothing in comparison to such exercises in sadism as **Orson Scott Card's Ender's Game**.

In the bookstores the SF section consists mostly of fantasy (and most often SF hides under the fantasy label). Overwhelming is the amount of mysteries and crime novels. **Mystery series**, often local ones, fill also the programs of most TV stations. There are quiet little towns in Austria (like Kitzbühler) or Germany (Rosenheim) that seem to be hotspots of criminal energy, with more violent deaths than Chicago in the time of Al Capone. The sales of 'literary' titles, however, are mostly minuscule, and without other income, most of the reviewed literary writers would be near starving.

It is a curious world.

(31 October 2024)

## CY CHAUVIN

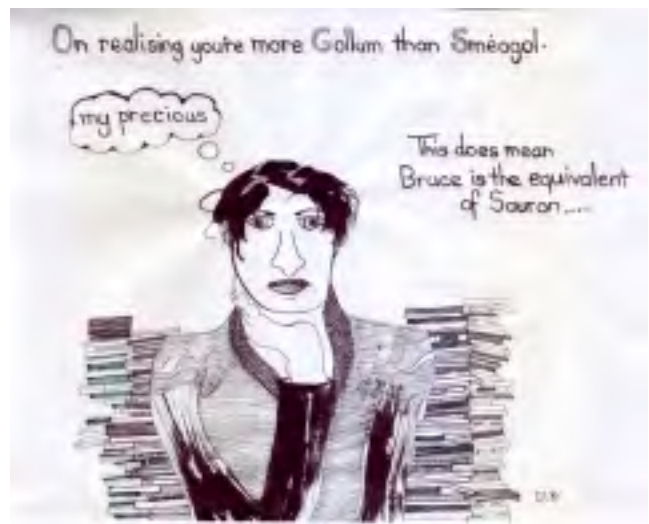
17829 Peters, Roseville,  
Michigan 48066, USA

I was surprised to find **David Pringle's** books *The 100 Best Science Fiction Novels* (1984) and *The 100 Best Fantasy Novels* (1989) at the library, and so out of curiosity I borrowed them. Do you have them? Since you are the Master of Listmania, they seem right up your alley; or perhaps they are just on some dark and discarded list of your own. *The 100 Best Science Fiction Novels* seems quite standard, with few unusual or outré choices, and knowing David's taste, you can forgive him going overboard on novels by **Philip K. Dick** and **J. G. Ballard** (although *Crash* is not by any stretching of definitions sf), but *The 100 Best Fantasy Novels* is all over the place, with many strange and unusual choices, and even books I've not heard of by well-known authors (*The Sinful Ones* by **Fritz Leiber** being most notable). Those choices are the most interesting for those of us who have read too much science fiction and fantasy already. But what I really wanted to say is that both these books date from the last century, and there is a need for a best 100 from 1984 on (or at least a best 50 — another 100 is likely to be *The 100 Mediocre Novels of Fantasy and Science Fiction*). It would be, as you suggest, a handy reading guide.

[\*brg\* I have my precious copy of David Pringle's *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels: An English-Language Selection, 1949–1984*, but I cannot remember why I did not buy his *100 Best Fantasy Novels*. Indeed, I've never seen a copy. The obvious answer is that Melbourne's Space Age Books was still operating until the end of 1985, but closed shop then, and that Merv Binns made sure he stocked books such as *The 100 Best Novels*. For some reason I did not order *Best Fantasy Novels* from Justin Ackroyd of Slow Glass Books, Space Age's successor, although I'm sure I must have read about it in *Locus*. I would really like it, if anyone has a battered old copy for sale.

Cy, you might not have heard about the successor to *100 Best Novels*. Compiled by Damien Broderick and Paul Di Filippo, *Science Fiction: The 101 Best Novels, 1985–2010* (Nonstop Press, 2012) lists a lower percentage of my own favourites than does David Pringle's original volume, but it does include an Introduction by David. Both feature wonderfully crunchy lists. My favourite novel from the original list is *Hothouse*, by Brian Aldiss, and from the Broderick and Di Filippo list, *The Sea and Summer*, by George Turner.\*]

Your editorial is interesting as always. I am still addicted to 'real' (postal) mail as well, and watch



for the mail carrier to come by, and try not to appear too anxious if I meet him on the sidewalk or coming up the lawn. 'Hello John' (a neighbour told me his name), 'nice that the weather has cooled down.' I notice that all those who say that 'snail mail' is obsolete order numerous packages from **Amazon**, or via **Federal Express**, **UPS**, etc.: and I believe the surprise and pleasure of something delivered to the house is much the same. (\*Rustle\* \*click\*) I just now heard something thump in the mailbox; it's likely to be **StippleApa** or maybe a train magazine. Bruce, you don't know what willpower it takes to keep on writing this letter to you, and not check.

I have to agree with **John Litchen** and his assessment that *The Man in a High Castle* is likely **Philip K. Dick's** best novel. I reread it five to ten years ago, and was amazed by its quality. John considers at the end of his review the 'reality' of the world in the novel, and notes that its future is not very advanced from our own — is it alternate history, or a parallel dimension? — and mentions *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, a 'science fiction' novel about our reality written by another character. I think this all links with something John writes about earlier in his review: the dealer who sells 'fake' antique pre-war items to the Japanese who occupy California, and who cannot tell the difference between what is real and what is genuine. This is the same theme Dick is peddling: what is the essence of something that is historical, if you can duplicate it exactly? It does seem to worry a lot of writers: what is fake? Of course, most of these pop art items aren't actually used for what they were intended, but become display artifacts. (That happens today to a lot of historical buildings and machinery, and is a disappointment to me.)

About my own article on **science fiction and poetry**: I found another **Brian Aldiss** story that seems an oblique comment on the subject, called



'**The Moment of the Eclipse**' (in the same collection as '**The Worm That Flies**'). The story is about, or inspired by the poem, '**Poem at a Lunar Eclipse**' by **Thomas Hardy**. In the Aldiss story, the main character wants to make a film based on Hardy's sonnet. 'To synopsise a poem is absurd,' the character says in his narration. 'My host, however, claimed that the sequence of visual images I had sketched to him as being capable of conveying this mysterious sense fell too easily into the category of science fiction, and that what I required was a more conservative approach [for his film] ...there was the force of truth in what he said; the trappings should not be a distraction from but an illumination of the meaning'. In 1969, when the story was first published, there was a lot of discussion of the 'trappings' of science fiction.

Most of this letter was written on 16 August, and delayed not just from mail in physical mail boxes and other normal procrastination, but from beautiful sunny weather. Michigan has had a long 'Indian Summer', filled with mild weather, but now the wet and cold is coming. I hope your own coming summer is as nice.

(17 October 2024)

## HENRY GASKO

119 Moroney Street, Bairnsdale VIC 3875

I've just finished the *SFCs* that you sent out awhile ago (thanks very much!) and saw that my last letter to you and Elaine was mid last year. So I thought I would send a quick catch-up.

As mentioned there, I did go to Canada last September and October to visit **my mother**, who is now 93 but still going strong. While I was away, **Judy** dislocated her shoulder and was in quite a bit of pain for some months. It has healed now, but it meant that she had to cancel the planned second knee replacement in November, since she would not be able to use crutches. And even now that the shoulder has healed, she has decided not to go forward with the knee replacement — she has a slight limp but no pain and she remembers the pain of recovering from the last one too well.

The other big news is that our **grandson Finley** (Emily and Ollie's only child) has been officially diagnosed with level 2 autism. It has been apparent for some time that he was not developing normally, and this is actually a relief, since it means that they have been able to register him for NDIS and get financial help. We're not sure how that is going to work out with the changes to NDIS, but at least it is better than it was.

Nothing else has changed much. We spend

much of our time in our caravan in **Paynesville**, and Emily and Ollie and Finley are living in the house we bought in **Bairnsdale**. They are still working towards selling their old house, which is sitting empty, and building on their bush block. But there has been a lot happening in their lives in the past year (related to Finley as well as Ollie's job) and so there has not been a lot of progress. But we are pretty cosy in our little caravan and so we are not pushing them.

**Anne** is still performing at **Witches in Britches**, as well as several shifts a week in a bakery. But I think she is starting to realise that this is not a viable long-term option and she is wondering where she might go with the rest of her life.

As for other activities, Judy was getting stir crazy after having to give up the **Tiny Homes** project in Wallan. So she has started another group — **Verge Gardens** for East Gippsland. It is certainly keeping her busy, organising meetings with residents and with councillors, and working towards a big festival next March.

I haven't been nearly as productive recently. As well as cycling and swimming and gym work, I rediscovered my love of **bridge**, and am playing two or three times a week — once with a 96-year-old lady who is a marvellous role model for growing older even though her analytical skills are waning somewhat. And I am also playing with a much younger woman (only 80!), who is very keen to go to competitions and is very good. Sadly bridge is a dying pastime these days. I learned to play when I was in university and have played most of my life. But these days, at 73, I am often the youngest person in the room!

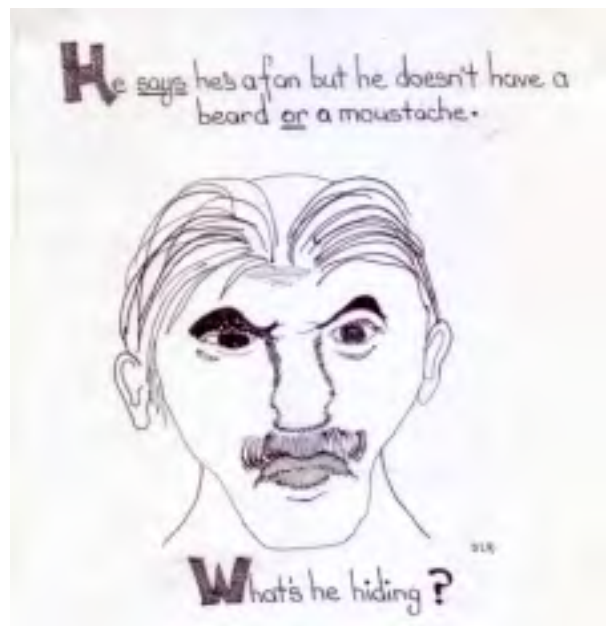
Unfortunately I have not been writing much lately. Finley's diagnosis has put me into a bit of a depression (self-diagnosed) as I am working through the implications. However I am still a slush pile reader for **DreamForge**. It's a small American SF magazine run by **Scot and Jane Noel** out of Pittsburgh. I would highly recommend it to any of your readers. There are a number of their stories available free on the internet, including a few of my own. Just search for my name, since I am **the only Henry Gasko in the world** at the moment — one of the few perks of having a strange-sounding surname. *DreamForge* are now open for another round of submissions and we have received over 1000 — a lot of people out there want to be SF writers! So I am busy reading a lot of good and not-so-good stories.

I did take a couple of undergrad writing courses from **Curtin University** in the last six months to see if I was missing anything, since I often disagree

strongly with the literary works that win awards these days. One was on straight **Short Story Writing**, and the other was on **Experimental Fiction**. Sadly, they both left me pretty much none the wiser. There was a lot of emphasis in both courses on writing to get a message across, and very little emphasis on writing a good old-fashioned entertaining story.

I am also in email conversations with a couple of fellow writers — a lady in Seattle, and a Texan living in Hamburg. He suggested that I try a little **Magical Realism** (specifically **Brian Evenson** — short story writer specialising in MR horror). So I did that and it inspired me to try writing a bit of it. I have come up with a trilogy of sorts (but only 3000 words), which I have attached for your amusement if you are interested. The middle section is a new MR story which I wrote after reading some Evenson, though it turned out to be not much like his stuff. And the first and third sections are adaptations of stuff I wrote a while ago but which (hopefully) fit together thematically.

I've never been a big fan of Magical Realism but I am finding it quite interesting trying to figure out what people (mostly critics) see in it. And it is certainly easier to write than straight SF or even 'hard horror', where you have to make sure everything follows more or less logically from the underlying premises. In MR, it often seems that the less logicity, the better. And it is a very popular genre among a lot of magazines out there. So I may hold



my nose and try a few more — they're actually fun in a way. Of course they need to have a certain amount of resonance with the public, but readers of Magical Realism tend to be very good at reading whatever they like into a story.

That's all for now. Hope your leg finally healed and you and Elaine are going well. If you ever want a nice holiday in a lovely part of the state (Gippsland), there is a train service to Bairnsdale, and the caravan park here has some nice cabins where we can get you a discount.

(20 October 2024)

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## We also heard from ...

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Quite a few correspondents already about **SFC 118**. Those letters will appear in **SFC120**.

And tanks for 2004's greetings from these people and quite a few I've probably forgotten ...

**CREATH THORNE** ('Shortly after you wrote my spouse of 52 years died. While not unexpected (Ann had been very ill) it has thrown me for a loop. I'm just now trying to get back to what I guess is the New Normal'); **APOLLO PAPPS**; **THOMAS BULL**; **NICK THOMAS**; **SALLY YEOLAND** with continuing news of her health problems during 2024; change of residence; retirement; and much else — we're mainly in conversation via Facebook; **LECH KELLER**; **ROBERT ELORDIETA**; **PAUL COLLINS**; **WILLIAM SARILL** (It's always nice to see my writing appreciated; **ALEX SKOVRON**, in the middle of home renovations; **BEN PEEK**; **PAUL**

**DI FILIPPO**; **JOHN D. BERRY**; **JEFF HAMILL**; **DAVE CLARKE**, my CD supplier friend from Readings Carlton, who had to leave when the store stopping stocking CDs; Dave is okay, but I've visited the Carlton store only once since he left); **GUY SALVIDGE**, whose *Diemens* I mention at the beginning of this issue; **LESLEIGH LUTTRELL**, with the first of two recent letters; the second will be featured in SFC 120; **SANJAR SIRCAR** ('Congratulations; the 55th Anniversary is good'); **BARBARA SHARPE**, who has been making sure that I receive the PDFs of the bimonthly Shakespeare Society newsletters (actually fine fanzines) and monthly Dickens Society newsletters; **DAVID PEPPERELL**; **ADRIENNE RALPH**; **IRWIN HIRSH** (see my thank-you to Irwin at the beginning of the issue); **PERRY MIDDLEMISS** (many helpful emails about thises and thats, plus PDFs of *Perryscope*.)

