

# SF Commentary 101

February 2020 80 pages

JAMES ALLEN \* GEOFF ALLSHORN \* STEPHEN CAMPBELL \* JENNY  
BLACKFORD \* RUSSELL BLACKFORD \* ELAINE COCHRANE \* DITMAR (DICK  
JENSSEN) \* EILEEN KERNAGHAN \* DAVID RUSSELL \* STEVE STILES \*  
TIM TRAIN \* CASEY JUNE WOLF \* AND MANY OTHERS



Ditmar (Dick Jenssen): 'Trumped!'

# SF COMMENTARY 101

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**FRONT COVER:** Ditmar (Dick Jenssen): 'Trumped!'

**BACK COVER:** Steve Stiles. A reprint of his classic cover from *SFC* 91. Originally rendered incorrectly on the cover of the paper copies of that issue.

**ILLUSTRATIONS:** Steve Stiles (pp. 7, 14 ); Stephen Campbell (pp. 18, 36); David Russell (pp. 74, 79).

**PHOTOGRAPHS:** Elaine Cochrane (p. 3); Stephen Silver (p. 7); Helena Binns (pp. 9, 10); Leigh Edmonds (pp. 18, 19); Casey Wolf (p. 50); Richard Hyrckiewicz (p. 69); Werner Koopmann (p. 78).

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# I must be talking to my friends

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## The future is now! (cover story)

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No *SFC* letter writer has commented on the obvious fact that during 50 years of producing this magazine, I have avoided writing about current affairs and politics.

I have plenty of good reasons for doing this. I don't know enough about most topics to throw in my two bits' worth. People who write to me occupy a wide number of points on the spectrum of political bias and opinion. Let them argue with each other. I don't mind disagreeing with readers, but I don't want to be seen as an idealogue — it might encourage the other idealogues. I like to publish within the great fanzine tradition: keep it light, keep it clear, keep it personal.

So I won't write about politics here. I'll write about science. I'm writing about the weird experience of taking part in a 200-year-old experiment that has unfolded around me and everybody now alive. The future is here, not up there in time somewhere.

Let us imagine a truly horrific scenario: Bruce Gillespie becomes world dictator. I've been elected to stop the 'hothouse effect': the heating of the atmosphere because of the increasing percentage of certain gases, especially carbon dioxide, in the atmosphere. My obvious answer is to stop all spitting of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Internal combustion engines stop. Various types of energy-producing machines stop. But millions of lives would be lost, either from the sudden disappearance of heating or cooling devices in extreme climate zones, or from the breakdown of the many industrial processes on which people rely.

Let's imagine that I become a really magical world dictator — don' wanna hurt nobody no-how. I ban all use of machines that rely on petrol- or diesel-powered engines or the burning of coal or wood. I replace every one of these processes powered by devices that generate electricity by solar, water or wind power. I replace all cars with universal public transport systems based on renewable sources of electricity. I replace millions of the trees that have been cut down or burnt during recent years. The world is forbidden from emitting any more greenhouse gases.

Problem solved? No.

Even if good old Gillespie and nobody assassinates him for his trouble, the amount of carbon dioxide, methane, and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere will remain at current levels. The atmosphere will remain vastly overheated. The ice caps and the methane reservoirs trapped in the north Asian tundra will continue to melt. The catastrophe will continue

There are no Gillespie Dictators in the world. A few governments throughout the world are enabling massive reductions in the production of greenhouse gases. Some countries with vast populations, such as India, China, and USA, are still building coal-fired power stations. Seemingly small-scale Australia is belching out greenhouse gases at even greater rates every year.

During the 1960s, we suffered from a prologued drought in the state of Victoria. We lived at Melton, then a small country town without a reticulated water supply. Our water supply was a large corrugated-iron tank by the side of the house. During the time when it ran dry, we had to buy water carried by tanker from the nearest Melbourne suburb of Deer Park, 20 km away.

During the summers of the 1960s, however, a hot day in southern Victoria was 100 degrees Fahrenheit, 36 degrees Centigrade. It was considered a very hot summer if we had more than three or four such days during January and February.

On Monday, 30 December 2019, the temperature reached 42C in Melbourne. The average temperature for all major centres throughout the continent of Australia was 41C. We had already suffered several days of 41C in Melbourne throughout December. New South Wales and southern Queensland had been having similar temperatures for months, and had been scoured by bushfires since the beginning of September. On 30 December, bushfires raged throughout most of East Gippsland (the eastern tongue of Victoria). The citizens of the seaside town of Mallacoota, as well as 4000 tourists, gathered on the beach, hoping they could avoid being incinerated. 200 houses were destroyed in that small town alone, including that of Don Ashby, well-known Melbourne fan of the 1970s and 1980s, and his family. The road to the rest of Victoria was closed (and is being reopened only gradually four weeks later). 4000 people were evacuated from the beach by Navy ship.

Two days before that, my sister Jeanette and other people attending a folk music festival in the Nariel Valley in northern Victoria had to evacuate to the town of Corryong, which was itself threatened by fire. Jeanette was able to reach home in Guildford, halfway across Victoria. The Nariel campsite was saved (although fire ran down both sides of the valley), and Jeanette has since been able to return to pick up the caravan.

We even had a bit of excitement in Greensborough, a northern suburb of Melbourne, in late December. A grass fire threatened houses in Bundoora, only 4 km away. The valley filled with smoke, as it did from the

Sydney and East Gippsland fires a week or so later.

At the time of writing, fires have burnt 1.4 million hectares of bushland in Victoria, about 5 million hectares in New South Wales, and large areas in South Australia (especially Kangaroo Island), Tasmania, and Western Australia (cutting the only sealed road between Western Australia and the rest of the country). But thanks to the efforts of a vast volunteer army of firefighters, only 26 lives have been lost throughout Australia during this bushfire season.

The Australian press and various other media have tried to turn these events into a purely political issue. The conservative Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, was holidaying out of the country as the fire crisis rapidly deteriorated during December. His only reaction for a week or so after returning? Patting people on the head and declaring that all was normal. As the extent of public anger at his seeming indifference has become apparent, various emergency measures have been taken.

So what about the science? Australian environmental and atmospheric scientists, especially those working for the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), have watched appalled as various indicators have shown clearly during the last ten years how rapidly the Australian climate (and world climate in general) is changing. They take no satisfaction in saying 'We told you so' to our politicians. To me, the politics of the situation in any country is swamped by the magnitude of the scientific experiment that humanity has imposed upon itself during the last 200 years. Until the early 1970s, there was a general assumption that burning various fuels produced harmful waste products, but a

good breeze somehow swept these products out to sea. Robyn Williams, ace ABC Radio science broadcaster, recalls that the first mention he heard of the greenhouse gas effect and the heating of the total environment was during the first program of *The Science Show* during the 1970s. Lord Richie Calder from Britain outlined the then new findings: if you fill the atmosphere with ever greater quantities of shit (carbon dioxide and methane), the air and sea become a giant dunny — or 'hothouse'. Also on *The Science Show*, David Suzuki has been offering further details of the mechanisms that have led to the rapid heating of the atmosphere during recent years. In the early 1980s, our own George Turner wrote *The Sea and Summer (Drowning Towers)* to demonstrate the social effects of polar ice melts and rising sea levels. His novel still reads very well, but he failed to foresee the rapid destabilisation of weather patterns in the atmosphere.

The political Trumps of this world (see Dick Jenssen's cover to this issue) accelerate the catastrophe, but even the most rational political leaders probably feel defeated by the current situation. Vast sheets of ice are melting ever faster, and sea-level increase is now measurable along many coasts. A billion animals may have been destroyed in Australia during the last few months, and some species made extinct. The human species, a self-important, pestilential top predator in what might be the only reservoir of life in the universe, seems determined to eliminate itself, but why do we have to take the other many millions of species with us?

— Bruce Gillespie, 27 January 2019

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## Bruce Gillespie, with much help from Elaine Cochrane:

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### Farewell to the old ruler. Meet the new rulers.

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On Saturday, 14 December 2019, Elaine and I reached a point that we had considered inconceivable only a few years before. For the first time in Elaine's life, and for the first time in my life since 1976, we were living in a catless household. Sampson had died, much sooner than we expected.

I've already written about our loss of Harry, our cuddly black and white cat, in May. The year before, we had lost Flicker, commander of the household and Harry's daddy. The year before that we had lost Polly, who achieved the age of 19 years and 11 months, just before she could receive her letter from the Queen. The three cats I've mentioned all basically died of old age, although Harry's death was very sudden.

And the year before that we had lost silly beautiful Archie, from kidney failure, at the age of six years old.

Why did we not adopt replacement cats as the members of the old dynasty left us? Because in the other half of the house lived Sampson, a large tabby cat who was very different from the cats whose house he shared.

Sampson was one of the five tiny kittens Elaine found in 2003 in the remains of an old house round the corner from our house in Keele Street, Collingwood. We called him Titch, because he was the tiniest of the five. You might remember from my account of the lives of Flicker and Harry that Elaine spent huge amounts of time keeping all five kittens alive because their mother had disappeared. Elaine also found homes for all of them. We lost contact completely with the couple who took the ginger kitten. We kept in touch with other new owners. Elaine had heard on the grapevine that Titch had shown some troublesome behaviour, but we were surprised



**Above: Farewell to one ruler, Sampson (2003–2019)  
Welcome to the new rulers, Chloe (front) and Esmerelda  
(Zelda) (back).  
(Photos: Elaine Cochrane.)**

when the owner of Titch, now called Sampson, emailed her in 2008 and said they could no longer keep him. He had become so aggressive that their toddler was afraid of him.

Neither of us was prepared to deal with a seriously deranged cat, but if they had surrendered him to an animal shelter he would have been assessed as unadoptable. What could have happened to the tiny sweet little kitten? Sampson had become a very angry cat. He was frightened of almost everything outside the house, especially sudden rain or thunder. He would bite and claw Elaine whenever he felt stymied or restrained. I kept away from him. Flicker didn't help — his idea of fitting another cat into the household was to offer it a place in the hierarchy under him. Sampson did not understand cat hierarchies. Harry was blatantly hostile. Archie used to pee on things unexpectedly. We thought that was merely because he was a neurotic cat, but the real cause was underlying kidney weakness. Sampson replied in kind. It's no fun being in a house where two ex-male cats try out-peeing each other.