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# Robert Day

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## The longest Day: Three years of reading SFC

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### ROBERT DAY

Flat 2, Heatherlea, Station Road,  
Kirby Maxloe, Leicestershire LE9 2EN, UK



### SFC 107 (November 2021)

Thanks for reprinting the tributes to **Judith Hanna**. I last spoke to her (and **Joseph Nicholas**) at the Dublin Worldcon. What I always remember about Judith was that we met up infrequently, but she always greeted me as if we'd just met up after a week's absence, not a year's or even more. I attended her funeral service virtually where Joseph delivered his eulogy, always a difficult thing.

You wrote about the 5.9-scale earth tremor; the UK doesn't get many such tremors, but I've experienced two (and missed at least two more that were so faint as for me not to notice them). Perhaps the biggest one I recollect was the **Great Walsall Earthquake**. This was a 5.0-scale quake in September 2002. Walsall was some 25 miles from where I was living at the time; the house I had then was actually just on one side of a fault line. It was 12:40 a.m. and I remember standing at the sink just tidying up before I went to bed and hearing a rumbling sound, as though some heavy machinery was coming down the lane that ran in front of the house. 'What's the farmer doing out at this time of night?' I thought as the rumbling got louder; then it got louder than any farm machinery

I'd ever heard, and it approached from my left and seemed to be moving west to east. It passed by, but didn't shake the house — I was on the right side of the fault, it seems. The noise died away to the east, and I actually waited a few minutes waiting for the sound of an impact, because by then — never having experienced a serious earthquake — I'd rationalised this down to something really extreme, such as an asteroid strike, so I was hoping that ground zero would be sufficiently far away not to affect me. I was quite relieved the next day to find out that it had 'merely' been an earthquake ...

Reading back to the **Plague Years**, here in the UK we had a Prime Minister whose actions during the pandemic became notorious — first for indecision, then for profiteering. MPs were able to suggest companies to provide urgently needed supplies to the NHS, many of which turned out to (a) belong to friends of those MPs; and (b) have had no experience whatsoever of supplying anything to anybody before; unsurprisingly, a number of minor entrepreneurs suddenly found themselves trousering massive amounts of money for providing unusable rubbish instead of Personal Protective Equipment; and (c) for partying whilst telling everyone else that they had to isolate, and indeed risked arrest if caught breaking some vague ill-defined rules against association. This became known as '**Partygate**', and whilst it wasn't quite a bottle of whisky, revolver, and one bullet moment for Boris Johnson, it did finish his career, as well as setting the Tories on the downward slope that they find themselves almost at the foot of ... I write two days before a General Election that the polls suggest may be an Extinction Level event for the Conservative Party. Never was a calamity better deserved.

Five days later: well, that was something of a blast. An almost non-stop **Labour landslide**, with many Big Names from the last 14 years of British Conservative politics consigned to the dustbin of history. Marred mainly by a low turnout, which has led to **Nigel Farage**, of the insurgent right-

wing Reform UK Party — actually a limited company in which he is primary shareholder — complaining loudly about getting 14 per cent of the vote but only 9 per cent of the seats in our first-past-the-post electoral system. Margaret Thatcher changed the UK totally on a share of 40–45 per cent of the popular vote, and progressive political parties complained about it for years without causing any waves. Nigel Farage, who is a politician exceptionally fond of the sound of his own voice and who constantly and loudly moans that the mainstream media are forever cancelling him when he's the UK party leader with the most exposure to airtime on BBC's flagship public debate show *Question Time*, makes one complaint and suddenly Proportional Representation is a hot topic. Still, we managed the traditional seamless transfer of power in around 90 minutes and no-one accused the ballot of being rigged or felt the need to take to the streets to protest the result.

At this remove in time, most **Covid stories** now seem like distant reports from a foreign land. The one odd thing that happened to me was that after one of my inoculations, I developed a sympathetic pain in the opposite arm to the jab site. My GP said 'Yes, I've had other people say that' but couldn't offer any explanation.

Having said that, I think I may recently have had the latest Covid variant earlier this week; I developed a cough and a runny nose midweek; and these were accompanied by headaches, something I don't normally get. They were a bit akin to stress headaches, which is odd because I don't really have that much to stress over right now (although my car failed its MoT — the annual statutory safety test — because one of the rear passenger door catches had failed and the door couldn't be opened from the outside). Two problems:

Problem (1): As my car is 25 years old, Volkswagen UK no longer carry the full range of parts for it, even though the same bodysell — and presumably the same door catches — is used by other companies in the VW group, such as Skoda and SEAT. My garage has odd rules about their not buying parts on the grey market, but only from approved suppliers, so I had to source the part myself. It's widely available — after all, my car is still made by VW in Mexico! — but I had to do the ordering.

Problem (2): Because they can't get the door open easily, the job of fitting a new door catch is going to be fiddly, and will be a good two hours' work. Add the MoT retest fee and we were looking at a bill in the region of £220. Not huge, but potentially more than I had available in my account. Until last Wednesday, when I got the

welcome news that I was due a tax refund from our Inland Revenue. Hoorah!

So I might have been having stress headaches from relief at not having to stress over my car any further. Or I might have had a minor bout of Covid. Seeing as I don't have access to a car at the moment, that makes the question of my mixing with other people a bit academic anyway, at least until this coming Thursday when the car goes to the garage.

I read **Pete Rogan's** exploration of the use of the **atomic weapons** against Japan with considerable interest. My father was in Italy in 1944; after the fall of Rome, he was rotated back to the UK and sent to a holding battalion at Hunstanton in Norfolk, there to await posting to begin training for the British Far East Expeditionary Force, known as 'Tiger Force'. He always took the view that the use of the A-bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki was to prevent the extreme loss of life on both sides that the invasion of the Japanese Home Islands would involve. I see Pete's opinion of this. But recently, I've become aware of another strand to this argument. The US Navy had a number of admirals who were severely anti-British, who were delighted when the Japanese took Singapore and were determined to keep the British out of the war in the Pacific. Such men would have been appalled by the involvement of the British in the invasion of the Home Islands, and so would be quite happy to see the use of atomic weapons to draw a line under the Pacific War in a way that would keep that ocean a specifically American ocean.

I am reminded of **George Dyson's** book on the **US Project Orion**, the spaceship to be powered by exploding atomic bombs behind it. At one point, he is talking about American inter-service rivalries, and commented that the US Army lived in fear of reaching the Moon, only to find that they'd been beaten to it, not by the Soviets but by the US Air Force.

I was interested to see **Colin Steele's** short review of **Chris Priest's** *The Evidence*. I reviewed this recently as a part of my catch-up reading of Priest's last books, which I have now completed with *Airside*. I think I now know why the last time I saw Chris Priest (at Novacon 50), he was selling copies of his books from out of a suitcase. None of his recent novels has been easily categorisable in ways that publishers like. But I hope to return to this as I write my piece on his 'Dream Archipelago' stories, 'A Dream of Islands'.

## SF Commentary 108

February 2022 88 pages

This edition was published in SF Commentary  
Virtual Meetings special feature



### SFC 108 (February 2022):

**Gillian Polak's** account of hosting an online convention will in future years probably become a noted historical account of a time when virtual events were new. I actually did an online training course during the first Covid year (2020), but because it was an **IT training course**, the course leader was already pretty well familiar with such things. He was based in Toronto; most of the rest of us were in the UK, but I seem to recollect that we had at least one participant in continental Europe and one in Tunisia. Oh, and another in Canada; but whereas the course leader was boasting about his personal sacrifice in getting up at 6:30 a.m. to start delivering the course at 7:30 a.m. so we could start at the civilised time of 10:30 a.m., the other Canadian deflated him somewhat by saying 'Well, I'm in Calgary, so that's a 4:30 a.m. start for me.' We found few problems by and large, other than local loop connectivity issues; in particular, we had sessions where we split into seminar groups, and that all went perfectly well. The course was led by **Michael Bolton** — no, not *that* one; this Michael Bolton is one of the superstars of the IT software testing community, and quite open to the idea that SF may have a valid role to play in defining the enquiring mindset that a good tester will need to be effective.

I read your review on **Dave Langford's** *Don't Try This At Home* (and promptly went online and ordered a copy). Your plaintive cry of 'where is Dave's report on ... Brighton 1979?' made me wonder; where indeed is Dave's report on **Seacon**? I seem to remember there was something appeared, though as I Was Also There at the time, I may be conflating lots of different fanzine pieces with my own recollections. And sadly, my fanzine collection was one of the things I lost in the move from Warwickshire. But I dived into my collection of Langfordiana, thinking that something might

have been reprinted in 1987's *Platen Stories*, but in the introduction to that volume, Dave commented that 'Some of the 1970s snapshots look a bit faded and embarrassing ... even I haven't the gall to (re-) reprint them...' Dave has always been his own worst critic, though he invokes British fan legend D. West at the very outset, who said 'The only proper place for old fanzine articles is in old fanzines.' I also recollect that Dave was standing for the 1980 TAFF race and so might well have spent much of the convention being seen and delivering bon mots to the assembled Good Folk of Fandom. And yet, I have a vague recollection of an account of an incident where Dave poured beer over some deserving person's head ...

I was interested to see **John Litchen's** piece on **Wilmar H. Shiras' Children of the Atom**, because some years ago I acquired a few 1940s *Astoundings* for not very much money, and in reading through these, in the November 1948 issue, I came across a short story by Shiras, '**In Hiding**', which turned out to be the first part of *Children of the Atom*. I was really quite impressed. Perhaps I felt the denouement of the story was a bit rushed, but it was well written and engaged my interest far more than I'd expected. (Though a lot of the things the child psychologist in the story does in terms of how he handles his patient would get him struck off nowadays, if not put on a register somewhere!) Given the extent to which stories about 'atomic mutants' quickly became a cliché in the 1950s, a story about mutants who were benign and whose mutations didn't give their subjects uncanny powers and the desire to wear Spandex out of doors was really quite refreshing and not the sort of discovery I expected to make in a Golden Age pulp.

You said on Facebook that you hadn't been able to secure a copy of **Simon Winchester's** book on **Krakatoa**. Well, we can fix that; let me find a jiffy bag and my copy will be on its way to you later in the week. It's the least I can do in return for all the fanzines you've sent me over the years.

**PS: Relevant review:**

**PROJECT ORION: THE ATOMIC SPACESHIP,  
1957–1965  
by George Dyson  
(Deep Waters Reading (wordpress.com))**

(14 July 2024)

**[\*brg\* You really know how to surprise a bloke on a wet winter Sunday morning in Greensborough, Melbourne. SFCs 107 and 108! Ancient history? Hardly. I did have a good run on publishing SFC from the first months of Covid**

onward, and I remember most of the pieces in *SFC* to which you refer.

If Britain goes over to preferential and/or proportional voting, they would find that it can disadvantage small parties even more than happens at the moment. The Greens have scored consistently 10 to 12 per cent of the vote throughout urban Australia for many years, but only recently have they been able to capture a small number of inner suburban seats in three capital cities. Our system usually throws up contests between the two major sides, with only one minority government (Julia Gillard Labor plus two Independents for three years) in my lifetime. However, the total vote is now being split 32/34/34 between Labor, Liberal/National (i.e. Tories), and all other parties, but it's the second preferences of voters for the other parties that decide which of the two major parties actually govern. First-past-the-post voting would wipe out quite a few independents, including those who have been able to capture seats from the Nationals in country electorates.

Let's see how your new Labour Government gets on, given the problems left unsolved by the Tories. Here, Albanese was given a clear mandate to sweep away much of the stink left by the previous 15 years of Lib/Nats, but has merely flicked a broom at some important problems. Some state Labor governments, such as ours in Victoria, have had continuing success because they have actually Done Something.

Thanks very much for the offer of Simon Winchester's book on Krakatoa! But I think you'll find the cost of postage is wallet-breaking. You are excused from sending it. I certainly could not afford to send a book overseas these days.\*]

You were completely right about **postage charges to Australia!** For my own edification, I went to the post office to see for myself what sending an average-sized 'B' format paperback would cost. Answer? £18 untracked, £21 tracked. I know you knew this, but I really had to see for myself. Mind you, domestic first class post has escalated severely in price here: 75p two years ago, £1.35 now. How much of this is reflecting actual costs and how much is price gouging I don't know.

So thanks for the absolution you granted me for not sending the Winchester book to you. At least I now have some idea of the relative values involved: £18 to send a rather third-hand reading copy is definitely too much to cope with! To justify that sort of expenditure, any future gift will have to be of considerably higher value. Still, when I come across the Winchester in future, I shall think of it as 'that book I nearly sent to Bruce'.

I suspect I've been seeing the links to more recent issues of *SFC*, but I get such a lot of

**Facebook** traffic that they don't always register with my forebrain. And that's assuming that the FB UI is performing in any sort of rational way, which I've noticed no longer seems to be the case. My newsfeed now appears to have stopped displaying posts in date order, and indeed may change the stories posted whilst I'm scrolling down the page. I've found that if I scroll past something and then try to go back to it, it isn't always still there. (LinkedIn seems to have worked like this for ages.) Only by specifically selecting 'Feeds' from the sidebar do I get posts displayed in chronological order with any degree of stability.

(And now, Facebook has stopped working for me altogether. It has started using 2-Factor Authentication, where you get an access code sent to a nominated e-mail address or mobile phone; but two days ago, the codes stopped coming through, leaving me unable to log in. Typically, there is no option on their 2FA notification screen to select a different nominated device or account. Then yesterday, Facebook suddenly started telling me that I was using 'the wrong credentials' when they aren't wrong at all. This is the sort of behaviour that I noticed as the prelude to FB's Great Outage of 2021; and I see that today, Microsoft 365 is down across large swathes of Europe, making me wonder what platform Meta is using to host their credential checking. [www.downdetector.co.uk](http://www.downdetector.co.uk) has been reporting a high volume of reports of Facebook outages in the last 24 hours; perhaps someone needs to put another shilling in the meter ...)

Instead of relying on notifications, I just have a link to **Bill Burns' eFanzines** pinned to a task bar at the top of my browser workspace; that works for me and I can keep some sort of track as to where I am with catching up. Once I have caught up, of course, the reminders will be useful.

Well, the furore over **proportional representation** is now dying down here as **Nigel Farage** gets to grips with actually being an MP instead of just wanting to be one. So far, he has not covered himself in Parliamentary glory, having absented himself from the State Opening to go to his constituency, and then abandoning both Parliament and his constituency to dash over to the US to be at Donald Trump's side after his brush with death. Which would have been nice for him, except that Trump couldn't make time to see him, leaving Farage paying for a return trans-Atlantic flight and nothing to show for it. When he was an MEP, he was notorious for not actually turning up for any of the European parliament business he was actually eligible for, such as taking up his seat on the EPs Fisheries Committee — a sector he claimed that his campaign to take

us out of the EU would benefit greatly. (Fishermen are now seeing how hollow that promise was, as their 'just-in-time' export sales to the EU have evaporated now that the necessary paperwork makes European sales impossible to complete within the shelf life of their catch.)

Farage never understood that other European countries have Euro-sceptic MEPs as well, but their objective was to go to Brussels and squeeze every last Euro out of the EU for the benefit of their constituents. Farage instead saw himself as the scourge of the whole institution, dedicated to its long-term destruction. This still seems to be a theme in the right-wing elements of the British press, who delight in stories about how the EU is doomed or should be brought down, even though it no longer affects us. Why are they even bothered, I ask myself, unless there is a rightist conspiracy to unravel international co-operation? Oh, but I forgot; there are no right-wing conspiracies; all conspiracies are leftist ones, or so we are constantly told.

Meanwhile, **our new government** is doing some things differently — such as actually appointing a scientist as the Minister for Science, or someone with knowledge of the prison system as Minister for Prisons. In other areas, they seem to be keeping to the same course as before, though so much of the criticism on matters of foreign policy or broad direction are commented on by those further to the Left than the Prime Minister, so a certain amount of salt has to be taken with it. On the other hand, seven left-wing Labour MPs who dared to step out of line for voting in favour of removing a two-child benefit cap when this wasn't in the manifesto have been suspended from the party for six months. This is seen as being exceptionally harsh (seeing as seven rebels hardly threaten a 400-plus majority in the House), and may yet bring about a long-awaited split of the Labour Party into a social democratic centrist party and an overtly Socialist one. But then again, that's been forecast ever since the Tony Blair days.

My copy of **Dave Langford's** *Don't Try This at Home* arrived fairly quickly, and it will go into a fairly high spot on the upper slopes of Mount TBR. A quick check on arrival showed me that I actually feature in the book, displaying alcohol-fuelled excess at Silicon 3 (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1978), and a self-deprecating comment on said excess. I probably won't add that to my own personal bibliography.

Just as Dave's own *Ansible* is full these days of notices of peoples' passing, so I see *SFC* also has to be. Your note on **Eve Harvey** was appreciated; I can't claim to have known the Harveys that well,



but Eve always had a friendly greeting for me on the infrequent times when we bumped into each other.

In some areas, my reading is very behind, worse than for *SFC*; so it was something of a surprise to pick up the next copy of *Foundation* off the magazine/journal TBR pile to find you beaming at me on the cover, in the company of **George Turner**. Yes, it was their Year 2000 special Australian issue. Your own contribution made me realise that it's a long time since I've read any of George's novels, and indeed I still have *Brain Child*, *The Destiny Makers*, and *Genetic Soldier* on the TBR pile.

## SFC 110 (July 2022)

Your review of *Portable Storage 7* mentions **Greg Benford's** memories of **Brian Aldiss**. I met him a few times; I was pleased to be able to tell him, late in life, that he was responsible for my serious interest in SF. My mother was fond of Mills & Boon romance novels, and my father would bring a selection for her from our local library each week. He always went by whether he recognised the cover picture, so from time to time something odd would turn up. One Saturday, it was Aldiss's *Report on Probability A*. He realised fairly quickly that he'd made a bit of a blob there, so he gave it to me.

I was probably 13 or 14 at the time. I hardly understood a word of it; but I found its very weirdness exciting, and I quickly went out to try to find more like it. (The next SF I read was the novels of **James Blish's** *Cities in Flight*, but in reverse order ...)

The last time I spoke with Brian Aldiss was at a meeting of the Birmingham SF Group, where amongst other things he hit on my other half quite

unashamedly. This would have been three or four years before he died, so he was pushing 90 at the time. About four years ago, his children bought some of Brian's own SF collection to Novacon to sell, and I'm pleased to say that I acquired a couple of them.

I, too, take guilty pleasure in **Conan the Barbarian**, especially that thumping **Basil Poledouris** score. The premise creaks a bit: we are supposed to think that Conan developed into a mightily thewed warrior through spending his late childhood and adolescence in heavy slave labour and subsisting on a diet of gruel at best. Yes, 'what does not destroy you makes you strong' said Nietzsche, but I doubt that he intended it as the cornerstone of a nutrition plan.

I find **Arnold Schwarzenegger** an interesting character. I once read a story that he got his interest in films by working as a grip on the Austrian crew for *The Sound of Music*. I have never been able to verify this, though I now feel it falls into the category of 'too good to check'. I do think that he is underrated as an actor, although his range is fairly small; he plays 'Mr. Ordinary' roles in **The 6th Day** and **True Lies** (although in that latter his character does live a double life). I still feel his standout role is as the eponymous Terminator in **Terminator**; for an emotionless killer cyborg from the future, he injects a lot of emotion into the role without allowing it to show. That's clever.

Pleased to see **Colin Steele** acknowledging **Ken MacLeod's** latest work, his '**Lightspeed**' trilogy. Just when you think that MacLeod has exhausted all the possibilities of Leftist politics and thought, he finds a new angle, and Lightspeed is no exception. His scenario of a future world divided into the Alliance (UK/USA/Aus/NZ/India), Union (the EU, plus a unified Ireland and an independent Scotland) and the Co-ordinated States (China and Russia) seems all too likely; his treatment of the Faslane nuclear submarine base in Scotland as an enclave of the Alliance is a practical real-world solution that would also be most likely even if no Scottish politicians on the nationalist side have thought that far ahead yet. I have the final volume of this, **Beyond the Light Horizon**, sitting about four books from the top of Mount TBR. My one big objection to this trilogy is nothing to do with MacLeod; his publisher has only issued this series in 'B' Format paperback. There is no hardback edition: and MacLeod is an author who I have tried to always collect in hardback. Grrr.

I was intrigued to see **Colin Steele's** review of **Chums**; how a tiny cadre of Oxford Tories took over the UK. Just to bring that up to date, both Liz

Truss and Rishi Sunak went to Oxford. Keir Starmer took his first degree at Leeds University, but he did a postgraduate degree in law at Oxford. Make of that what you will. Still, it makes quite a change to have an entire Cabinet without a single Etonian.

## SFC 111 (December 2022)

I understand your mixed feelings at **retirement**. I've now been retired just over a year. My finances cover my regular outgoings, but any unexpected expenditure causes problems. In January, my car battery died unexpectedly, and in order to replace it, I had to go into my overdraft. I only got that cleared this past month when I had a tax refund. I was one of the lucky cohort who was amongst the first to get the enhanced State Pension; that plus my Civil Service pension provides enough to meet all my regular outgoings, but nothing extra. I'm now congratulating myself in having built up a stash of books to read, DVDs to watch, and models to build whilst I was earning.

The big political news this week relates to this. The new Labour Government has uncovered a **financial black hole** which they say the Tories concealed. Cue angry retorts from the former (now Shadow) Chancellor. The existence of this black hole was tacitly acknowledged by both sides during the election campaign; the Tories claim that the new government have made it worse by committing to above-inflation pay rises for public sector workers — implying that if they'd won, said workers would have to have managed again with a below-inflation rises, resulting in their voting with their feet and the government having difficulty recruiting. (After all, this was one of the reasons I left the Civil Service in 2010.) I don't recollect the outgoing Chancellor moaning about the Tories' mockery of the 'There's no money left' note left in jest by the outgoing Chief Secretary to





the Treasury in 2010. After all, Gordon Brown was only credited with saving the world financial system during the crash of 2008; a mere bagatelle.

**[\*brg\* Gosh! Wow! According to our branch of the Murdoch Press, it was Australia's own (Liberal = Tory) Treasurer Peter Costello who saved the world financial system!\***

Anyway, one of the measures that Rachel Reeves, the new Chancellor, has announced is the scrapping of a universal **Winter Heating Allowance** of at least £200 for anyone not on a range of means-tested pension benefits. Now, I got that last year; but as the heating in my current place costs me a third of that for heating my last place, I've never been too exercised by the Winter Heating Allowance. I think I blew a big chunk of last year's at a model railway exhibition. This year? Well, I actually get a very small amount of assistance with housing costs from my local council — the grand sum of just over £4 a week. So I shall be interested to see whether that means-tested benefit is one that will count towards my getting a fuel allowance this coming winter.

As for **health problems**; I'm keeping my fingers crossed and not really talking about my own health, as I don't want to tempt fate. I could make a list of ailments, but right now there's nothing that's exceptionally restricting my ability to live the life I want (with the assistance of pharmaceuticals). Though I should probably check to see if I'm due to have my hearing reassessed.

I was first alerted to the wonders of **Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*** by a college friend very many years ago. It took me until my 2019 visit to the Dublin Worldcon to do something about it. Well, where better to buy a copy? But something strange happened whilst I was reading it. At the time, I had a BBC radio news/current affairs program on; and I became aware that the items I heard — an interview with a professor of political economy and migration statistics from the London School of Economics, followed by a piece on trying to get an AI to write topical jokes — seemed to acquire some of the oblique propensities of O'Brien's prose. Either the world was suddenly revealed to me in its true surreal nature, or the book itself was warping reality. Perhaps de Selby could enlighten me.

I've enjoyed the hard-science novels of **Alastair Reynolds**, though I did make a slight mistake in reading the first two books in the wrong order. But the sheer verisimilitude of Reynolds' hard-sf vision engaged me quite directly. So when I read ***Inhibitor Phase***, I had something of a sense of

anti-climax. Perhaps it was down to there having been a gap of some years between reading the original novels and coming to this one. I think I agree with **Colin Steele** on this; probably one for Reynolds fans rather than new readers.

My Christmas list last year included the **Terry Pratchett** biography. **Rob Wilkins'** book doesn't hold back from pointing out that Terry Pratchett wasn't necessarily the benign elf that he was sometimes depicted as. Certainly, the one time I spoke to him, I received moderately short shrift, and that was before he achieved megastardom status; but he was far from the worst offender in the 'spiky author' stakes. Even then, in the late 1980s/early 1990s, when he was still doing science fiction conventions, his reputation was such that he must have had countless people buttonholing him, and this book shows that he did not suffer fools gladly. At times, this book does come over as more like Pratchett than Pratchett himself, but that's no bad thing.

## SFC 112 (June 2023)

I was most interested to read **John Bangsund's 'Glimpses of a Golden Age'** in the section devoted to **Lee Harding**. I'm fairly certain I read part of this in an earlier *SFC*, but the Addendum was new to me. I found this interesting because of John's account of the **Victorian Railways Institute**. There were such bodies in the UK, of course, but they were mainly at the 'self-improvement' end of the spectrum. British Railways had sporting associations, of course, and musical societies of many different sorts; but none was quite as organised as the VRI, nor had the range of different facilities under one roof.

A Google search didn't return many hits for **'Victorian Railway Institute Library'**, though I did find a few personal reminiscences — see <https://www.flindersstreetstation.com.au/third-floor-stories.php>. I put a note out on **Library**

### SF Commentary 112

June 2023 31 pages

MEMBERS TO:  
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**Thing**, which has a railway discussion group, to see if there were other examples of railway undertakings with an equivalent to the VRI's lending library; but other than a single instance from Haarlem in the Netherlands, where a local branch library was located on the station to provide a service for the travelling public (and so only opened during commuter peak hours), no-one has given any instances of similar library operations. (The LT group includes members in the USA and both East and South Africa.) There was, of course, the relationship between railways and bookstalls, with W. H. Smiths in the UK and Bruna in the Netherlands. The **Dutch State Railways** (NS) apparently still sponsors an award for the most popular books voted on by passengers; and during their National Book Week at one stage gave free travel on the Sunday of that week to anyone with a copy of the Book Week award winner.