Elaine was puzzled as to what to do, but at least we had arrangements in place so that Sampson could have a separate part of the house. That's because Violet, who had dropped dead very suddenly a few years before, did not get along with the other cats, so had had her own rooms in the house and a separate space in the outside enclosure.

Sampson demanded a lot of Elaine's attention and affection, but had little idea of how to repay that affection. We guessed that he had lived in a household where he received a lot of attention some of the time, but was left outside to fend for himself during the day while his people went to work.

Elaine was on the point of giving up but as a last resort the vet suggested a cat psychologist. Such people exist. The bloke turned up at our house, offered the kind of nostrums that psychologists offer for dealing with rogue humans, but he also diagnosed anxiety and suggested we try a Feliway diffuser. We plugged it into a wall socket, from where it emitted a synthetic cat pheromone into



the air of the whole house. Up to a point, this worked. The pheromone seemed to lessen his basic feeling of anxiety so Elaine could start to build his trust. He remained unpredictable, though. He became much more affectionate toward Elaine, and would sit on her lap for long periods. Then sometimes he would feel agitated for no obvious reason and attack her.

Over the years, Sampson was affected by various medical conditions. First he was diagnosed as having an overactive thyroid, so had to take daily pills for the rest of his life. Both he and Harry were diagnosed as having pancreatitis, and put on very strict diets and an anti-inflammatory syrup. However, Sampson still had periods when he could not keep down food, so he had to be given a very expensive anti-nausea tablet. About two years ago the vet noticed that the whole of his inner mouth was very inflamed and red. The only cure for this condition, caudal stomatitis, which would have killed him eventually, was to have almost all his teeth removed, except for the front fangs. This treatment worked. Sampson could still eat (and bite) with his few remaining teeth.

Flicker was, as I've said, commander-in-chief of cats until he died. We thought that Harry would mourn woefully for the loss of his daddy, friend, and mentor, which at first he did, but at the same time his personality expanded to fill his own half of the house. Elaine began to leave the middle door open. Harry and Sampson began to sniff noses and not bitch at each other. We didn't realise it at the time, but this may have been because Harry's health was declining and he no longer had the energy to be hostile. They were never truly friends, but both were very much happier with the new arrangement.

By 2019, 11 years after Sampson was returned to us,

he became what most people would consider a cat of normal temperament. I never completely trusted him, but that was my fault. He became ever more affectionate to Elaine. However, one night when Sampson stayed overnight at the vet's, the staff begged Elaine to come and deal with him.

I thought he would mourn after we lost Harry in May, because he had been distraught at Flicker's sudden absence, but now he had the run of the whole house and enclosure. As a loner, he didn't miss Harry at all. He really began to enjoy life.

Over the last few years, Sampson began to show weakness in both back legs. He would stagger when he got off Elaine's lap, or would wobble after walking too fast. This appeared to be arthritis, so as well as the anti-inflammatory syrup the vet gave Sampson injections every few months that were supposed to help maintain joint function. This seemed to work for awhile, but then in late November Sampson began to suffer seizures. He would spasm for a brief period, lose bladder control, then slowly regain consciousness. He'd be very wobbly for awhile but then seemed to recover. However, his back legs were becoming progressively weaker and he began to lose the use of his tail. The vet suspected that Sampson was suffering from a brain tumour. Whatever the cause, by Saturday, 14 December, Sampson could barely walk, although he did not seem distressed — he was still interested in looking at birds and the smell of cheese. The vet picked us up from home and took the three of us over to the surgery. I think he was as upset as we were that he had to use that final injection. Elaine buried Sampson in the back yard.

No cats in the house! It had never happened before. I could have lived with the strange situation for awhile, but Elaine went online and looked at the photos of the cats offered for adoption at the Cat Protection Society, which

is about a kilometre from our place. We had long ago decided that when we needed to restock we would adopt an older cat, not a kitten, and she could not resist the two 14-year-old female black and white cats, sisters, who were on offer. They had been surrendered 'because of ill-health' (no other details of the previous owner supplied) a month before. As soon as Elaine saw Chloe and Esmerelda she started the process of adopting them. For awhile it seemed that we would not be able to tell them apart. It's still difficult, but Esmerelda, now called Zelda, has a chirpier attitude to life, plays more, does everything with a bit more enthusiasm than Chloe does. Although they are twins, Chloe sees herself as the slightly disapproving elder sister.

We see no sign of old age in them, though, and still find it very hard to believe they are 14 years old. On the second night at our place, Zelda disappeared from the house and enclosure! Elaine could not sleep. She got up again at 4 in the morning, and Chloe made a noise to show that something outside was disturbing her. Elaine went out into the main back garden (very dark and bushy) and called Zelda. There she was on the back fence. Even after being with us for only two days, she had worked out where she was. She had had her exploratory adventure, and was very pleased to come home.

The next day Elaine found that Zelda had discovered a tiny hole in the nylon mesh enclosure and forced her way out. She did her best to fix the enclosure with pigeon wire, and neither Zelda nor Chloe has escaped again. Elaine also discovered evidence that a fox had been in the back garden and had tried to burrow into the enclosure near where she found the hole. She hired a 'fox man', whose trap caught an old fox a few nights later.

In Chinese style, the new dynasty has begun right at the moment the old dynasty exited. Now we'll see which dynasty lasts longer, the human or the feline.

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## Tributes

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### A giant falls: Steve Stiles (1943–2019)

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It is very hard to believe that Steve Stiles (1943–2019) has left us. This giant of the fanzine art world has been a part of my reading life ever since I joined fandom. He was already contributing to many fanzines when I began to receive traded fanzines from overseas in 1969. He has produced some of his finest fanzine covers and interior illustrations in the last year.

Steve was famous for his good humour and generosity. I've misplaced a quotation from Ted White to the effect that Steve was a professional artist who loved nothing better than contribute his covers and interior illustrations (for free) to fanzines.

You might remember that when Steve contributed his first cover to *SF Commentary* a few years ago (*SFC* 91), I completely stuffed up the presentation on the print

edition. Fortunately, the cover of the PDF edition shows the cover in its full glory.

Did Steve go into a huff, as any artist would have been justified in doing? No. He sent me the cover for a later issue of *SFC* (No 94). That's generosity! It's rather sad that we did not meet in person.

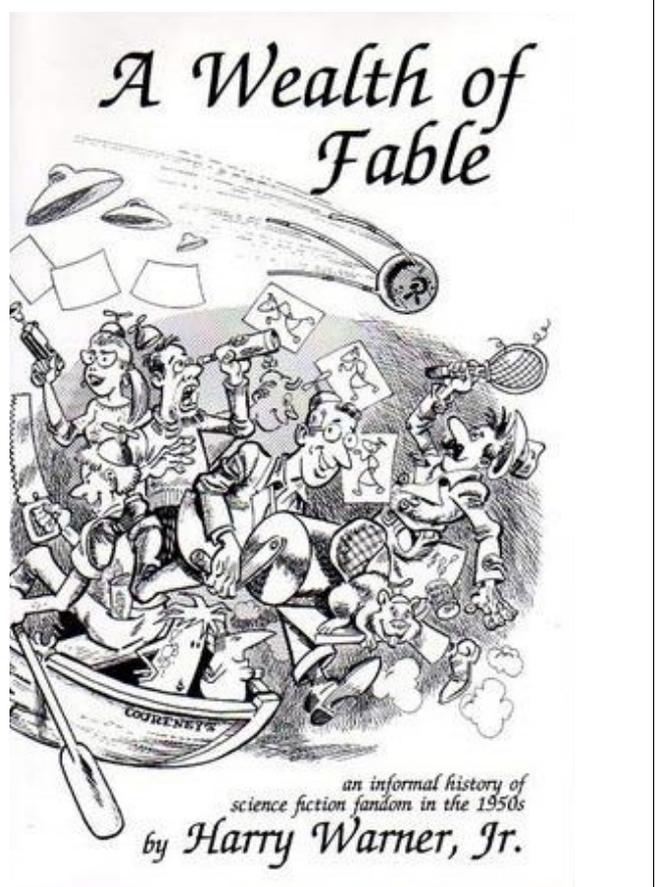
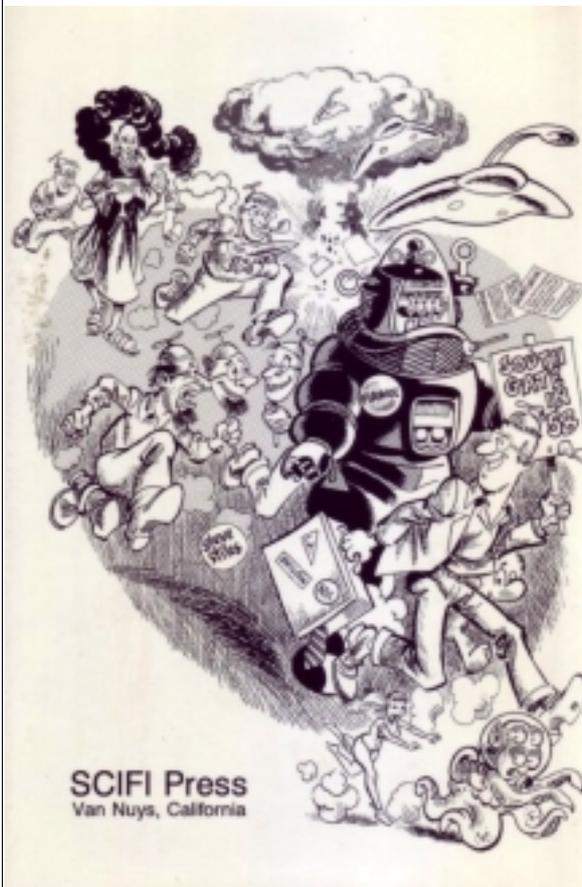
A brief quotation from **Mike Glycer**'s obituary in *File 770*:

Steve Stiles, one of fandom's all-time great artists, died during the night on 12 January 2019, only a few days after he shared on Facebook that he had cancer and a short time to live. It's a double shock to his wide circle of friends who were still adjusting to the first piece of news.



Steve Stiles. (Photo by Stephen Silver.)

Two of my favourite Stiles covers:  
 (below) his back and front covers for Harry Warner Jr's *A  
 Wealth of Fable* (SciFi Press);  
 and (right) *Lake's Folly*, Christina Lake's 2018 collection  
 of some of her most delightful and amusing fanzine  
 articles.