**Relevant reviews:**

**BEYOND THE HALLOWED SKY**

by Ken MacLeod (Deep Waters Reading (wordpress.com))

**BEYOND THE REACH OF EARTH**

by Ken MacLeod (Deep Waters Reading (wordpress.com))

(31 July 2024)

**SFC 113 (July 2023)**

I've started this loc during the interval in the **Worldcon Philharmonic Orchestra concert** on Day 2 of the **Glasgow Worldcon**. Not that I'm in Glasgow, you understand. Finances have been so up and down this year that I couldn't commit to attending, not knowing if I'd be able to afford the cost of getting there or hotel costs. Rail fares for

me to Glasgow would be in the region of £180 return per head; the air fare from Birmingham to Glasgow would be £50 each way, but then there'd be the cost of transfers to and from the airports. To take my car would involve three tanks of petrol, which would be about the same, though that would be split between two of us. But my car is 25 years old and overdue a service. It cost me around £350 to get through its statutory MoT annual safety check just last month, and I wasn't certain I'd be able to afford that until I had a tax refund come through. I've now booked it in for a service, but that can't be done for another 10 days. Also, I've asked them to replace the automatic transmission fluid. The vehicle is very jerky when it's first started, and remains so until it's run a mile or so to warm up the fluid. The transmission unit is supposedly 'sealed for life', but I suspect Volkswagen's idea of 'life' wasn't 25 years, and as far as I can see from the service record, no-one's ever changed the transmission fluid. And like all oils, it breaks down over time. So the idea of driving to Glasgow in a car overdue some serious TLC doesn't appeal.

(Later: the car has been given that TLC — some £340 worth! — and amongst other things I had the transmission fluid replaced. As I suspected, it looked 25 years old. More, the garage drained 2.1 litres out of the transmission, but put 3 litres back in. Unsurprisingly, it now drives a lot better than it did.)

Instead, I'm taking advantage of our modern technological age and streaming sessions that I want to see; so earlier today I 'attended' a panel on the mainstream novels of **Iain Banks**, and what attractions they hold for sf fans. Then there was a performance of organ music from **Interstellar** and **Ken MacLeod's Guest of Honour interview**. Finally, I watched a panel on **The Expanse** and an **orchestral concert** specifically for the Worldcon — a feature of both the London 2014 and Dublin 2019 conventions.

This would all be fine except that the feed kept freezing. Eventually, by noodling around the site, I found that I could 'unfreeze' the feed by either forcing a screen refresh or (if all else failed) reloading the whole program stream in a new browser tab. Well, we'll see how I get on tomorrow.

(Three days later:) Well, I got to grips with the live streaming, although I found that I was still having issues with the feed freezing. Some of that might have been at the con end, and some might have been at mine. I also found that some of the bigger set-piece events were more stable, as if the organisers had secured the use of more bandwidth. Mostly, I got to see what I wanted; a **memo-**



rial commemoration for **Chris Priest**, a panel on ‘when literary writers attempt SF’, and a further panel marking the 30th anniversary of **Stargate SG-1** (and its spin-offs); a series I am quite fond of, mainly because it never took itself too seriously.

**The one failure** was a talk on the Monday afternoon, just before the closing ceremony, on the **economics of generation starships**. The speaker was just getting into his stride when the feed went down and did not come back. A couple of other feeds also went down at the same time, and no-one was able to get them back before the session finished. I speculated that somewhere, there was an essential piece of streaming infrastructure physically located in an area where the convention had finished its occupation, and someone had switched the kit off without knowing either what it was for or that someone might still be using it. The speaker had originally withheld permission for a recording to be taken, for contractual reasons; but when he heard that there had been a streaming issue, he reversed that decision and so I shall have a chance to see the session in the next few days. Indeed, many of the convention sessions are available as digital replays, so I shall be going into the program again and seeing what is available that I initially thought not interesting enough to mark to stream.

Today (Wednesday 14 August), I had an interesting moment. **BBC Radio 4** has an influential and long-running magazine program, **Women’s Hour**, which has been looking over the past few months, on and off, at **genre fiction and how women relate to it**. So this morning they got around to science fiction and fantasy, and of course I listened. After the segment, I had to sit down and dash off an e-mail to them. In part, I said:

I began to wonder if I had myself slipped into some sort of alternate universe — one where the preceding weekend, the World Science Fiction Convention had not been held in Glasgow; one where all six Hugo awards for written science fiction or fantasy had not gone to women writers; one where half of the guests of honour were not women; one where many of the panel and lecture participants were not women; and one where more than half the senior organising committee were not women.

Neither of your two guests (**Moira Buffini** and **Larissa Lai**) seemed to be aware of either the convention, nor of the longstanding role of women in science fiction. Yes, the roots of science fiction were predominantly male, but women have now been visibly active in the field for more than half a century.

(**Larissa Lai** is a past recipient of the Tiptree Award, but she didn’t display a lot of awareness of the genre in the program segment.)

I added that their colleagues on **Radio 4**’s arts magazine program **Front Row** were more on the ball as they’d interviewed Hugo winner **Emily Tesh**, even if it was well after the event on Tuesday evening.

It’ll be interesting to see if I get any feedback...

(Later: I got none, and so turned this into the blog post you have seen and asked for reprint rights for. The rest you know...)

Meanwhile, back at **SFC113**...

It was quite a blast going down Memory Lane with **Daniel King**’s exploration of the SF of **Michael G. Coney**. I remember when his books first came out; he was British and New, and there was quite a bit of a stir. I recollect reading **Mirror Image**, **Syzygy**, **Winter’s Children**, and **Hello Summer, Goodbye** as well as **Friends Come in Boxes**, which Daniel missed covering; but then Coney seemed to drop off my radar and I think my copies went when I had a rare purge of the collection very many years ago. I reacquired a copy of **Hello Summer, Goodbye** in a new edition from **PS Publishing** at the Dublin Worldcon in 2019; it has yet to make it onto the trek from Base Camp to the slopes of Mount TBR.

Many of the more overtly **SFnal climate change novels** described by **Mats Dannewitz Linder** are also to be found along the path up Mount TBR. The point that both he and you make about how climate fiction is nothing new to readers of SF brought back to me one of the Worldcon panels I (virtually) attended, on what happens **when mainstream literary writers attempt SF**. The biggest groan of recognition came when someone paraphrased such a writer declaring ‘My next novel is going to be about AI, because that’s a hot topic at the moment. But what if the AI suddenly developed feelings?!’ I get the same sort of reaction myself, not to climate fiction as such, but to authors who loudly trumpet that what they are doing is important because they have done it and no-one else has ... But, as Mats says, quoting **Amitav Ghosh**, ‘The problem with what has been written so far, he says, is that it is seen as science fiction and is therefore not taken seriously.’ I recollect a former colleague, who was a great music fan and solid socialist, commenting that another colleague liked many of the same sort of bands and yet didn’t seem to take on board the messages within the music. The same can be said for some readers of SF — or some people who

ought to read SF but see it as beneath them. I was interested to see **Colin Steele**'s review of **Chris Priest**'s *Expect Me Tomorrow*. I was quite taken with this; on reflection, one thing that struck me was the reaction of one of the authors of 'my generation' to a calamitous future that might have seemed excessively doom-laden in the 1970s when I first encountered Priest's books, but now seems all too likely. The other thing that *Expect Me Tomorrow* had me doing was hitting the search engines, because Chris deftly wove real-life events into the narrative. The real-life case of **Adolph Beck** established a legal precedent of requiring evidence in the positive identification of suspects in criminal cases. Priest wove that case into the story so well that I spent some time looking for evidence that he had had a twin brother, so much was I able to suspend my disbelief.

I was fascinated with **Colin Steele**'s review of *Stalin's Library*. One of the things that I have always been struck by in reading about Communist states, and talking to people either brought up in those states or in nations that have turned away from Communism but whose schools and universities were established in the Communist era, has been just how much people who went through those educational systems were educated to think. That might seem unlikely to those brought up to believe in Communism as a monolithic ideology that demanded unthinking compliance from its citizens; and I have to qualify that idea of 'education in thinking' by adding that in Communist states, such thinking was strictly bounded by the truths allowed to be taught and the reference works used as the basic texts of the regime. And yet, I have found a great capacity for intellectual discussion amongst quite ordinary people from those backgrounds that would be unlikely to be found here in the UK. Perhaps one reason for the rapid collapse of Communism was that, once liberated from the ideological straight-jacket of the Moscow Line, many people rapidly saw the opportunities offered by the West and at the same time better understood the underpinnings of capitalist society in ways that enabled them to avoid some of its worst excesses. I've had discussions with Polish colleagues about the books of **Stanislaw Lem**; and my recent reading of the latest **Ken MacLeod** novel, *Beyond the Light Horizon* (conclusion to his 'Lightspeed' trilogy) made me observe that over the last 10 years of my working life, I often found myself boggling over some colleagues' reactions to business situations, and thinking 'I'm a grizzled old socialist, yet I understand the business dynamic at work here. Why can't you?'

We think of **Stalin** as a bloodthirsty tyrant; and

yet, like other Communist leaders, he was (as Colin points out) well read. Colin writes that Stalin 'praised the writings of political rival Leon Trotsky ...', and indeed, one of his favourite plays was **Bulgakov**'s *The White Guard*, a sympathetic portrait of a White family in Kiev (or Kyiv as we now call it) during the Russian Civil War (1917–22). Though it has to be said that the Socialist Realist painting of Stalin in his library that you reproduced sends some interesting messages; all the books visible are in uniform — and doubtless 'official' — editions, and safely kept behind glass, in case the wrong people should want to read them. Meanwhile, Stalin himself is shown pondering over one of the books of Lenin, gazing into the middle distance and doubtless (we are encouraged to imagine) thinking Great Thoughts. It is a glorious image of Soviet propaganda. (The immediately following image, of the Bookshop in Wigtown, is much more to my personal taste.)

Whilst we're on the subject of **Colin Steele**, the short bio of him you published in *SFC 115* triggered a memory for me, and the trigger word was 'librarian'. It seems that I have memories of seeing Colin's name referenced in professional literature during the later 1970s when I was qualifying as a librarian. A quick Google search throws up some bibliographic references, though nothing that I can swear I read, with the possible exception of his 1976 book *Major Libraries of the World*. As I reach my older age, I'm beginning to see all sorts of instances of the Interconnectedness of Things (and people), and this only reinforces that view.

Back to *SFC113*: **Steve Jeffery** asks about **Recently Read** piles. Well, that's my flat. There are piles of books that I've read, which, when I feel like some exercise, I rearrange into their proper order and integrate them with the books on the shelves, in some vain attempt to maintain the shelving order. Some books get put on one side, to be transferred to my storage unit (some 20 miles distant), or to be donated to Good Causes (there's an outwardly nice but very unfunny book of RAF humour that is going to end up as a raffle prize come Christmas). As for the rest: well, I seem to have evolved an old bibliomane's variant of tai chi in order to get around my flat without toppling piles of books. I maintain that it's not hoarding as long as you have a catalogue.

**[\*brg\* Here at Howard Street we have a catalogue — thanks to the enterprise of Elaine. She wrote the first version during the month before Covid, when we truly had no idea the tidal wave was nearly here. But Elaine did have some free time, so wrote a comprehensive catalogue of all the books I had collected after there was no**

space on the shelf for new books. All of these books became part of Mount To Be Read as soon as I bought them, but had not yet escaped the boxes to join the mountain. At that stage, the box tally was about 35, but is now 53. Add to them about 1300 books from the Dick Jenssen legacy. I have a further pile of 19 books that count as Absolutely Urgent and Should Be Read Next. They include eight novels by Mick Herron. Today I found in a bookshop John Banville's *The Drowned*, the latest in his Strafford and Quirke crime/mystery novel series. This tops the latest Peter May novel set in the Orkney Islands, but not by much. It's an exciting world at Howard Street, but would be much more exciting if we could live in a residence that doubles as an Infinite Library.\*]

**Casey Wolf** writes about the perils of being a tenant. I'm also in that situation, but I'm fortunate. I've now been in this property for 10 years, and my rent hasn't gone up in that period. My landlady is Old Money, and doesn't feel the need to sweat her assets. She also has a portfolio of something like 100 properties. The house my flat is part of was passed to her by her mother; the family apparently made their fortune in the nineteenth century through breeding racing pigeons, and apparently the name 'Massarella' is still known in the racing pigeon community. I am a bit concerned, though, about what might happen if I outlive my landlady; I can imagine a new generation looking to raise rents to market levels at a time when I'll be least able to afford it.

Certainly I'm finding my **reduced circumstances as a pensioner** something of a challenge. My garage bills tend to see me dip into my overdraft, and just when I get one cleared, another bill comes along. I say that's one of the consequences of running a 25-year-old car, but friends who drive newer vehicles tell me that they have similar scale bills for regular maintenance. I do find that my food spend has gone down a bit, and as a consequence I'm slowly losing weight (which is A Good Thing). Books and CDs aren't too much of a problem, as the charity shops allow me to keep adding to the collection for very little money; newer books are an occasional treat, but my library is big enough to allow me to carry on reading new stuff for some time, as well as occasional re-reads as the spirit moves me. And as for my modelling — well, I bought models 'for the stash' whilst I was still working, and so again don't have to worry about being able to keep my hand in.