His awards history barely begins to scratch the surface of how much he meant to fandom over the past fifty-plus years, substantial as it is. **He earned the first of his 17 Best Fan Artist Hugo nominations in 1967, winning the award in 2016. He's won 15 FAAN Awards, presented by fanzine fans at Corflu, since the award was revived in 2001. And Steve was the first winner of the Rotsler Award (1998), a career honor for fan artists.**

It was only appropriate that Steve created the iconic cover for Harry Warner's fanhistory of the Fifties, *A Wealth of Fable*, for if no fanzine was complete without a Warner letter of comment, no faned felt completely faannish without a Stiles cover or cartoons.

Dave Langford, in Steve Stiles' entry in the *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* (SFE):

His first professional sale of a cartoon was to Paul Krassner's *The Realist* in 1961. He has contributed covers and/or interior artwork to *Fantastic*, several

Worldcon souvenir books, and many fanzines, including *Algol*, *Ansible*, *File 770*, *Locus* (in its pre-semiprozine era), *Mimosa*, *Psychotic*, *SF Commentary*, and *Xero*. He published in various underground comics venues from 1968, appearing in a number of 1970s and 1980s Kitchen Sink Comics titles including his own *Hyper Comics* (one issue, 1979): this featured 'Gonzo Horror', an entertaining graphic spoof of H. P. Lovecraft. He also worked as a penciller for the UK division of Marvel Comics.

Stiles was a versatile artist of considerable range, but it is his distinctive and knowingly goofy cartoon style that is most admired in fandom. Book cover examples include *A Wealth of Fable* (1992) by Harry Warner Jr, the 2002 reissue of Warner's *All Our Yesterdays* (1969), and Rog Phillips' *The Club House* (coll. 2014) by Phillips. A graphic novel anticipating the Steampunk mode is *The Adventures of Professor Thintwhistle and His Incredible Aether Flyer* (February–December 1980 *Heavy Metal*; graph. 1991) with Richard A. Lupoff as Dick Lupoff, adapted from Lupoff's *Into the Aether* (1974).

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**We have lost several Melbourne-based fans over the last few months, in particular Les Robertson and Adrienne Losin.**

**Geoff Allshorn's memories of Adrienne have just been published in the latest issue of *The Instrumentality* for the Australian SF Foundation.**

**David Russell and James 'Jocko' Allen have written their memories of Les Robertson.**

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## David Russell:

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## Vale, Leslie Shane Robertson

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Vale Leslie Shane Robertson.

Les Robertson was a science fiction fan. He lived in Moe in the east of Victoria with his parents Charlie (Chas) and Kath Robertson.

Like his father, Les worked at a coal-fired power station. Most of Moe's men did the same.

He was one of the problem-solving techs that fandom produces in abundance. At one convention the movie *Short Circuit 2* was to be shown on a large cinema screen just prior to the finish of the con. An essential cable was missing, so impatient fans were waiting en masse getting increasingly annoyed at the delay.

Les was asked for help and had the needed cable to link the two recalcitrant bits of technology. Les saves the day!! At the closing ceremony, Shane Morrissey gratefully thanked Les.

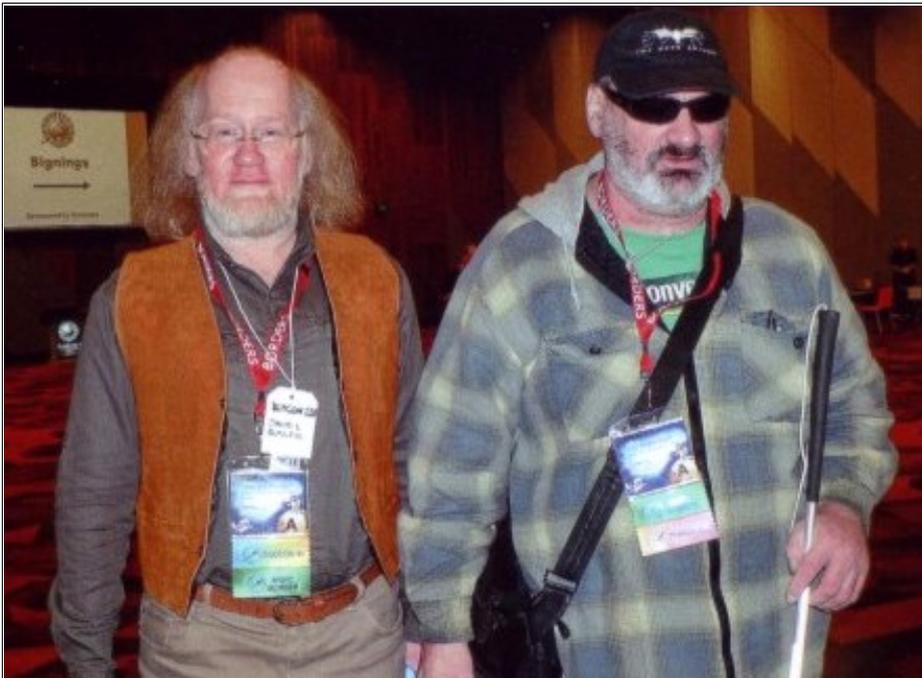
You see, Les always lugged around a huge amount of kipple with him when he attended conventions, far more than any other reasonable person would bother bringing. Seeing him with all of his paraphernalia I was always reminded of the over-prepared beaver from Lewis Car-

roll's *The Hunting of the Snark*: 'The beaver brought paper, portfolio, pens, and ink in unfailing supplies'<sup>1</sup>

As the person who had to, on occasion, help move all of these essentials around later in Les's life I often thought when he was repacking at 1 or 2 a.m. that life would have been easier for both of us if we'd gone minimalistic rather than the fannish everything and the kitchen sink, and a spare kitchen sink and essential repair materials if either sink should spring a leak, way of doing things

One time a ring that he owned went 'missing', causing much searching of packed bags and luggage; given the lateness of the hour I was heartily sick of relooking through possible hiding places, using a torch to make sure it hadn't gotten underneath his hotel room bed and making plans to phone housekeeping the next day in case they found it after we'd checked out and caught both our early morning trains home. All of this while wanting only sleep after a three-day convention.

I phoned him after arriving home. His mother Kath answered the phone. 'Did the ring turn up?' Yes. It was



**David Russell (l.) and Les Robertson (r.) at Aussiecon 4, September 2010. David is providing guiding help, as he often did for Les in the years after he lost his sight. (Photo: Helena Binns.)**

stuck to some duct tape he'd used to seal up some luggage. Les always had duct tape and a sewing kit and superglue and a leatherman tool and ...

We met through both of us belonging to the Melbourne Science Fiction Club back when it was located at Saint David's Uniting Church Hall in 74 Melville Road, West Brunswick. I'm sure I attended a few meetings without paying much attention to Les. If you chucked a rock back then you'd hit a dozen slightly overweight, bearded, affable enough male fans at any well-attended meeting.

In talking to James 'Jocko' Allen I'd learned that Les would happily get milk or perhaps fish and chips from a nearby shop in Melville Road if someone was too busy to get them for themselves but that getting the change from these purchases out of him was a little difficult.

Les would glom onto people and talk seemingly endlessly about his obsessive fondness for B-grade science fiction movies. The first time I was the victim of one of these enthusiastic proselytising speeches I learned more about *The Puppeteer* series of horror movies (also an interest ) than I really wanted or needed to. And why were people edging away from me and suddenly remembering that they had to speak to someone else when I was telling them about the latest artist I'd encountered?

When he could still see, Les would ride quite long distances on his beloved motorbike at the drop of a hat if a fellow fan needed help setting up a video player or a television set. It was usual for him to help out at the conventions he attended. Somewhere on a VHS tape at the 1994 convention Constantinople (William Gibson was one of the guests of honour) held at the now demolished Southern Cross Hotel, there's footage of me wandering up to Les, not noticing the video camera he was using on behalf of the committee, and saying 'Hey Les, how's it going?' Only to be scolded by him for talking over the panel that he was recording for posterity.

Coming home from Melbourne after a convention where he wore his warlord costume which, prior to modern con's no-weapons policy had a heavy steel sword

as part of it; Les was using the handle of his sword as a makeshift handle to steer a wheeled trolley on which he had all of his con stuff. Two teenaged Vietnamese boys, one of whom had a butterfly knife, decided to mug him and demand his money. Les simply pulled the sword from its scabbard and told the two of them bluntly 'Fuck off'. I like to think that they turned away from a life of crime as a result of being confronted with a much larger weapon.

Les became a diabetic, and annoyed fans with his cavalier attitude towards reducing the amount of sugar in his diet. On a visit to Moe I was taken to 'see' a movie with him. I told him the visual stuff that was happening. That annoying person who talks during the entire movie? That was me! Sorry. Before going into the theatre Les bought soft drink and a chocolate-covered ice cream, and was going to buy a packet of Fantale Follies before I put my foot down and said no to the lollies. He complained: 'It's not really going to the movies if you don't have Fantales.'

Later in life he'd buy full sugar cans of soft drink and drink them all between the weekly grocery trips. Sweet things were one of the few pleasures he had left in his life.

An incompetent doctor had blinded Les during a laser session on his eyes to seal leaking blood vessels at the back of his eye. After that Les no longer trusted anyone in the medical field and did whatever he wanted to as far as his diet went despite everyone telling him that there would be negative consequences.

Eventually he had to undergo dialysis every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. which meant he was unable to attend the Melbourne Science Fiction Club's weekly meetings on Friday night. Towards the last two years of his life Les was taking so many pills prescribed for him by doctors that he had to be extended a line of credit by his pharmacist, so expensive had his medical bills become. This meant he was unable to maintain his memberships in any of the clubs he'd been in or attend anything like the number of fannish events he dearly



Les Robertson, 2007. (Photo: Helena Binns.)

will remember meeting my blind friend for a long time.

Les struck up friendships with those patients he underwent dialysis with, but the funerals he had to attend when their bodies no longer responded to the blood cleansing must have been an ongoing reminder of his own mortality.

Further illness and the failure of the National Disability Insurance Scheme to address problems Les had with getting around in his parents' residence meant that he fell often and was on a first-name basis with the local ambulance drivers who had to come and pick him up. His father Chas had died and Les's mother Kath wasn't strong enough to lift him back into his wheelchair unaided.

One of the most frustrating two hours I have ever spent in my life was on a train with Les going to Canberra to attend the first Conflux convention. He always liked to have a phone with him in case of emergencies and had just bought a new one. Since we had an abundance of spare time on the combined train/bus journey, he thought he'd work out how to use the phone without using the thick manual that came with every new phone back then. Frustratingly this was the one thing he didn't pack. Sob! But it was okay. He had his trusty seeing eye human with him! Press button. Tell Les how this had changed the screen. Press 'nother button. Les is unhappy with the result. Repeat. Endlessly. Are you sure you didn't bring the manual? The glass windows on that carriage didn't open, which is why Les still had a telephone at the conclusion of the journey.

It's absurd to claim that you have the slightest inkling of the task given to King Sisyphus in the underworld after only two hours of frustration with a recalcitrant mobile phone and a blind man, isn't it?

The speed that I normally walk at from one bit of a convention to another is something I hadn't given any thought to until Les lost his sight and I began helping him get around at cons. He'd have his hand on my left shoulder and would walk behind me to reduce the likelihood of walking into something. At a fairly slow pace. Oh the freedom to walk quickly without having to warn Les about steps or tram tracks or signposts; it's something most people have never had to consider. We are all most fortunate to have our sight.

Les during the phone calls we had on Tuesday night told me he considered James 'Jocko' Allen to be his best friend. The two of them had spent a lot of time together during Jocko's bachelor days; so my contact with Les later on in his life couldn't get me the top spot.

Les Robertson was kind, annoyingly a bit more intelligent than me, and more stubborn than any other person I've ever known, even when that stubbornness was to his own detriment. He was generous with his time and the effort that he put into helping others. I will miss him, his sense of somewhat twisted dark humour, his love for truly bad movies, and the long conversations we regularly had. I hope I've given a rounded impression of my friend and his interactions with me and fandom through writing about his good qualities and his flaws.

Twenty people attended Les Robertson's funeral at the Chapel of LaTrobe Valley Funeral Services at 6

would have liked to.

I read Dave Langford's fanzine *Ansible* to him whenever there was a new one out. 'Thog's Masterclass' was his favourite section. I also read Les the more interesting articles from *Ethel the Aardvark*. Murray MacLachlan's work was especially appreciated. He was uninterested in book reviews since print was dead to him. So Christmas and birthday gifts to Les were usually DVDs

I believe it was in 2017 at Christmas time that, exhausted by the illnesses that beset him, he announced that he wasn't going in for any more dialysis. This causes a build up of toxins in the blood and results in death. It cast a pall over the 'tis the season to be jolly' for those few friends who still kept in touch with Les. Every phone call potentially became the call that would announce his death. I was relieved when he phoned early in 2018 to tell me he'd decided to live.

On his only visit to Dennington where I live, he was still capable of walking, and by chance we met up with a niece and nephew of mine, Kate and Michael Andrews. They'd never met someone who was blind before, and Kate asked curiously 'What's it like being blind?' Les was unable to come up with a quick answer; so I told them: 'Shut your eyes.' Which obediently they did. 'Now keep them shut.' Their eyes remained closed. In a louder voice: 'Forever!' Their eyes snapped open. I'm sure they

Ollerton Avenue in Moe. Six of those twenty were science fiction fans. I was one of them, but I was ten minutes late for the 2 p.m. start. I will always be grateful to Les's mother Kath for delaying the start of her son's funeral service so that I could attend all of it. James was on time.

Fandom is poorer for Les Robertson's demise.

1 *The Hunting of the Snark, an agony in eight fits*, with nine illustrations by Henry Holliday. p. 750; from *The Complete Illustrated Works of Lewis Carroll with all 276 original drawings*. Chancellor Press 1982.

— David L. Russell, November 2019

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## James 'Jocko' Allen:

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## Leslie Shane Robertson (27 March 1958–31 July 2019)

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I first met Les at a convention back in 1985 or 1986, when we did a Pan Galactic Gargleblaster panel. After several other drinks, we sampled his weird red concoction from a tall glass, being careful not to swallow any of the dry ice that was making it fizz and smoke. No glow sticks in this one, but sometimes he put those in too. Sipping carefully and try as we might, none of us on the panel could identify the mystery ingredient which turned out to be two red Berocca tablets. Les explained later that after drinking the spirits, we might need a Vitamin B boost. He loved dry ice and glow sticks in drinks and never did anything by half.

Another example of a Les special was his contribution to the MSFC salad night. I don't know why we were having a BYO salad night one summer, but people brought along all sorts of salads and quite a lot got eaten. Les decided on a garlic salad. He was in my flat, at the kitchen table, when I got home. I walked in to find him carefully smashing five or six bulbs of garlic with my claw hammer. He had carefully wrapped it in a clean plastic bag and was pounding the garlic to bits on my chopping board. There were other ingredients, but the garlic dominated. We caught a tram to the club meeting in West Brunswick and people could smell the garlic salad a block away. As it sat in its re-used ice-cream container, you could see a haze above it from all the garlic oils. A few hardy souls tried it and said that it was 'very strong'.

Les attended many MSFC meetings during the late 1980s and early 1990s. He was also a keen *Star Trek* fan and a long-term member of Austrek, which was reflected at his funeral, as there were quite a few photos of him in a Federation red uniform from the second and third *Star Trek* films, before he joined in with the Klingons and began to go his own way with capes, flashing lights, leopard prints, and boots. He loved dressing up, although I do remember the time he told me about how things went a bit wrong and he was questioned by the police in Richmond. He was on his way to the *Blue Brothers*

film showing at the old Valhalla, dressed as a Brownshirt member of the Illinois Nazis, complete with plastic machine gun/water pistol slung over his back. Walking down a street he heard the police car roll up behind him and the two officers wanted to know what he was up to. A couple of minutes later they were satisfied he had a plastic gun and he was back on his way to the film.

It was a nice funeral down in Les' hometown of Moe. The funeral main photo of Les was him on his beloved black motorcycle. I wish I had a dollar for every time I helped roll-start it because the battery kept going flat, but it did give him the freedom to come down to Melbourne and travel around. I teared up a little when they played 'Science Fiction, Double Feature' from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. I realised this was more of the SF&F that Les had loved. Even when he was blind, he still went to movies with a carer who described the bits he could not see.

One last story. Saturday night in Canberra, Conspire convention March 1989., at the Rex hotel. I was walking down the corridor going to my room when I met Les. He told me he was going to an all-night screening of new *Star Trek Next Gen Season 2*, as someone had been sent tapes from the US of episodes we had not seen. I said I was off to bed and so we parted. Next morning I got up and was walking down another corridor heading for breakfast when I spied a shambling Les. 'How did it go?' I enquired. 'It was worth staying up all night,' he said. 'And now I am going to crash in bed for a couple of hours.'

Ah Les, I will miss you. As the celebrant at the funeral said, Les's energy is not lost, merely changed. May you go boldly on.

— Jocko, November 2019

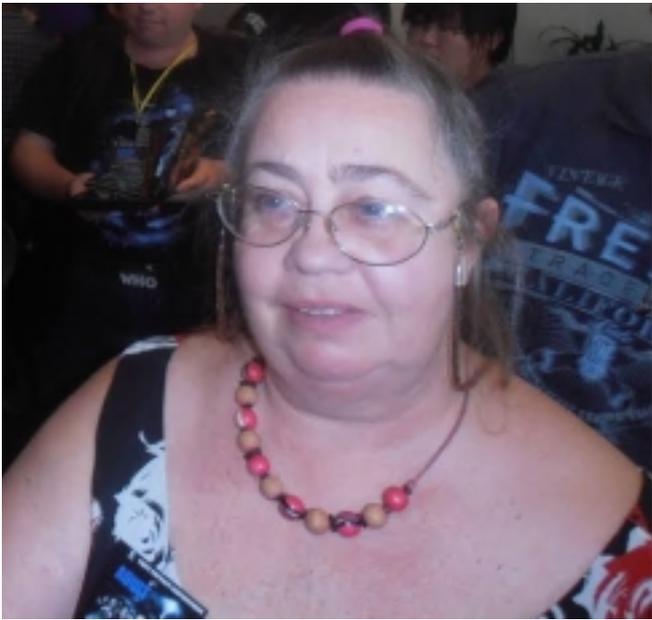
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## Geoff Allshorn:

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### Adrienne Losin (???—2019)

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[It is with great sadness that the Australian Science Fiction Foundation notes the passing of Adrienne Losin. The following was written by Geoff Allshorn for the most recent issue of *The Instrumentality*, which can be accessed from the ASFF website. Thanks for their permission to reprint.]

Two of my earliest memories of Adrienne Losin testify as to her unique nature. In 1977, she was part of a group that went to see a science fiction film that formed part

of a double feature. The first film was a short documentary about microscopic life. As the narrator informed us that a cellular life form ‘multiplies by dividing’, Adrienne burst into laughter. This introduced me to her subtle but quirky sense of humour. A year later, when an upcoming episode of *The Paul Hogan Show* featured a short sketch called *Star Trot* (a send-up of *Star Trek*), Adrienne arranged for a group of fans to visit the Channel 9 studios and have a tour of the set. This demonstrated her ability to organise fan events, often at short notice.

I first met her over forty years ago, through the *Star Trek* club. In those days, Austrek was a fledgling group run largely by school students. Using her background experience as a school teacher, Adrienne helped us to organise our first convention and she arranged venues for a couple of our early club functions. I understand that she played a similar role in assisting others to launch the local *Doctor Who* club. For me, Adrienne was full of explosive enthusiasm and vigour, nobility and eloquence. Across many SF clubs and social network forums, people have their own anecdotes regarding Adrienne.

I last spoke with her at a convention in Melbourne, when she informed me that she was moving to Queensland in order to be closer to family. I am glad that she got to spend time with them, although she continued to come to Melbourne on special occasions. She leaves behind a rich tapestry of SF memories. To paraphrase Douglas Adams: so long, Adrienne, and thanks for all the fandom.

— Geoff Allshorn, 2019

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## The postal path to penury

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This continues the section of ‘I must be talking to my friends’ in *SF Commentary* 100 that gives some information about letters and other bits and pieces I receive in the mail. Real things, not electronic unreal things. Last issue I ran out of room to mention more than a few of these little presents from the world of ur-reality, the world where international fanzines of genius roll into the house every other day and my own posted fanzines cost only \$1.20 each to send overseas; where big boxes of review copies arrive every other week, often sent airmail from overseas publishers; where letters of comments arrive so frequently it’s worth saving the stamps for collectors.