I was interested to see **Dennis Callegari** writing about *The Dragon Waiting*. I read this a few years ago on the recommendation of a friend. The dragon of the title, she assured me, was Welsh national-

ism, but that never really seemed to materialise as a plot point, instead being a part of one of the protagonists' back story. Nonetheless, I enjoyed it as a clever fantasy — something I don't read much of in comparison to SF — with a different setting to the identikit FantasyWorld (TM) setting beloved of so many blockbusters.

I also read the **Terry Pratchett biography**, which at times seemed more Pratchett-esque than Pratchett himself. I first saw mention of Terry Pratchett's excursions into fandom in **Peter Weston's** fannish biography, *With Stars in my Eyes*, in his account of the early days of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group.

I would comment on **Giampaolo Cossato's** broadly accurate analysis of **Brexit**, but the whole thing still makes me angry, as much for the incompetence of Remain as for the lies and spin from Brexit.

#### **My reviews of books mentioned:**

**EXPECT ME TOMORROW**  
by Christopher Priest

**BEYOND THE LIGHT HORIZON**  
by Ken MacLeod

**THE DRAGON WAITING**  
by John M. Ford

**TERRY PRATCHETT: A LIFE WITH FOOTNOTES**  
by Rob Wilkins

**WITH STARS IN MY EYES: MY ADVENTURES IN BRITISH FANDOM**  
by Peter Weston

**All accessible from Deep Waters Reading**  
([wordpress.com](https://www.wordpress.com))

(25 August 2024)

#### **Non-loc to SFC 117:**

My **holiday to Herefordshire** was lovely — verdant landscape, charming little black-and-white villages, secondhand bookshops and, for once, a total absence of any timetable whatsoever. Usually when we've been to that area, we've been for the annual literary festival at **Hay-on-Wye**, which is about 40 minutes' drive from the farmhouse bed-and-breakfast we've become accustomed to staying at. This has meant that we are usually on the clock over getting to festival events, or returning to the B&B later in the



The garage in the centre of Weobley. Old-fashioned, but not Tudor. We chatted to the wife of the owner, a sprightly 82-year-old; her husband has recently given up the business, having turned 90. The property, like many of the others in the village, was dressed to hide 'modern' frontages.



More Weobley. The traffic cone marks a location where the film production company are due to return to undo the set dressing; in this case, to 'un-dirty' the white and restore the timberwork to black. Though it should be understood that 'black-and-white' houses are mainly a Victorian fashion. Half-timbered properties varied regionally in the colours and finishes of the timberwork and the wattle-and-daub infill, which would be coloured with pigments found in the local soils. The timbers would often be left uncoloured, though some regional variations occurred.

Weobley Church. There are some parts of this that are early 12th century, but bits kept being added and the building only reached this extent in the mid-15th century.



evening.

This time, there were no such restrictions. Instead, we followed our noses, and if something looked interesting, well, we just changed the day's plan on the fly and went to explore. So for instance, we realised that we'd been bypassing a village called **Weobley** (pronounced 'Webley', in case you were wondering) which we'd both said, at various times, 'We ought to go and look at that'. So this time, we did. We found a delightful little village that was just emerging from having been used as the location for the forthcoming film of **Maggie O'Farrell's** novel *Hamnet*, all about Shakespeare's son who died at the age of eleven.

We made it to Hay later that day, but only really had time to look in two or three bookshops, coming away with a very few finds.

The next day we spent fairly close to the B&B, visiting some extensive gardens in the village. The day after that, we headed into the **Shropshire Hills** and found another bookshop in a repurposed barn. Books were bought, and the proprietor admitted that he was writing a book — a memoir of his days in the book trade and anecdotes from his later life as a rural bookseller. This all begins to sound a little familiar.

Finally, the next day we made our way home via the **Long Mynd**, that part of the Shropshire Hills adjacent to Church Stretton.

(8 September 2024)

On **AI**: I have no problem with the likes of **Jim Burns** seizing on AI as a new tool and using it to generate new ideas or to do some of the tedious legwork on some commissions. The problem with AI is the way in which people with no appreciation of art think that it can replace a human artist — you know, the sort that needs paying for their work. When **ChatGPT** first came out, we spent some time playing with it. We asked it for a story about a bookshop in the style of Ray Bradbury; it generated a story called '**The Last Bookshop on Mars**', which (other than having an irritating tendency to keep repeating 'The Last Bookshop on Mars' as if that was the topic for a round of Radio 4's *Just a Minute*) was pretty good as a **Bradbury pastiche**. But for any topic suggestions more complicated than that, it seemed to generate something more like a novel outline.

Meanwhile, I see horror stories of AI being used to supplant humans in a range of activities, whilst there are stories of schoolkids using ChatGPT as though it's a search engine, being ignorant that it is incapable of differentiating between fiction and non-fiction when returning its answers.

More recently, I've seen job adverts offering good money for writing assignments that are actually training AIs. I for one refuse to become a Quisling to our new robot overlords ...

Your visit to **Leigh Edmonds** for **Valma Brown's** valediction afforded us a glimpse of Leigh's own **collection of models**. Most of the models I've built are in a storage unit about 20 miles away (as is my stash of unbuilt kits) but none of it is as neatly organised as that. Most modellers and hobbyists I know do take the view that garages are wasted on cars anyway.

**Dave Langford's** *Ansible* has become notorious recently for its ever-lengthening **RIP column**. I rather prefer your approach, to show friends celebrating the lives we have lost and giving those of us who knew these people not a chance to see some of their own writings or accounts from others who knew them well (including, of course, yourself).

It's many years since I last read '**Scanners Live in Vain**', or indeed any **Cordwainer Smith**. I note that **Rich Horton** comments that Smith's second wife, **Genevieve Linebarger**, was apparently the sole author of the posthumously published story '**Down to a Sunless Sea**'. Well, I remember reading that when it first appeared, in the **October 1975 F&SF** — I went through a phase of occasionally buying SF magazines because there was a very good newsagent near my college in Newcastle upon Tyne, and the October 1975 *F&SF* was the very first one I bought, which is why I remembered it so readily, and I still have it now — and 'Down to a Sunless Sea' is bylined as by Smith himself, and the editor's introductory note describes it as 'completed by his wife after his death'.

**Kim Huett's** piece on his fannish origins inspired me to go back to the shelf and pull down my copy of the **Brian Ash Visual Encyclopaedia**. I had not looked at my copy in years, as it had mainly been superseded by the **Clute/Nicholls Encyclopaedia**, but I spent some time with the Ash book and I may well schedule it for a re-read at some point. Oddly, I still turn to my printed copy of the second edition of Clute/Nicholls if something comes up that I want to check and I'm not online. I suppose the Edward G. Robinson character in *Soylent Green* is a sort of hero to me ...

(Later...) A few days out intervened, on particular to visit the **Staffordshire** village of **Abbots Bromley**, which each year is the home of the **Horn Dance**, a tradition dating back to the thirteenth century. A group of dancers, six of whom wear reindeer antlers, move around the village and



outlying houses and farms, performing a dance whose purpose has been lost in antiquity. It echoes some of the ritual dances that seek to influence the hunt, which may place it even earlier — there are Neolithic cave paintings showing figures with antler head-dresses — but it also combines elements of other rural traditions, such as beating the parish bounds and collecting the annual rents from farmers. Be that as it may, nowadays the dancers tend to progress from pub to pub, stopping for refreshment along the way. My pictures can be seen here: **Abbots Bromley Horn Dance, September 9th 2024 | Flickr**, but I've attached a few that you might find interesting.

I was interested to read **Colin Steele's** review of

**Memory's Legion**, the short stories set in the universe of **The Expanse**. I was struck by how the stories were, to a greater or lesser degree, integrated into the TV series. Whilst all the stories add to the character development, though, anyone who has only read the novels will need this book for the story **'Strange Dogs'**, as this introduces two characters who only appear in the novels much later, and have already had life changes that are important to the narrative before they turn up, fully formed, in **Tiamat's Wrath** (Volume 8 of the series). Although the TV show never made it past the sixth novel, these characters were introduced in Season Six as a precursor to the rest of the story. The presence of *Strange Dogs* in the show seems odd, as it becomes a plot thread that seem-



ingly goes nowhere; only when you read the final three novels does everything fall into place; but the short story is important.

### My reviews:

## MEMORY'S LEGION: THE COMPLETE EXPANSE STORY COLLECTION

by James S.A. Corey

(Deep Waters Reading ([wordpress.com](https://wordpress.com)))

(4 October 2024)

### SFC 115 (March 2024: 55th Anniversary Edition)

Sorry for the gap in writing; I've been working on **an editing job** I've inherited, which has a drop-dead date next April (which is when we need to be putting finished hardback books into people's hands), and right now I'm at the stage of placing illustrations into the (fairly final) text and checking those illustrations to see if they are good enough to print. But seeing as the guy who collected them together for this book is no longer with us, and I don't know where these pictures came from, or what format they were to begin with, things are going to be a bit fraught until I see a proof copy. One picture that my co-editor said would be nice 'if it was edited a bit' now sports a great big warning in friendly, flame-red capitals in the MS at its insertion point to say 'THIS IMAGE MUST NOT BE RESIZED ANY FURTHER'. Plus I'm waiting for a friendly contributor to finish a couple of maps for me.

And then **my car threw a minor wobbly**. I was coming home last weekend and I got stuck in a traffic queue on a hill behind a very slow-moving vehicle. And the engine cut out on me, without warning. Well, it's a 25-year-old automatic, so I



The War of the Worlds (War of the Worlds) by H.G. Wells

March 2024 88 pages

reasoned that being brought to a halt when it was already only inching forward probably confused the poor thing, and it restarted immediately, so I shrugged it off as one of those things. Except that the very next time I took it out, I was coasting along a car park aisle looking for a space, and the same thing happened. Now, I'm a great believer in the *Goldfinger* hypothesis — 'Once is happenstance, twice is coincidence, but three times must be enemy action' — but the thought of a car engine cutting out for no apparent reason isn't something I want to imagine in UK traffic conditions, and just because it restarted immediately twice, that's no guarantee that it will cooperate a third time. So it's off to the garage in a week's time. My researches on the Internet and my discussion with my garage suggests that the likely culprit is a minor split in a breather hose or a vacuum line. Modern (i.e. built since the 1980s) cars have a variety of hoses connected with the fuel system, and once cars started getting electronic engine management systems, these things feed into a black box that balances air and fuel according to engine speed, road speed, fuel demand, air temperature, and engine temperature so as to get the most efficient fuel burn. Getting a split in one of the air lines into the throttle can confuse the black box, and if it gets a reading that's outside its parameters for any of those conditions, it will shut the engine down. The hopeful thing is that it is one of those problems that may take an hour to find but about five minutes to fix with a simple length of rubber hose. (But see the end of this loc.)

**Your not driving** is probably a good choice. I have spent quite a lot to keep my car on the road this year that I can't really afford, except that I can't really afford not to. The car also has a big-ticket regular maintenance item that will next come up in 2027, and which I suspect I shall be unable to afford. I could give the car up, but that would restrict my social life quite a bit, as most of my social interactions are not local. Yes, I would save something like £170 per month if I didn't have a car, which is enough for me to have taxis locally, or even (on paper) to hire a car when I wanted one. Except that car hire may have really cheap headline daily rates, but the small print says that they will require large deposits, which would be problematical for my current cashflow situation. And the most convenient car hire firm for me doesn't actually accept debit cards (why???)

Turning for some light relief to **SFC 115**: it was nice to start with something positive, with your account of **Alex Skovron's Patrick White Award**. But then the march of time reasserted itself with more tributes. The one that meant the most to me

was for **Chris Priest**; though I only really met him the once, he became a writer whose career I followed with interest. I recollect meeting him off a train in Newcastle upon Tyne and recognising him from a Jim Barker cartoon I'd seen in a fanzine. I was surprised the last time I saw Chris, at Novacon a few years ago, as I didn't recognise him through advancing years.

I'm still working towards my commemorative article on **Chris's 'Dream Archipelago' books**, though I need to do some re-reading of the earlier stories to see how they fit into something that Chris himself originally described as only a 'shared setting' rather than any sort of coherent series.

**Tony Thomas's** mention of the **Patrick Stewart biography** reminds me of one of the funniest things I ever saw him do on television, when he was taking part in Ricky Gervais' sitcom about TV, **Extras**:

Stewart (to Gervais): 'You're trying to tell me that you're a middle-aged single man who has never watched *Star Trek*?'

(Gervais nods.)

Stewart (totally straight-faced): 'Good Lord.'

For myself, I personally credited Pat Stewart with making **Star Trek** more — what? Relevant? Realistic? Believable? Well, perhaps a mix of these things; I found I could believe in his portrayal of **Jean-Luc Picard** as a ship's captain more than I could ever believe in Bill Shatner. On the other hand, I never believed in Picard's Frenchness; perhaps in the far-off days of the Federation, national differences have become submerged in a wider human identity, especially once faced with a galaxy full of differing alien species (even if most of them are actors with funny prosthetic foreheads). But Stewart's delivery, coupled with a character with a liking for English literature (no Victor Hugo on Picard's reading list? No Dumas? No Proust?) and tea, seemed quintessentially English to me. Or perhaps **Paramount's** finest ideas factory, despite coming up with synthahol as a replacement for intoxicating liquors, couldn't get their collective heads around finding a harmless substitute for strong coffee and Gauloises.

It is nonetheless entirely possible that without casting Stewart as Picard, the whole *Trek* franchise renewal would have fizzled out; and it's interesting to note that its more recent, second resurrection (starting with *Discovery*) was fairly quick to schedule something for Stewart with the three seasons of Picard chronicling his character's adventures in his retirement years.

**Jennifer Bryce's 'A Christmas Oratorio'** was, to me, perfect.

I was interested in **Colin Steele's** review of **Jack Dann's *The Fiction Writer's Guide to Alternate History***. Now, I likes me a good **alternate history**; I think this is a book I would like to see. But there's one thing that I've identified that many authors who use the AH framework overlook in their rush to remake history to suit their own individual vision. Some time ago, I read **S. M. Stirling's *Marching through Georgia***, which is structured around the idea that the North American losers from the American War of Independence flee to South Africa and establish a militaristic state there. Well, apart from the overt racism, I had one major problem: Stirling has no named characters in his book — other than a namecheck for General von Paulus, in our reality the WW2 German commander at Stalingrad — we would recognise. Part of the fun in AH — for me, at least — is in seeing not only how the broad sweep of history is changed by the hinge event, but also seeing the occasional reference to someone we know so we can take pleasure in the author's inventiveness in placing that person in their invented reality and, through that placement, can relate their reality to ours. A failure to do this results in a world that the author has obviously thought up out of whole new cloth but might have been too lazy to think up new names for.

One of my recent modelling projects actually led me to some AH world-building of my own. There's a segment of **aviation modelling** known as '**Luftwaffe '46**', an excuse to build models of some of the exotic paper planes that German aeronautical engineers sketched on the backs of envelopes (and then promoted as possible projects to feed Hitler's hunger for 'new and secret weapons'). A couple of years ago, I came up with one '1946' scenario to account for my building a **Heinkel He.162** with forward-swept wings (something that never made it into production) and Austrian markings (which was a complete fiction) on the premise that if **Operation Valkyrie**, the assassination attempt on Hitler, had been successful, Austria might well have engineered its own liberation and the secret factory under a mountain near Baden (south of Vienna) where the He.162s were assembled, could easily have started turning out aircraft for the new Austrian Air Force. I've attached a photo (WB21\_023) and the model's caption; the events described in the liberation of Austria did happen — including the rush to prevent a Yugoslav invasion — but about a year later in our reality. However, Austria was occupied by the four victorious Allies and partitioned (as per *The Third Man*). The Austrian Republic was only restored as



an independent, self-governing nation in 1955.

More recently, I was working on a model of the even more hypothetical **Sänger sub-orbital bomber**. I'd acquired a kit of this because it included some ancillary support vehicles I needed for another project, and the aircraft itself was such a simple kit that I thought I could build it quickly. But when I looked at the markings on offer, I had a problem. The design was so advanced that I could not see it coming into service before the mid 1950s; but the kit offered me markings from the Luftwaffe, mostly in the 1944–45 period, but one as early as 1942–43, and in ground-attack camouflage to boot! Hardly appropriate for a sub-orbital aircraft.

I'd been reading a book on the **British space shuttle project** (yes, there was such a thing), and suddenly a thought popped into my head: what would **Bernard Quatermass** have done? I not only ended up with a Sänger sub-orbital bomber with RAF roundels on it; I also had a novel outline.

(See above photo WB24\_004 — showing such an aircraft after a particularly boisterous re-entry — and the attached Word document is the story outline I ended up with, together with an exploration of the equivalent history in our reality.)

It's many years since I read **Wulfsyarn; Phillip Mann** was an author I used to follow and I enjoyed his work, up until that four-book series **A Land Fit for Heroes**, an alternate history where Rome never fell and the Empire lasted more than a thousand years. I've said above that I like a good alternate history; unfortunately, I didn't find this good, because I found the Roman Empire and Roman Britain as depicted to both be unconvincing.

From your four-star list, the same (in terms of how long since I last read them) goes for the **Aldiss Space Opera** anthology and **Coney's Friends Come in Boxes**. **Dave Langford's All Good Things** is a bit more recent. And **All the Light We Cannot See** is on the TBR pile ...

## Films:

We saw **Freaks** at a presentation once at a festival of fairground and circus arts. There's an academic here in the UK, **Professor Vanessa Toulmin**, who has made a study of the history, art, and sociology of the travelling fairground community. She has some family connections with that community, and is accordingly known within it as 'Professor Vanessa'. ('No,' she says, 'that's not a stage name, I really am a professor!') In that context, *Freaks* was of interest because the performers were real carnival artistes. The festival itself (alas, no longer held) was great fun. On another occasion — and having been a few years running, so I'd become a known face — I was invited up onto the stage during a magic performance as part of the 'stage committee', the people from the audience invited to check the equipment of the illusion and confirm that yes, the chains are solid and the locks real. The thing was: the illusion being performed was a fairly common one, and I could see how it was done!

Did I say anything? No I did not! It wasn't my place to spoil the illusion for everyone else, and I suppose I'd been seen enough for the performers to grasp this. What it did do for me, though, was that if I now see that illusion performed anywhere else, I can make a better informed judgment over how well the performer has done the trick, or if they've injected anything new to make their performance different from everyone else's. And that's almost as good as being on the inside.

**Hell Drivers!** I've not seen that in ages; it used to be a staple of British weekend TV back in the black-and-white era. And in addition to **Patrick McGooan** and **Stanley Baker**, there's a fine supporting role by **William Hartnell** as McGooan's criminal mentor. The last time I saw this — possibly 20 years ago — I was struck by the attitude shown towards the Stanley Baker character, who had just been released from prison and faced overwhelming prejudice as a 'jailbird' (I recollect he'd been inside for something comparatively minor and innocuous). I'd like to think that the same attitudes wouldn't be so prominent today — I've met and worked with people who'd done time and the one thing you can say of them is that you couldn't make any assumptions about them — but I acknowledge that my view is purely down to those I've met. We might not express a wider prejudice in quite the same way now, but I doubt that it's gone away.

**The Death of Stalin** isn't particularly accurate, but it has the ring of truth about it. I've long held the view that Russia is a hard country and breeds hard people; and even those thought

of as clowns (in particular — and it's a while since I've watched it — **Khrushchev** as depicted in the film) have a core of steel not very far from the surface. After all, it's easy watching Khrushchev the clown in *Death of Stalin* to forget that Stalin sent him to Stalingrad in 1942 to whip the defenders into shape, and he didn't do it with kind words and merry quips. And the execution of **Lavrenti Beria** was at the same time more formal than the film suggests, and yet at the same time just as impromptu.

I was impressed with the TV series of *His Dark Materials*, particularly enjoying the way the production veered from the dieselpunk of Lyra's world to the allegorical afterlife via a particularly Kafka-esque purgatory. I've not long read the novels; links to my reviews are below. I did have one major problem with the **Series 3** production design, though: the Magisterium is supposedly headquartered in Geneva in Switzerland — so why was the CGI footage of their headquarters so very obviously based on Salzburg in Austria? Geneva is on the shores of a huge lake that stretches to the horizon; Salzburg is in a river valley in the foothills of the Alps. The two are very different.

In his loc, **Cy Chauvin** talks about your list of ten major novels featuring music as a major theme. Did you remember **Kim Stanley Robinson's** *The Memory of Whiteness*? That, too, has a composer as a viewpoint character, as I recollect (many years since I last read it).

I was interested to see **Steve Jeffery** writing about **Edmund Crispin's** anthology *Best SF Stories 3*. I read this back in the days when I was setting out on my discovery of sf in the 1970s, but I came across a copy much later and re-read and reviewed it just over 10 years ago. The interesting thing about it as a publishing event was that Faber kept the Crispin anthologies in print for some considerable time. Indeed, they went through a number of different impressions — my copy was dated 1962, and was the third impression. The book was first published in 1958. Faber seemed to treat these books as samplers for the genre, and put each volume through a number of impressions, keeping them in circulation for new readers for a number of years.

I most recently came across a reprint of 'A Subway Named Mobius' in a British Library collection edited by **Michael Ashley** entitled *The Platform Edge: Uncanny Tales of the Railways* (British Library Publishing, 2019).

And now the latest news ... I've now had my car diagnosed for its sudden outbreak of engine cut-outs, and whilst the garage couldn't replicate the

problem, they did put it on a diagnostic computer and were able to point to a problem with the engine temperature sensor, which is doubtless sending false data to the engine management system. Fortunately, unlike the sentient bomb in *Dark Star*, its reaction to false data is to just shut the engine off rather than exploding; and the cure is to restart the engine, which resets the engine management system. Or to have £350-worth of work done to the vehicle. Still, I can take a little comfort from the fact that if the car were five years old rather than twenty-five, a job like that would cost about the same. And on my way back from the garage, I passed a much newer Volvo pulled up on the side of the road with steam coming from under the bonnet, which is never a good sign.

**My reviews:**

**NORTHERN LIGHTS**  
by Philip Pullman

**THE SUBTLE KNIFE**  
by Philip Pullman

**THE AMBER SPYGLASS**  
by Philip Pullman

**BEST SF THREE: SCIENCE FICTION STORIES**  
edited by Edmund Crispin

All available at Deep Waters Reading  
(workpress.com)

**SFC 116 (June 2024):**

I was reading through **Dick Jenssen's** autobiography, and I came to the section he headed 'Things of which I am proud'. And that set me to thinking; **what am I proud of?**

I suppose I am proud of having had a book

**SF Commentary 116**



published, though I would be prouder if I could get the next one placed with a publisher (but European light railways are not flavour of the month these days. That 'E' word, for a start-off). By extension, I am now finding that the photographs I have taken since 1970 are now getting interest in some quarters. After all, that was the basis for the first book. So I could say that I am proud of the corpus of photographic work I've created; and, by extension, of the two photographic awards I've won. But this is all a bit self-centred.

Over the past 35 years or so, I've worked with a number of people, increasingly finding that most of them were younger than me. In my last job, I had a colleague who I took under my wing a bit. When I'd interviewed for the job, I didn't know that the decision was down to two people; me and one other. The other candidate was a chap in his middle twenties, with a fairly standard BSc in computer science and three or four years in a testing role with another software company. Whereas I was (at the time) in my late fifties, with no formal qualifications in IT but a lot of experience in implementing systems in the real world, both in the public and private sectors. I got the job, mainly because the manager whose decision it was felt that they already had a team of testers with the same sort of background as the other candidate. But my experience was something they didn't have. And so I got appointed.

Within a month, one of the other testers handed in their notice, as a job had come up that suited his family circumstances better. (Strangely, that was a job I'd interviewed for, had passed all the interview stages, but hadn't gelled in some way with the company owner, so they readvertised it.) Now, in the public sector that I'd spent 30 years in, such a situation would have meant that the HR team would sigh heavily, knowing that they'd have to go right back to the beginning of the recruitment process. Instead, this small business was able to do things with rather more agility. 'I wonder if Mathew's still available? We would have appointed him if he'd not been up against Robert.' So the office manager picked up the phone, and within a few weeks Mathew came to join us, and was given the desk next to mine.

He was a nice lad, always happy to help and share his knowledge. We soon got into a good working relationship, each sharing what we knew. He taught me a lot about current IT techniques; I taught him everything I knew about navigating office politics and bureaucracy. He left the company after about five years, mainly because he had a young family to support and so a raise would be helpful, but also because he'd learnt everything

the company could teach him. I felt proud of his achievement.

And that wasn't the first time. A couple of years later, someone who had worked for me back in the 1990s as an assistant (one of the few times I've actually had line management responsibilities) was awarded an MBE for his services to community and small business banking. I'd like to think that some of the things I imparted to him in those days stayed with him and formed a basis for his working life, too. So I'm proud of his achievement, too.

These are things we should always talk about. The day my father died, a neighbour told me that my father had once told him how proud he was of my trade union role (as union representative for an entire government department — albeit a small one). I'd done negotiations, taken part in TU conferences, helped make policy by sharing best practice I'd helped make in my Department with comrades from other Departments, and I'd represented members in dispute with the employer (in two cases up to taking cases to Employment Tribunals). I'd always viewed the union work as something of a chore — there were very few other people willing to take it on, it caused a certain amount of friction with my immediate line managers as I had to fit the union work in around my other work, and I'm fairly certain that it played a part in my failure to advance my civil service career as much as I would have liked. To be told that it had made my father proud of me was something of a revelation.

We should all have that sort of moment.

**Mark Nelson** asked some questions about **Stalin's personal library**. Now, I can't help with that; but this may interest people. The online library cataloguing/book blogging app I use, **LibraryThing**, has an ongoing project that they call '**Legacy Libraries**'. Where well-known people either have surviving libraries, or their libraries have been catalogued, LibraryThing volunteers transfer that catalogue to the app, meaning that you can browse the titles in some of these libraries. See [Legacy Libraries | LibraryThing](#). Just looking at the first few entries for twentieth-century personalities, I see that they have catalogued the libraries of Louis Armstrong, W. H. Auden, David Bowie, Aaron Copland, e. e. cummings, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ian Fleming, Graham Greene, Helene Hanff, Ernest Hemingway, Kathleen Hepburn, Lena Horne, Harry Houdini, Robert E. Howard, and Langston Hughes, to name but a few.

Mark expresses an interest in the use of the word '**fanzine**' in the modern world. I hear a lot of

use of the words ‘fandom’ and ‘fanzine’, but these are usually now connected — at least, here in the UK — with teenage fans of popular entertainers. Apparently, they even produce **fanzines**. And it is quite common to find this discussion in connection with the role of women in these fandoms. The punk fanzines seem to have become historical curiosities, as have the football fanzines (the best known of those over here, *When Saturday Comes*, went pro a very long time ago).