So much for the dream world.

In the actual world, fanzines have not gone away. Most

of them are available only as PDF file downloads from the internet, usually from Bill Burns’s wonderful website <http://efanzines.com>. Others are sent to me as attachments to emails. But some actually travel by air, laden with stamps valuable enough to stock a small shop. And the competition between them has been fierce during 2018 and 2019.

### Best of the Year ... but which Best?

Voting forms will soon appear for both the FAAN Awards, in whatever zany categories are chosen for 2020, or for the Hugo Award for Best Fanzine or Best Fanwriter. It would be good if actual fanzine publishers and

fan writers were nominated for the later, but this rarely happens these days. John Hertz suggests that a mass attack by fannish fans would change this situation. But, like many fanzine fans, I can't afford a Postal Membership to a world convention merely in order to nominate for the Hugos.

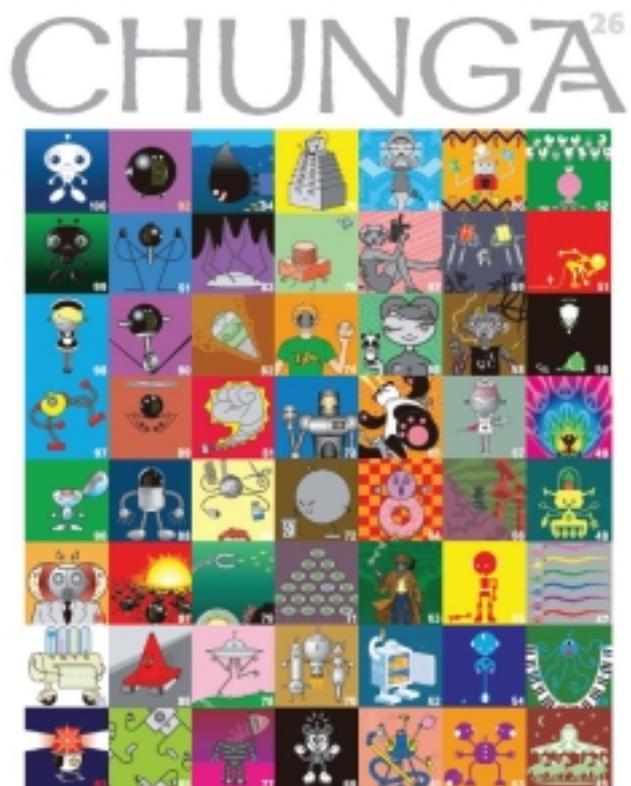
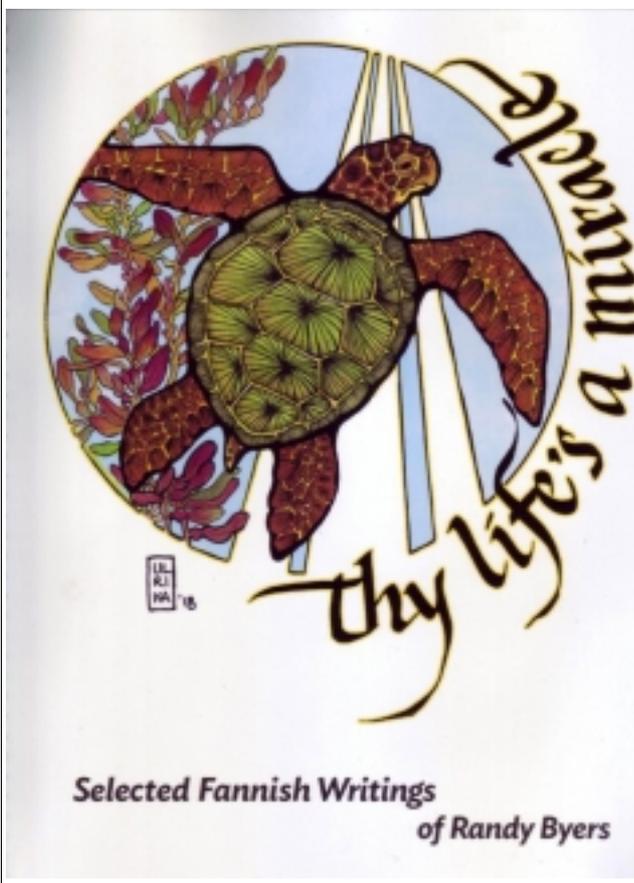
Whichever voting path you take, you will have problems choosing your nominations in 2020. The year 2019 produced three of the best one-off fanzines I've ever seen, and other frequent FAANZ winners, such as *Banana Wings*, have had an excellent year. It would be a braver person than I am to say which of the following I prefer. I can't compete with any of them. I'm not too good at fancy computer artwork, and I don't seem to have access to many of the fine fannish writers who festoon these fanzines.

If real fanzines still filled the nomination slots in the Best Fanzine section of the Hugo Awards, *Thy Life's a Miracle: Selected Fannish Writings of Randy Byers* (March 2019; edited by Luke McGuff; most readily available from <http://efanzines.com>) would surely be the winner in 2020. **Randy Byers**, a Seattle fan who was first diagnosed as suffering from glioblastoma in 2015 and died of it in November 2017, was a friend to everybody who met him, and a seriously witty and observant fanzine writer. He was also a brilliant photographer — some of his best photos have appeared recently in *SF Commentary*. The written selections in this 136-page A4 spiral-bound volume come from a wide variety of fanzines. Randy continued his internet contributions long after his first diagnosis.

I was impressed particularly by his Guest of Honor Speech at Corflu 34. As you probably know, the Guest of Honor at the Corflu convention each year is picked from a hat two days before she or he must deliver the Guest of Honor speech. The anointed person can either pay a fee to the convention and escape speechifying, or spend 24 hours trying to scratch up a speech that will amuse and entertain fellow attendees. Randy Byers was already very ill when he attended Corflu 34. His speech is short and poignant. He tells of his attempts to become a science fiction writer but 'I wasn't any good at it'. He later admits to being a better editor than writer (his best-known editing gigs include *Apparatchik* and *Chunga*), but the rest of *Thy Life's a Miracle* undercuts this statement.

I leave you to discover the sheer variety of Randy's experiences and interests — matters fannish, of course, but also travel stories (including his trip to Australia), book, movie, and music reviews, and pen pictures of people I've heard about but never met in person. He was very brave and cheerful in his last years, but we should remember he had always been brave and talented — a treasure to everyone who knew him.

It is a further tribute to Randy Byers that his *Chunga* co-editors, **Andy Hooper** and **carl juarez**, have returned to the material unpublished when Randy died, and have produced *Chunga 26* (64 pp.; available as a PDF download on [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com)). It would have won all the FAAN Awards in any year in which *Thy Life's a Miracle* had not also appeared. carl's production values are exemplary, as always. The articles maintain a high standard of excellence, featuring writers such as Steven Bryan Bieler (on the bracing experience of receiving 500 rejection letters for his fiction), James Bacon, John Hertz, Graham Charnock, Gordon Eklund, Pete Young, Andy Hooper him-



self, and a vigorous band of letter writers. The feature article is by Randy Byers — his account of his return trip to Yap, an island in the far west of Micronesia where Randy lived with his parents from the ages of 5 to 9. This long, exhaustive report was written in daily diary entries on Facebook after the return bout of brain cancer. But nothing could stop Randy enjoying every minute of his life. Randy's photos are excellent.

In any other year — you know what I'm going to say — *Random Jottings 17: A Corflu 36 Anthology* (edited by **Michael Dobson**; 170 pp.; available as PoD from Amazon or as a PDF file at [efanzines.com/Random Jottings](http://efanzines.com/Random Jottings)) would have been the automatic winner of the FAANZ Award for Best Fanzine. Michael Dobson, host of Corflu 36 in 2019, asked fan writers to nominate their best fanzine articles, and provide an introduction. I'm not sure whether I would have been here or not, but I do remember being too busy at the time to reply to Michael's invitation to participate. I can't begin to summarise the variety or qualities of the articles that are here, but it takes only a quick scan to enjoy the four fan artist portfolios (from Steve Stiles, Grant Canfield, Jay Kinney, and Dan Steffan).

The articles range from serious stuff about the nature of fandom ('The Dumbing of Fandom' by Paul Kincaid; and Ted White's 'The Politics of Fandom') to fabulous fannish tales (e.g. 'Merv Barrett Presents', which appeared only after his death last year; Steve Stiles' 'The Cutty Sark Affair', and many others) to fannish autobiography (Dan Steffan's 'My Origin Story').

At first I thought I would not find any evidence of Australia's fannish past — until I saw that the first contribution is 'Living in the Seventies' and all the contribu-

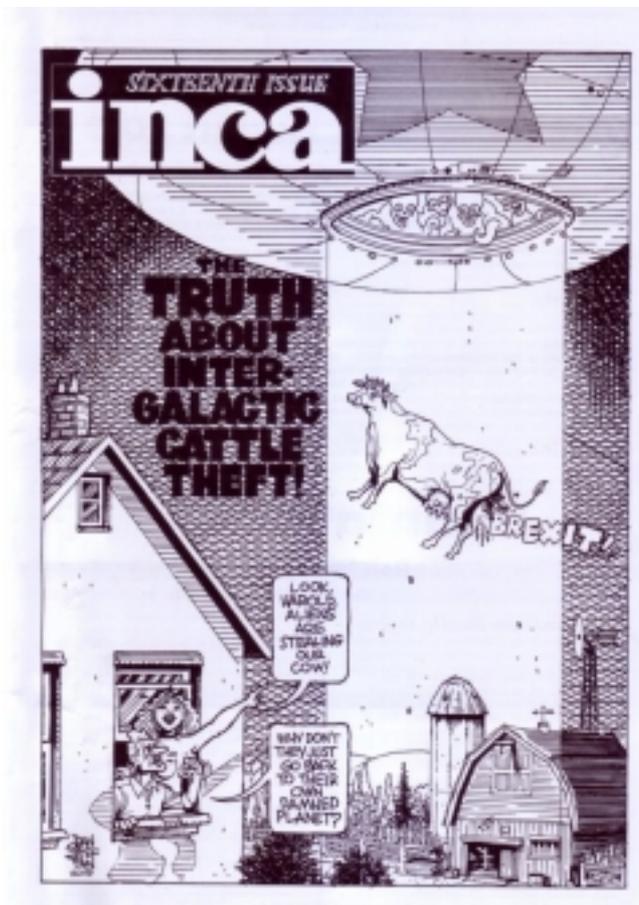
tions are by Australian fans. Kim Huett introduces some of my favourite pieces from the early days of ANZAPA. Whatever happened to Peter House after the early 1970s? Nobody in Melbourne seems to be able to answer that question, but his 'The Origin of PLEHI' gives some idea of his writing talent. John Brosnan's 'The Perils of Sydney' gives some idea of how amusing he could be; and Leigh Edmonds' 'Dad Man's Bluff', about the flat that he and Paul Stevens shared in the late sixties, is one of his very best pieces from the glory days of *Sugar Tooth* and *Rataplan*.