The **pop music fandoms** are now considered prime material for academic research, especially by academics who seem intent on shoe-horning their perception of ‘fandoms’ into their particular world-view. Pointing out that fandom and fanzines are concepts now pushing their centenary tends to get studiously ignored.

**John Hertz’s ‘Criticanto Reconsiderations’** was a fascinating read — reviews of books I’d never read, but many of which I had heard of. I think there’s a big place for retrospective reviews, especially in SF where we have a canon of works considered to be influential. I’m currently reading a **David Hartwell** collection, *The Science Fiction Century*, published in 1997. The century in question is, of course, the twentieth; and it’s fascinating to see a range of stories, from some which I’d heard of but never read (**Edgar Pangborn’s ‘The Music Master of Babylon’**, or **Algis Budrys’s ‘Nobody Bothers Gus’**), to others which I’m revisiting (**James Tiptree Jnr.’s ‘Beam Us Home’**, **James Blish’s ‘A Work of Art’**, or **E. M. Forster’s ‘The Machine Stops’**), to others I’m both reading and hearing about for the first time. And there are discoveries, such as **H. G. Wells’s** prescient description of a smart speaker in his 1897 **‘A Story of the Days to Come’** (even if the rest of the story is about the consequences of the imposition of some very Victorian values on a young couple in love).

Many modern critics decry the works of SF’s yesterdays because they can seem outdated in terms of language and execution, or just plain go out of date. **Ian Sales**, for instance, regularly denounces what he calls ‘Men in F\*\*\*ing Hats SF’, pointing at **Asimov’s ‘Foundation’ stories**, where the denizens of the far-future Foundation do, indeed, wear hats (probably trilbies), smoke pipes, and read newspapers. This irritates him immensely, mainly because some people still hold up the ‘Foundation’ series to be one of the classics of the genre. This wouldn’t really be a problem — ‘costume drama’ is perfectly acceptable if we are talking about Jane Austen or Charles Dickens — except that SF as a genre still struggles to take its proper place in the canon of world literature, and

holding up some works beloved of fans as exemplars of the best that the genre has to offer — instead of being significant, which isn’t the same thing — he sees as counter-productive. And I can understand this. Especially when non-fans often still think of SF as ‘prediction’, which it isn’t. Even when Wells was writing about smart speakers.

(17 November 2024)

## SFC 117 (July 2024)

After all the kerfuffle trying to get the car fixed, I’m pleased to say that normal service has been resumed and last weekend was spent at **Buxton**, high in the Derbyshire Peak District, ostensibly attending the Birmingham SF Group’s annual **Novacon**. Yes, I know Buxton is nowhere near, or nothing like, Birmingham, but good hotels are hard to find. Though the **Buxton Palace** may stretch the definition of a ‘good hotel’. Yes, it has adequate function space and a selection of bars to hang out in: but it is owned by a chain with a reputation for running their hotels as cheaply as possible. Rooms are only made up if you ask at the front desk (this is a hangover from the pandemic; it seems likely that the management terminated many of the housekeeping staff) and heating is only provided for an hour a day. In November. (Northern hemisphere winter, remember.) And 1,000 feet (305 metres) above sea level, so around two degrees cooler than Manchester. We endured that a couple of years ago and swore ‘Never again!’

So instead we took lodgings in a B&B in the town — a delightful Victorian terrace facing onto a park, with a lake, with excellent breakfasts, friendly staff, wi-fi that worked, and (above all) heating.

And only about five minutes from a very fine secondhand bookshop, with a resident book-binder and (supposedly) a ghost.



The con itself was pretty much as expected. **Allen Stroud** was GoH, a writer I've not encountered before but who came over as personable. The fact that he had served two terms as Chair of the BSFA had totally passed me by. Lots of friends old and new to chat to, books to buy — all the usual you expect from a convention.

It's taken me a week to pick up the threads of what I was doing before I got involved with cars, and conventions, and all the concomitant disruption and domestic stuff that got put off. That included figuring out why you weren't getting my e-mails. It looks as though somewhere in the chain between my mail client and yours, somewhere there's been an update that hasn't had proper regression testing done — that is, testing to check that the new functionality in the update doesn't actually break something that's already there. You'd be surprised how often this doesn't happen (or perhaps not); the fashion in business circles these days is for 'automated testing', which is basically getting a computer to test itself. That's fine, but all that does is test that the code is written and executes correctly. It doesn't test whether the results you get from the update are actually comprehensible to a human user, or deliver the expected functionality, or break something already in place. For that, you need humans, and employing humans isn't the current fashion. (And that's before anyone even mentions AI.)

And if the update breaks something downstream that isn't stood up on your server or in an environment you have access to, well, them's just the breaks.

The **British Post Office** has drunk the same Kool-Aid as Australia Post, it seems. The First Class postage rate for a single inland letter has gone up to £1.65, and for the same reasons. Although so far, deliveries remain daily, people complain that they 'are not getting post daily' and 'only getting two deliveries per week'. These moans seem to miss the fact that there are not so many letters being sent nowadays, and if people aren't getting post every day, perhaps that means that there is actually nothing for them! I see my posties fairly often. If they have deliveries for either of the other two flats here whose front doors are on the other side of mine, they walk past my window. And so I see the posties on the days when I don't get post; and so I know that there are still daily deliveries, even if I get nothing. It may seem obvious to have to say this, but increasingly public opinions appear divorced from much in the way of sense, let alone reality.

Nice to see the review of **Rob Hansen's *Beyond Fandom***, a fascinating book that I have obtained, read with pleasure and then contributed to. One of my great discoveries at the 2019 Dublin Worldcon was ***Warhoon 28***, which finally exposed me at first hand to the writings of **Walt Willis**. And towards the end of that, I found a piece from the late 1960s where Willis described a way of formulating public policy initiatives he'd come up with which he described as 'Nudge Theory', a way of getting people to make incremental changes in their behaviours and choices that, when applied across the whole public sphere, had significant impacts on policy outcomes. This concept disappeared, only to emerge possibly 40 or more years later under the same name in a 2008 book by two Harvard behavioural economists, **Richard Thaler** and **Cass Sunstein**. I was able to draw Rob Hansen's attention to this, and submitted some text to him. The glories of print-on-demand mean that he was able to incorporate this into, not a new edition of the book, but to all copies generated after I wrote to him. (Link to my review at the foot of this mail.)

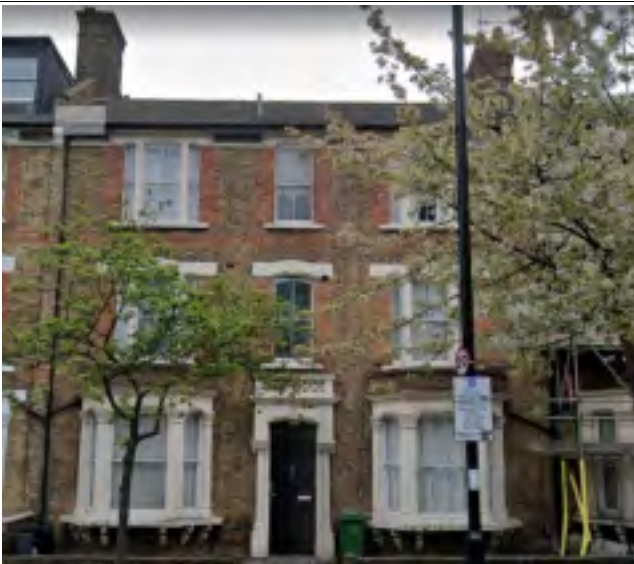
In your review of the various issues of **Rob Jackson's *Inca***, you mention the tour of Irish fan historical sites, including **Oblique House**. After I'd read *Warhoon 28*, I used Google Street View to find such places as were regularly mentioned, such as Oblique House and also the **Epicentre** in London.

The Pete Atkin albums Rob referred to are available on CD:

- ***Beware of the Beautiful Stranger/Driving Through Mythical America*** (See For Miles Records C5HCD 664)
- ***Secret Drinker/Live Libel*** (See For Miles



**Oblique House today (Google Street View).**



### The Epicentre today (Google Street view).

Records SEECD 725)

I first came across these after the death of British rock DJ and promoter of out-of-the-way bands **John Peel**. Oddly, given my devotion to classical music these days, in my youth I used to listen to John Peel a lot, mainly because he was one of the few people to play German electronica such as Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream. And then one night, he played the song '**I See the Joker**' and it stuck in my mind even though I couldn't remember who played it, let alone who wrote the lyrics or even what the rest of the song was like; I just had the refrain lodged in my head, 'I cut the pack/I see the Joker'. Only after Peel died did I do the necessary research and up popped **Pete Atkin**. He still gets occasional work in film and TV, only noticed by the likes of me who stay back and read the credits.

**Kevin Williams** is a long-time fan from the 1970s, who was active in Gannetfandom at about the time you first contacted me, though his fanzine days are long past. He's on Facebook; I'm sure if you searched and looked for the Kevin Williams who was 'Associate Director R&D at Procter & Gamble (retired)', you'd find him.

As a sucker for **alternate histories**, I was fascinated by **Janeen Webb**'s talk to the Nova Mob on that subject. It's funny how you so often hear people challenge revisionist accounts of past events by saying 'you can't rewrite history' — well, that's exactly what historians do as their daily toil! History is constantly being rewritten as new records come to light, or as different historians bring their own experience and knowledge — and increasingly nowadays, their cultural background

— to a historical period they've not previously considered, and so offer a new interpretation based on their own, unique, synthesis of the records.

To me, a good alternate history needs to have references back to events or individuals from our own reality to allow readers to appreciate the changes that a different set of circumstances might have brought to certain figures. Without that, the alternate history just becomes another exotic locale to set a story; I think of **S. M. Stirling's *Marching through Georgia***, where he set his divergence — the exile of loyalist Anglo-American settlers to southern Africa after the American War of Independence — so far from the action of his novel — World War 2 — that the only named individuals in the novel who were common to his alternate history and our own were Adolf Hitler and General von Paulus (German commander at Stalingrad), and neither of these was an active character in the novel.

**Phillip Mann** also produced a series of four novels set in the contemporary time of a world where the Roman Empire never fell (***A Land Fit for Heroes***) which I found unengaging, precisely because there was nothing in any of the four books that I could relate to the world I know, so that I could appreciate the differences. I don't normally consider my ability to relate to protagonists or situations to be a valid criterion for evaluating novels or short stories — it's fiction, after all, and a genre of fiction where experiencing other lives and other realities is a big part of the offer — but for alternate histories I find it necessary to understand the relationship between the reality on offer and the reality I inhabit, otherwise I rather lose the point of the exercise.

**Cy Chauvin's** article on sf poetry caused me to sit up, as I had only recently re-read **Cordwainer Smith's 'Drunkboat'** and marvelled at its strangeness, not appreciating entirely where that strangeness came from in this instance. I knew Smith's writing was weird and unlike so many other writers, and this was his strength. Every day is, as they say, a school day.

I have ***Dreamer of Dune*** on the TBR pile; I also still have my copy of the ***Whole Earth Catalog*** with the fairly extensive entry for *Dune*, praising it for its ecological themes and generally placing it firmly in that corner of the countercultural zeitgeist.

**John Hertz's** marking of **Beethoven's birthday** reminds me of a conversation I had with a friend who opined that the slow movement of



**Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7*** is a work of such gravitas that it would be fit to beam out into the cosmos to mark the death of Planet Earth. As a culture, we could be memorialised by nothing less.

I was interested in **John Litchen's** retrospective of **A. E. Van Vogt's *Slan***. I read it many years ago, and can remember almost nothing about it. Indeed, my clearer recollection is of **Bob Shaw** reading out a fanzine pastiche of it, ***Sfan***, which he had written in his fanzine days. "he fan ran. On and on the fan ran." Oh God, this is terrible.' Of course, this was based around the popular fannish saying from the 1940s, 'Fans are Slans', making the assertion that sf fans were superior intellects because of their ability to entertain wild and novel concepts, and think on a scale beyond the everyday that most people could not comprehend.

There is a basic fallacy in this; that the assertion is actually true. Sadly, sf fans have often proved themselves no less open to prejudice than the rest of the population; and reading sf is no guarantee of any sort of advanced moral or intellectual compass. For proof, look no further than the billionaire who embraces the letter X ...

On **P. K. Dick**: I read ***Valis*** many years ago, and it made no sense to me, until one morning it suddenly did. It was, at the time, a revelation. But I'm blown if I can remember it now ...

More seriously: it's also years since I read ***The Man in the High Castle***, and it's overdue a re-read. But I've recently been watching the TV series and I'm rather taken with it. To me, it picks up the themes of the novel and runs with them. In particular, it focuses on Mr Tagomi and extends the vision of our world that he experiences in the novel and builds an entire plot strand around that, of experienced travellers who can pass between alternate universes. To make things worse, the Nazis have found out about the existence of alternate worlds and have set out to conquer them. **William Sarill's** note suggests that PKD was considering this angle for a sequel; I also note his attention to Japanese aesthetic concepts, which the show attempts to put over. The theme of Mr Tagomi travelling between universes is introduced very slowly until he makes his excursion into our reality at the end of Season 1.

Many of the characters from the novel appear in the show; there are some nice performances in there. But the TV show also picks up on new details and weaves them into the narrative. In particular, the Nazi leader of the US has a son with a genetic defect, who chooses to surrender himself for euthanasia rather than take advantage of the

strings his father can pull for him — so we see the extent of Nazi conditioning of the young. Abendson isn't a novelist in this version, but rather a collector and distributor of newsreel films from other universes which show Allied victory (this most likely made better TV); he is intimately connected with the resistance, and we see a lot of their activities. Frank Frink and Robert Childan transfer very well to the screen; Juliana Frink gets mixed up in the resistance, but her adventures in the show go way beyond the novel (although one incident is replicated quite closely). The overall political situation is pretty much the same, with mistrust and duplicity between the Nazis and the Japanese, but we also see intrigue within the Nazi Party hierarchy. The world-building is well done, with a range of interesting touches; interestingly (to me) British telephone equipment and 1950s British cars stand in for Japanese ones in many shots. The Nazis don't have sub-orbital rockets but they do have Lufthansa SSTs that fly into Berlin Tempelhof, which must be unpleasant for those living under the flightpath ...

I have seen reference to this being available on DVD/Blu-Ray, but I have only seen this online, and not on Amazon, so I won't hold my breath until I encounter one in real life.

And so I bring myself up to date with SFC (for now). I have an edit job which I now have to try out in A5 format so we can see if it works at a size uniform with the other books in the client's series, or if it should appear in A4 because the client wants to make something special out of it. And then perhaps I can get on with some of my own writing, including my Chris Priest article for you ...

#### **Reviewed:**

### **BEYOND FANDOM: FANS, CULTURE AND POLITICS IN THE 20TH CENTURY** **edited by Rob Hansen (Deep Waters Reading)**

(28 December 2024)

### **SFC 118 (November 2024)**

Almost caught up!

How anecdotes travel! The **Barry Jones** anecdote with which you opened your celebration of **Race Mathews** is one which, here in the UK, is generally attributed to **Churchill** talking about the Tory party. But it has to be said that I suspect it holds true in almost any legislature and any political party. After all, the Left's capacity for factionalism is legendary.



Your comments about **radical and trade union songs** sung at the launch party for Race's biography took me back to my days as a trade union representative, where our annual conference had '**Scottish Night**', which was an evening of such songs, with an emphasis on audience participation. Besides '**The Internationale**' and '**Joe Hill**', particular favourites were songs from the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, such as '**Harama Valley**', and an Italian Communist song, '**Avanti popolo**' (which can be heard, oddly enough, in the Sicilian episodes in **The Godfather**, sung by a Communist procession in the background of one scene).

The memorial to **Sue Grigg** reminded me that I was not only at, but took photographs of, the **1979 Worldcon Masquerade** (my then girlfriend was also a competitor). I've had a look at the pictures, but after an interval of 45 years, with no notes to guide me, pictures taken on fast film (quite grainy) taken from a balcony, and longish exposure times, I can't say that anyone on those pictures is recognisable. This picture on [fanac.org](http://fanac.org) is rather better: **Seacon '79 — 1979 WorldCon — W79M017** (Photo: Debbie King)

Here's a strange thing. I've never had a copy of **Banana Wings** or had much interaction with **Claire and Mark**. I think what this is down to is a matter of fannish generations. I was most involved with fanzine fandom in the 1970s and 1980s; but increasingly I found I was getting fanzines that related to other fans, and who went where with whom, who went to which conventions, and who went to which parties. And I wasn't moving in those circles, and gradually the fanzines I saw had no relevance to me. Then the people I usually went to conventions to be with themselves dropped out of convention fandom. So when Claire and Mark

came on the scene, I'd been out of it for a while. My loss, I'm sure.

**In Ascension** is on the TBR pile; **Orbital** has been and gone, and I have reviewed it. I cannot say I was impressed; **Samantha Harvey** has a nice turn of phrase, to be sure, and invokes that good old 'sense of wonder'. The trouble is, those of us who've been reading SF for all our adult lives have read this sort of thing before. Once again, a mainstream writer thinks they are doing something new when they are not. And their mainstream literati readership also thinks they are doing something new, but would never dream of looking at that ridiculous science fiction stuff to find more of the same. I also found *Orbital* slightly too long; about ten pages from the end, I found myself thinking 'Oh, no — not another bloody sunrise!'; and I suspect that where sf writers have done this sort of thing in the past, they've done it in short form rather than in a novel. Which is why I was hard put to look at my collection and think of equally lyrical sf novels with an overwhelming sense of the human place in the cosmos and the indivisibility and beauty of our home world; my impression was that I read this sort of thing in short stories, and indeed the only novels that leapt out at me as being close to *Orbital* in terms of pure SF were **Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Mars'** books, which are a very different proposition; their expansiveness might not necessarily stand up well against a literary establishment with a penchant for brevity. And John Newman reminds me that I must soon re-read **Red Mars** as a prelude to completing the trilogy.

Anyway, my review of *Orbital* was critical but not unkind, unlike others I've seen from within the SF community. 'I was writing this sort of thing ten years ago' was **Ian Sales'** comment, and I've seen more cutting reviews since.

**Tony Thomas** mentioned in passing reading a few **K. J. Parker** titles. I discovered Parker when I read a review of **Sixteen Ways to Defend a Walled City** and gave it a try. I found it to my liking, and have since added its two sequels, **How to Rule An Empire And Get Away with It** and **A Practical Guide to Conquering the World**, to Mount TBR. I was attracted by the quirky titles and the premise, and will probably stay on for at least this trilogy, as Parker's fantasy appears to fit into a wider narrative. K. J. Parker is the pen-name (literally) of **Tom Holt**, whose humorous fantasy I started reading from his first book, **Expecting Someone Taller** — a fantasy set in modern times but invoking the Wagnerian incarnations of the Norse gods — and for a while I voraciously

consumed everything he wrote. I began to find his humour flagging, to the point where I found only every other one of his books at all funny. Eventually I stopped reading him altogether, though I later found that he'd written a book whose title made me smite my forehead and exclaim 'Why didn't I think of that!' (***Snow White and the Seven Samurai***), though to be fair I had had the same reaction some ten years or so before when the radical British comedian Alexei Sayle did the same joke on a TV sketch show.

**Leigh Edmonds'** column seems to focus on a range of issues that both myself and a lot of other people are thinking about SF these days. I've already said why I dropped out of fanzine fandom; one of the things I'm also doing right now is reading through a backlog of ***Foundation***, the critical SF journal. Now this can sometimes be enlightening, and sometimes not. The 'not' is when I come across a piece of dense academic analysis that ticks a certain series of boxes for the academic involved, but does nothing to improve understanding. Leigh comments that 'the students [studying SF as part of a university literature course] are never going to be exposed to fandom or fanzines — which are sociological and cultural phenomena', and in this he is right. What is more, that will mean that the student will never get the insight into works of SF that we had from our exposure to fanzines, because SF is fairly unique for the way in which so many of the key writers in the genre emerged from fandom via fanzine writing. This goes beyond the sociological into one of the major factors shaping the works of SF themselves; in order to understand many SF novels, it helps to understand the environment from which they arose. Which means fandom.

I sympathise with Leigh when he says that the reason he doesn't write fiction is that he's 'ratshit at writing dialogue ...' (etc.). Yep, been there, done that. My village has two writers' groups, and I keep looking and thinking 'they only meet five minutes away, perhaps I should go', and then I wonder if I need another diversion in my life from actually doing writing. Perhaps in a couple of years' time when I can no longer afford to keep a car running, I'll be glad of the company.

(Christmas Eve Eve)

I have inherited an editing job that, for various reasons too long to go into here (Voices off: 'That's never stopped you before!'), needs to be delivered in January. Over the past three days (on and off), I've tried inserting a new image into the document, only to find that the image is much bigger than all the other embedded images already in there, and

so is crashing my word processor. And of course, the image illustrates something previously unillustrated, and if I leave it out the client will ask 'Why couldn't you find anything suitable?' Poot.

(27 December)

So getting back towards something like normal — though we still have New Year's Eve to come. My current publisher responded to my digital Christmas card by asking 'Remind me, where are we with your next book?'. Me: 'I sent you the MS and photos some time back.' Publisher: 'OK, I'd better crack on with it.' He's a one-man operation, and does all his own setting as well as the rest of the publishing operation; but at least this sounds as though I might have another title out by this time next year. (This one's about Polish railways.)

**Colin Steele's** reviews cover a few books recently added to Mount TBR; ***Lake of Souls***, the **Reeves/Miéville *The Book of Elsewhere***, and **Stephen Baxter's *Creation Node***. The Reeves/Miéville opus I obtained from my local supermarket; there was a time when SF regularly appeared on the shelves in the book section of bigger supermarkets, but for the past ten years — ever since the death of Iain Banks, coincidentally — this has not happened. So to some extent, my adding *The Book of Elsewhere* to my basket was as such an act of sfnal solidarity as anything else — 'Look! There are people in your shop who want to read this sort of thing!' The interwebs are fond of circulating stories and memes about **Keanu Reeves** that suggest that he's not your average media personality but more of an ordinary bloke who is still in touch with his working-class roots, has empathy for his fellow humans, and generally does not conform to Hollywood stereotypes. As I only have his film personality to go on, I can't verify this to my own satisfaction, so I shall be interested to read *The Book of Elsewhere* to see if it grants me any insights — though the fact that he has been paired with **China Miéville** rather than, say, Kevin Anderson or Brian Herbert, might just be a pointer.

Mentioning **Iain Banks** reminds me that Father Christmas — actually Mother Christmas, if you want to be pedantic — slipped a copy of the Fortieth Anniversary Edition of ***The Wasp Factory*** into my stocking. This comes as a nicely presented hardback, with an introduction by **Neil Gaiman** and a second introduction by Iain himself, dated 2013, which makes me wonder if the original plan was for a Thirtieth Anniversary Edition, but Banks's untimely death put that plan on the back burner. I'm looking forward to renewing my acquaintance with the book, as I haven't

reread it since I first acquired a paperback copy way back when it was new.

Colin quotes **John Clute** on **Brian Aldiss** resembling 'Terry Thomas storming St Trinians'. In his later years, I always felt that Aldiss resembled no one less than the British comedy actor **Leslie Phillips**, star of many a British 'B' movie and the BBC radio comedy *The Navy Lark*. Strangely, Aldiss and Phillips were never seen in the same room together. Can this be a coincidence?

I was intrigued to see the review of **Cass Sunstein's** *How to Become Famous* saying that Sunstein himself considered that fame requires, amongst other things, 'a large dose of serendipity'. I've written elsewhere about how the idea that Sunstein and Richard Thaler dubbed 'Nudge Theory' originated, under that name at least, with fandom's very own Walt Willis. Thaler and Sunstein later said that their catchy name for their idea came about after a conversation with a publisher, which led me to wonder if that un-named publisher had seen Walt Willis's fanzine piece years before, and the name 'Nudge Theory' lodged in their mind, the way unconsidered and disconnected fragments do. Perhaps this proves it.

**Rich Horton's** article on *Norstrilia* seems to chime with a recent outbreak of synchronicity over here in Kirby Muxloe. Not long after I re-read '**Drunkboat**' in a **David Hartwell** anthology (*The Science Fiction Century*, dating from 1994), up pops this article, reminding me that I haven't read *Norstrilia* in a very long time. I possess it in the form of the Sphere UK paperbacks of *The Planet Buyer* and *The Underpeople*, which I gather from Rich's article were edited somewhat to make two novels out of one.

**John Hertz's** appreciation of **Martin Morse Wooster** pronounces a truth barely ever acknowledged that 'we in the SF community aren't tolerant; we only march behind a banner that says "Tolerance"...' Over the years, I have seen things and encountered people — especially those who have suffered from that lack of tolerance — that have shown me how true that observation is. Too many fans like to think of themselves as tolerant, but then fail to live up to the ideal. Perhaps things are changing; and not before time. But we all have our blind spots and our weaknesses. In this, social media has done us a disservice; it encourages us

in our intolerances of those who do not think like us.

As I said earlier, I spent twenty years as a trade union representative in the British Civil Service, and I often found myself having to persuade or influence people who disagreed with me (mainly in the workplace rather than in the corridors and forums of union power). I found the best way of doing this was through my setting a personal example, rather than by taking people's views on head-first. This took more time, but in the end it earned me more respect and even the odd convert. Of course, if I found I could challenge people's views with a well-placed example, I'd do it; but these examples employed, I'd like to think, subtlety and a well-selected real-world example that the colleagues around me could relate to rather than a brute force, stock ideological argument.

Finally: Dennis Callegari laments that in *The Book Blinders*, **John Clute** 'uses a lot of words I've never heard of. John Clute uses a lot of words you (or I, or anyone else) have never heard of pretty much anywhere. His reviews are a veritable cornucopia of lexiconial obscurity. I still have a novel by him on the TBR pile (*Appleseed*), but I cannot tell you right now about its language.

I contribute to the online cataloguing site **LibraryThing**, and read and write reviews of what I have read. There are a lot of other LT users who do likewise; but a certain number of them appear to be teachers who insist on classifying anything they have read according to its suitability for schoolchildren; who bang on about any novel with a teenaged protagonist as if it were specifically a YA novel; and who concentrate on any novel's reading age and accessibility to the exception of almost everything else. I can only think that exposure of such people to books by the likes of John Clute would make them bleed from the eyeballs ...

#### Reviews mentioned:

##### ORBITAL

by **Samantha Harvey**  
(Deep Waters Reading)

##### SIXTEEN WAYS TO DEFEND A WALLED CITY

by **K. J. Parker**  
(Deep Waters Reading)

(30 Decembere 2024)