I could always whinge about the articles that are not here, but it could well be my fault that they are absent. To me, John Bangsund is the best fan writer I've ever read, and his 'One Flash and You're Ash, Buster!' should be here. But I didn't nominate it, and Leigh Edmonds has reprinted it in 2018 in his fanhistorical fanzine *iOTA* (also available from [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com)).

## Fanzining is a way of life

As I say, the regular fanzines might have a bit of difficulty winning the sort-of-glitterizing prizes this year, but maybe they will beat the Gigantic and Lovely Special Fanzines of 2019.

*Inca 16* (**Rob Jackson**; August 2019; 50 pp.; available from [robjackson60@gmail.com](mailto:robjackson60@gmail.com)) is one of those fanzines that make me jealous because Rob has layout skills I don't have, and he can afford to print colour pages and post



copies overseas to people like me. Rob covers a fair width of the fannish spectrum, very much from the British viewpoint, but also including an article by Canada's Taral Wayne. British fan Harry Bell covers ten pages with 'Pie in the Sky 2', a collection of pithy pieces accompanied by emails of comment. Rob Jackson provides the fannish travel segment, with 'The Rockville Diaries', an account of his visit to Corflu 36 in Rockville, North Carolina, in 2019. As always, I wish I had been there, especially as Rob has photos of regular Corflu attendees, such as Steve Stiles, I've never met. I've met everyone shown on page 22: I wish you could visit here. Taral's reminiscences of childhood have become sharper and less nostalgic in his recent fanzine contributions. 'There Was a Hard Rain', about a hurricane he lived through in 1954, is one of his very best articles.

The one time I joined InTheBar, the mainly-British-and-definitely-fannish e-list that started in year 2000, I was so overwhelmed by the volume of traffic that I had to drop out. I suspect it is still busier than Facebook, to judge from the symposium 'Notes for a Corflu Con-runner' in this issue of *Inca*. It has contributions from Corflu 36 organiser Michael Dobson, convention attendees, and consuite organisers Curt Phillips and Aileen Forman. Much of this will be of interest only to people trying to organise conventions in American hotels; these days no Australian hotel will allow room parties, and they want to charge for all services offered by a con suite. But it does show the value of internet discussion between fans with a bit of nous.

The trouble with saying a few words about *Banana Wings 75* (November 2019; 56 pp.; available only as a print fanzine — enquire at email fishlifter@gmail.com) is that they may well be the same gushing words I might have used about any previous issue of the magazine. Some people — **Claire Brialey** and **Mark Plummer** — just know how to edit and write great fanzines every time, and there's nothing we lesser beings can do but gape and cheer.

I'm probably like every other reader of *Banana Wings* in that I turn to the editorials first.

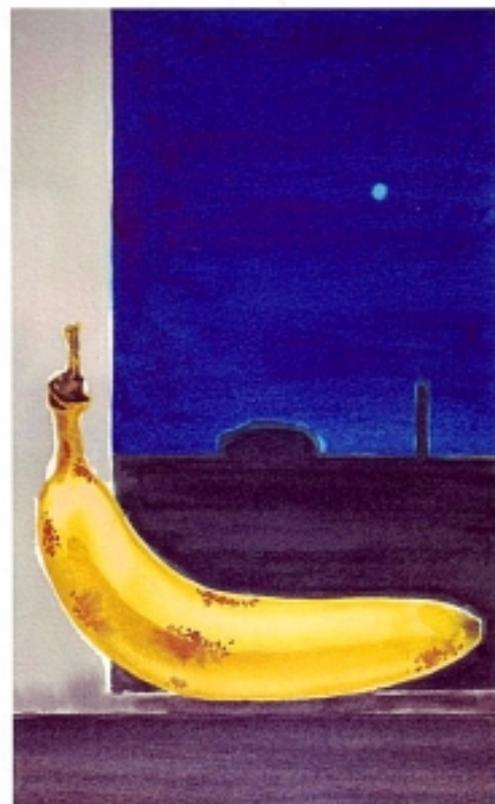
Mark writes about attending the 2019 World Convention in Dublin. To judge from comments I've read on Facebook about numerous Dublin Worldcon controversies, I'm very glad I didn't attend. Mark adds his own twist to several controversies, in particular overcrowding at the Hugo Losers' Party (which might have attained an official existence in 1976, but was certainly held by Joe and Gay Haldeman in 1973 in Toronto for people who had both won and lost Hugos that year), and the Best Related Work category in the Hugo Awards, which doesn't sound any less suspicious than any of the nominees or winners of the other 'fannish' Hugo Awards.

Claire is much more introspective than Mark this time. She writes about time travel, what we might tell our younger selves if we could do so (nothing, in my case; I can't think of a single choice I made in my teens and twenties that I might not have made more disastrously if Older Bruce had sat there telling me to do things differently). Claire also talks about the way older women find themselves becoming increasingly invisible, even in fandom. And that's a prelude to a worrying note that's



**BANANA WINGS 75 (November 2019)**

appeared in Claire's recent writing: a feeling of being a bit overstretched; a bit blocked. In fact, Claire's writing is still very lively and perspective (although I suspect we lucky members of ANZAPA see the very best of her



**PORTABLE STORAGE TWO**

work).

Caroline Mullan is a British fan I met many years ago (even during my trip to England in 1974?; more likely at Aussiecon 3 in 1999) but much of whose fanzine writing I haven't seen until recent years. Her 'Remembering James White for an Irish Convention' is exactly the kind of affectionate literary article I love to receive for *SF Commentary*; but *Banana Wings* received it instead. Many Melbourne fans are also fans of James White, both as writer (especially of the 'Hospital Station' series) and as a member of Irish Fandom during the 1950s.

The letter column is dominated by Australians Kim Huett and Leigh Edmonds, both of whom are doing great work about Australian fan history, and Bruce Gillespie, who seems to be merely waffling. Epistolary stars this time include many of my favourite writers, such as Steve Jeffery, Andy Sawyer, John Hertz, Fred Smith, Jerry Kaufman ... you get the drift. Sort of like the *SFC* letter column, at one-third the length.

With *Portable Storage 2* (Autumn 2019; 84 pp.; enquire from [portablezine@gmail.com](mailto:portablezine@gmail.com)), **William Breiding** threatens to become a power in the SF fanzine universe. It proves that the first issue of *Portable Storage* was not a on-off. It confirms my suspicion that William is gathering together a group of his own regular writers. Some names, such as those of Mike Bracken (who edited the fanzine *Knights* for some years), Jeanne Bowman (famous Californian fan), Billy Wolfenbarger (long-time contributor to Bill Bowers' *Outworlds* before we lost Bill Bowers), Rich Coad (whose *Sense of Wonder Stories* was one of my favourite fanzines while it lasted), and Alva Svoboda (first 'met' by me in APA-45 in 1971), will make readers want to ask for a copy of *Portable Storage 2*. Others, such as Don Herron and Dale Nelson, are names I didn't know. They seem to have been drafted already into the *Portable Storage* Fanzine Force.

This issue features such a wide range of material that it reminds me of my own best fanzines. (How's that for a reverse compliment?) For instance, Cheryl Cline writes about the twist ending in fiction, Alva Svoboda writes about West Coast fandom, Rich Coad invites us to take much more notice of the adventurous fiction of Paul Di Filippo (but I know him best as the kindly but firm custodian of the Fictionmags e-list). Dale Nelson, in talking about two of his favourite professors, Brian Bond and Milo Kaufman, covers an enormous range of interests.

This is a rich feast, including many fine letters of comment. My only complaint is that William includes very little of his own writing. That makes me very lucky. He sends his best thoughts to me for my fanzines.

**Rich Lynch** is willing to send me the print edition of *My Back Pages* even during periods when I don't have the financial resources to send him a print copy in return. It's an unusual fanzine: it includes no new material, but retrieves articles and photos from Rich Lynch's extensive files of his own material; and it has no letter column. It mainly retrieves tales of travels undertaken by Rich and Nicki over many years. *My Back Pages 18* (July 2017; 26 pp.; enquire from [rw\\_lynch@yahoo.com](mailto:rw_lynch@yahoo.com)) proves that you can make old material seem new by placing articles in

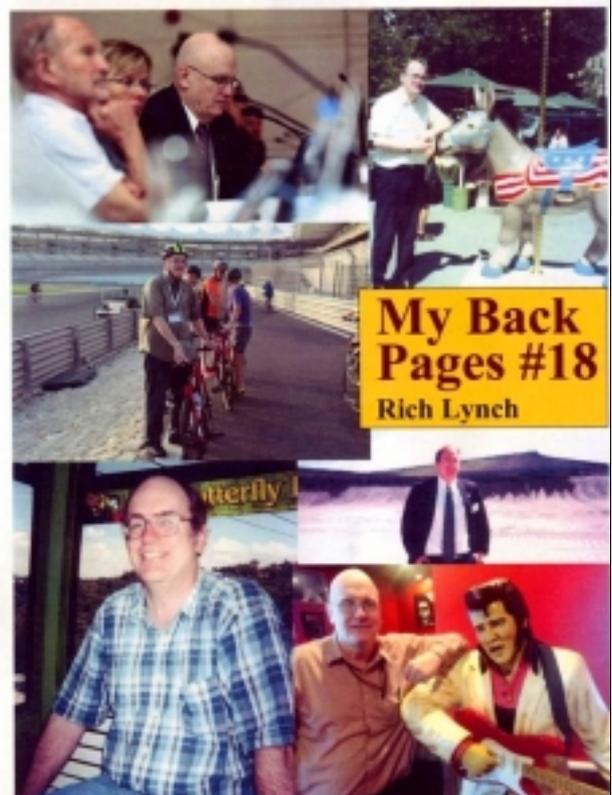
the right order, and illustrating them with colour photos. In No. 18, Rich swings through the Founding Fathers' Old South, attends FanHistoricon in 2016, and celebrates the life of Dave Kyle, who lived from 1919 to 2016, and had been a fan since 1948. Rich also celebrates the 80th anniversary of the first SF convention, in Leeds in 1937, and talks about the life and work of Bob Shaw and Sir Edward Elgar.

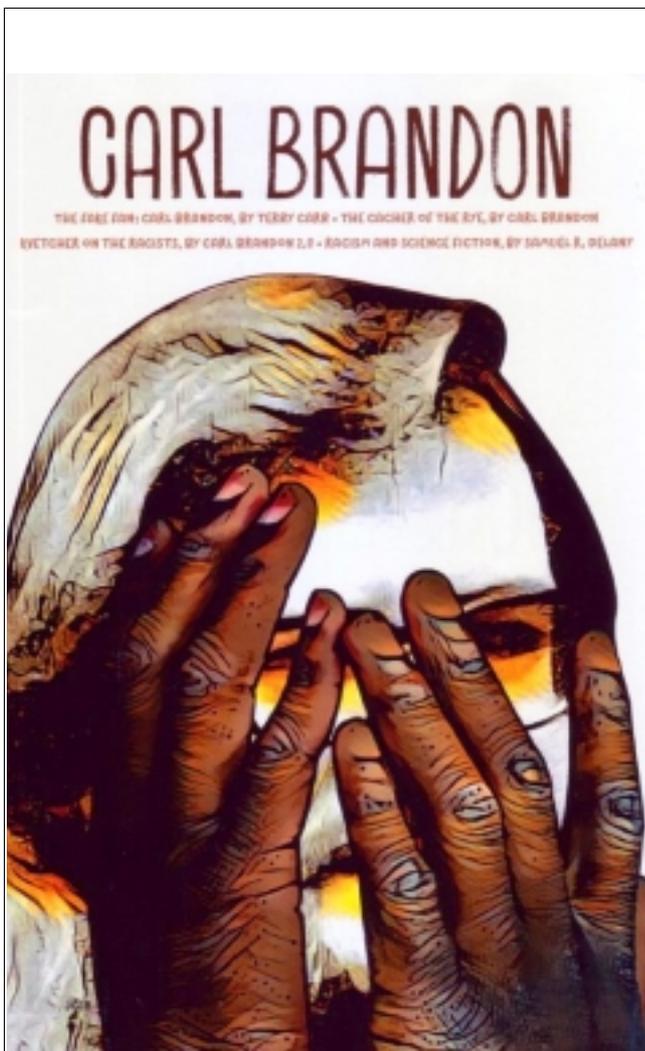
It's very pleasant to share the life of someone who is interested in all aspects of life and thought. (Issue No. 19 has appeared on [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com).)

## More one-shots ...

During a discussion of the name Carl Brandon on the fictionmags e-list, I wrote that I knew little about Brandon except that he was a fakefan. Until he was exposed he was thought to be the only African-American fanzine fan. However, all that had happened during the 1950s and early 1960s. Few American fanzines from that period could be found in Australia, and I had never seen an account of the Carl Brandon Affair. Robert Lichtman in California was so concerned about my lack of knowledge about important fan history that he sent me a copy of *Carl Brandon: The Fake Fan* (Union Street Press; 2019; edited by **Jeanne Gomoll**; contact [jg@unionstreetdesign.com](mailto:jg@unionstreetdesign.com)), a new collection of the works of that famous fan writer who wasn't.

Carl Brandon, it seems, was the creation of Terry Carr and Ron Ellik, who were already famous fanzine publishers and writers in the late 1950s. (And Terry Carr became one of America's greatest book editors with his *Ace Specials* of the late 1960s and early 1970s). In 'The Fake Fan: Carl Brandon', Terry Carr (in 1982) tells of the

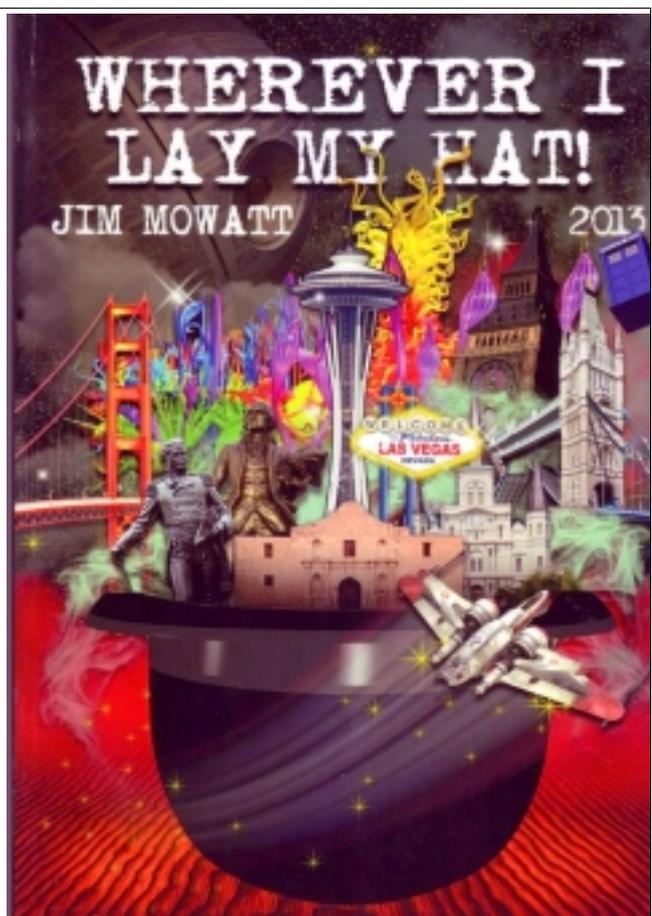




tradition of creating hoax fans, and of the events that led to the fame/infamy of Brandon. He began life as 'one of those quiet type kids' who 'doesn't seem to have the urge to publish or to fanspond', but later developed into a major writer of humorous pieces for fanzines, and 'a distinct personality'. Terry Carr wrote most of his pieces. Later still, Carl Brandon made it known that he was black, the first black fan that anybody could remember. Says Carr in 1982: 'What a marvellous opportunity to put fandom's sometimes self-congratulatory openmindedness to the test!'

I leave you to trace the complete story of Brandon's spectacular 'career' and unmasking — and the much later formation of the Carl Brandon Society, a 1990s group designed to encourage African-Americans to join fandom at large. The book includes Brandon's most famous fanzine piece, *The Cacher in the Rye*, a bibliography of his works, and an essay about 'Racism and Science Fiction' by Samuel R. Delany. It is a beautiful Print on Demand edition, with cover art and book design by Jeanne Gomoll.

Why won't I compete for one of the regular fan funds? In the past, the main reason I've given has been the expectations that go with competing for and winning a fan fund (such as DUFF, US–Australia travel; GUFF,



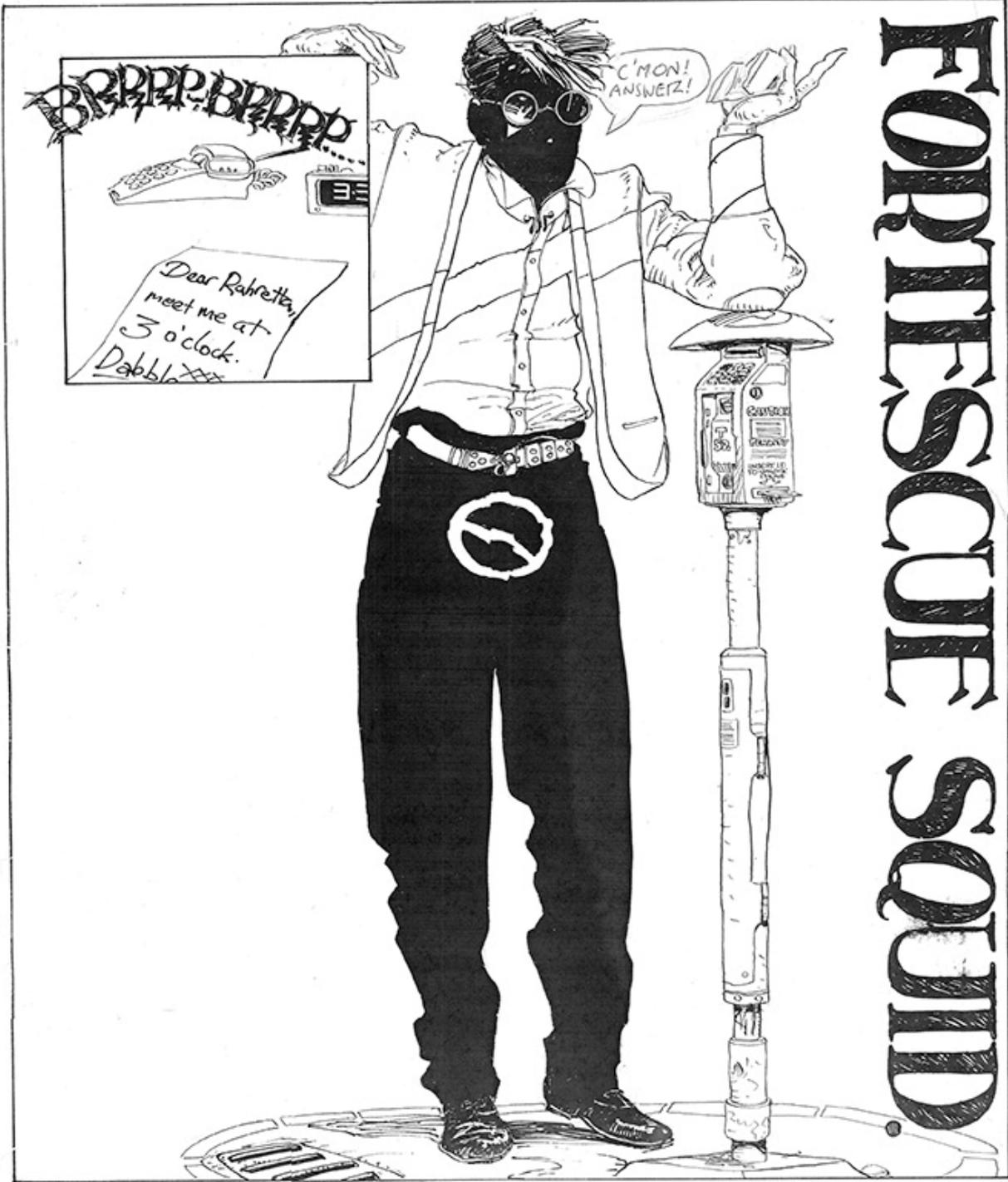
Britain/Europe–Australia) is that I would need to raise money for the fund for two years after my return from the trip. I wasn't too worried about the expectation that I should write and publish a Trip Report. That's what I do: write and publish fanzines.

But these days! Take a look at *Wherever I Lay My Hat*, Jim Mowatt's report on his 2013 TAFF Report on his trip from Britain to America, first to attend Torcon 3 in Toronto, and then to hit the fleshpots of American fan centres (including Las Vegas). Glossy, gorgeous cover. Heavy glossy paper within; colour photos on every page, including photos of many people I've met; some clever cartoons; lively, crunchy fannish travel writing. How could I ever match that? My own report on the 2005 Bring Bruce Bayside Fund is all in black and white, except for the cover, and it looks like a cheap job compared with recent TAFF and GUFF reports. These days if you win a fan fund you not only have to be talented, you have to be seen to be talented.

I include Jim's report as an example, not an exemplar. Recent fan fund reports by people such as Gillian Polack and Donna Hanson have been similarly luxurious to the touch as well as entertaining to the mind. Get in touch with the various fan funds to see whether copies of their reports are still available.

**Again I've run out of room for short reviews of books I've received recently. Continued as soon as possible ...**

— Bruce Gillespie, 27 January 2019



Stephen Campbell.

**In *SF Commentary* 100, I wrote: 'Some people still print out their letters of comment, put them in envelopes, attach stamps, and put them in the mailbox. A few even hand-write their locs. I'll thank them specifically next issue. (The letter column has been squeezed out of *SFC* 100.)'**

**So here we are in *SFC* 101, with large numbers of letters of comment in front of us. We start with the people who sent me locs in the mail:**

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## Handwritten and typewritten epistles

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**LEANNE FRAHM**

**12 Queen Street, Seaholme 3018**

A great surprise yesterday to receive a copy of *SFC*'s 50th Anniversary issue. I know I'm going to enjoy it. (I've already enjoyed studying Elaine's brilliant cross-stitch cover. Love it!)

(27 April 2019)

It must be 30 years since I wrote a letter of comment, but your 50th anniversary edition has driven me to do it once again, although this will probably be the shortest one I've written.

I probably never wrote to you on previous editions of *SF Commentary*; you published huge numbers of letters from famous writers and critics and fans, and there was no way in the world that I felt I was capable of contributing anything meaningful.

You will most likely also receive huge numbers of letters from famous writers and critics and fans after this magnificent issue, but this time I do have something meaningful, and that is that with this 50th Anniversary edition, you've reminded me of the joy I first felt when I found fandom. Much of it detailed events that occurred before I became involved, but the essence was the same. I smiled all the way through it, a half-sad half-happy nostalgic smile. Half-sad, because at 33 years, the world is before you; at 73, you're hoping fervently for another year at least. And happily nostalgic, because they were the days!

So thank you, Bruce, for all your efforts over the years, and for this. And thank you to Elaine for helping to make it happen.

(13 May 2019)

**GERALD SMITH**

**Unit 18, 3 Mockridge Avenue,  
Newington NSW 2127**

You have managed to get me to do something I haven't done for over 30 years. By publishing the fiftieth anniversary issue of *SF Commentary* in ANZAPA, and by doing so ensured that I read more than just excerpts from it — as I tend to do on efanzines.com — and, by making it such a brilliant fanzine — I have been coerced/forced/persuaded/lured-back-into producing a letter of comment.

I did give some thought as to the best way to respond to this super and superb issue of *SFC*. I could have

included what would have been a massive mailing comment in my next contribution to ANZAPA. But somehow that didn't seem adequate for such a magnum opus. And besides, my next issue of *The Erotic Wombat* will not appear in ANZAPA until the August mailing and I didn't want to wait that long before providing you with my feedback. I may still make some comment about *SFC* 98 in ANZAPA, but that's a different matter.

In the end there was one thing that really decided me to send you a LoC. Like many others I am sure, I eagerly scanned 'The 800: Fifty years of friends' and had a certain level of disappointment in not finding my name listed. Then it hit me. There is a very good reason I'm not included in that list. In all the years I have been reading *SFC* I have never contributed or responded. It is beyond time that oversight was rectified.

(I then re-read your introduction to the list of contributors and noted that this was not just for *SFC* but also for *Steam Engine Time*, *The Metaphysical Review*, *Treasure*, *\*brg\**, *Scratch Pad*, and others. Surely I have contributed to one of those at some time or other, even if just by way of mailing comments to *\*brg\** in ANZAPA? So, maybe it was an oversight by you. Still, it has prompted me to write a LoC, and that can't be a bad thing.)

**[\*brg\* In the end, I didn't have time to go through umpteen issues of my ANZAPA- zines in order to check whether further names should have been added to 'The 800'. So you're right; you probably are among a number of people who should have appeared on the big list. I'm glad my oversight prompted you to write to me this time.\*]**

Let me start by joining what I am sure will be a very loud chorus of congratulations from around the globe. To continue doing anything for 50 years is a massive achievement — even just staying alive for that long is hard enough. But to continue producing a magazine of such high quality for such a long period is monumental. And, while you have had help along the way — as you so engagingly detail in this very issue — it can be genuinely said that *you* have continued to produce *SFC* for 50 years. That truly is remarkable.

The zine is beautiful, Bruce. It is a thing of joy to hold in one's hands. From the gorgeous Elaine Cochrane cover to the spectacular Ditmar Jenssen back cover, and everything in between, this is a publication of which you should be, and I'm sure you are, immensely proud. The presentation is so clean and easy to read, and the flow of the articles within is both logical and natural.

As I said earlier, this is a beautiful front cover. As with the great illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages there is so much detail, and so much vibrant colour. Each of the little drawings is something I could enjoy looking at on its own. I'm sure it could be possible to analyse each and find possible hidden meanings but I'll leave that for others to do. For me that would detract from just taking in the whole thing as a wonderful piece of art. And the quote from Carlos Ruiz Zafon is just so apposite; it sums up just why we continue to hang on to books long after we have read them and will most likely never read them again.

Dick Jenssen's computer-generated art is always a delight to see, and 'Follow Me' is no exception. It just seems so right that when the crew of a mighty 16-oared Norse ship has found Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life itself, that it should be Pegasus that will guide them home. Here is the making of a quest story to rival Jason's great journey in search of the Golden Fleece. In the process we have the merging of two of the great mythologies of the ancient world.

I have always loved reading 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'. In any issue of *SFC* it is always the first thing I turn to. It is especially so with this issue, as together the pieces provide us with something of the history of *SFC*. And, in doing so, they also provide some insight into Bruce Gillespie, the fannish icon that you undoubtedly are.

To anyone who has never published a fanzine it must be a source of some puzzlement and wonder that anyone would do so, and especially keep doing so for 50 years. Like so many things in life that are really worth doing, that are done for the love of it and not to put bread on the table, it is a purely personal thing. And being a purely personal thing it can be very hard to explain to others just why you keep doing it. I produced a fanzine for a short while when I was much younger. (I called it *Pariah*, which was possibly something of a death sentence of a name. It did not last long, and probably shouldn't have lasted as long as it did, before succumbing to a mercy killing.) I realised that I had neither the talent nor the perseverance to continue, but would have liked nothing more than the ability to produce a zine anything approaching the quality of *SFC*. Had I been able to do so, could I have kept it going for 50 years? I like to think so. Instead I settled on doing apazines, and have managed to keep those going for over 40 years.

I truly think you do yourself a disservice when you say, 'I have kept publishing fanzines because I'm no good at anything else.' Your first answer to Mariann McNamara's question provided the definitive reason why you continue to publish fanzines. If you need any further reasons I would add that you produce such bloody good fanzines. If you were to stop producing them the world would be a much lesser place for many people. I'm also sure you are good at other things. To name but two: you are, I am told, a pretty darn good editor. And you clearly are not bad at being a husband if Elaine has stayed with you for 40 odd years.

**[\*brg\* Now that is a mighty achievement of Elaine's. :: I didn't ever have more than 300 recipients of the all-print editions of my**

**magazines. It's hard to tell if the PDF versions are read widely; it is certainly not world conquering.\*]**

I identify with your discovery as a young man that, while you could write fiction, you could not invent plots. I made the very same discovery at about the same age, and I'm sure there are many more like us. It would have been wonderful to be the writer of our dreams, but, that was not to be our destiny. Unlike you, sadly for me, my ability to write opinion pieces is journeyman at best.

From your interview with Gillian Polack it is not entirely clear whether we have Merv Binns, John Bangsund, John Foyster, Lee Harding, or George Turner to thank for the launching of your career as a fanzine producer. Still, that's not a bad quintet of mentors, so let's just say they share the kudos.

I'm not entirely sure you can attribute entirely to luck the contributions you received from the likes of Stanislaw Lem and Darko Suvin. Surely something about *SF Commentary* must have attracted them and caused them to respond? It is the same thing that draws your readers and contributors back to read the next issue, and then the next issue and so on. And then, by attracting such luminaries, their contributions add to the allure for others and the whole thing builds on itself. That is what has made Gillespie fanzines amongst the first that people want to read and own.

While I agree with you that 'Much that is today called "sci-fi" is backward-looking fantasy fiction about a never-never past', I don't think that the field has completely 'abandoned its commitment to the future'. Some of the best writers are still striving to provide us with stories that even you would accept are science fiction and which maybe even George Turner would agree are 'as well written as the best of any other kind of fiction'.

I believe Colin Steele provides some examples, if his reviews later on in this *SFC* are anything to go by. I haven't read the books he reviews, but they do give evidence that there is still some SF around that is set in the future and is, it would seem, well written. I submit to you *The Second Cure* by Margaret Morgan, *84K* by Claire North, *Austral* by Paul McAuley, and *Perfidious Albion* by Sam Byers as just some set in the future and for which Colin presents positive reviews. Others I might add include *The City & The City* and *Embassytown* by China Miéville, the 'Worlds' series by Joe Haldeman, and the Mars trilogy by Kim Stanley Robinson.

Of course, some of the best science fiction has never been confined to visions of the future. The events in *War of the Worlds*, for example, take place in a then-contemporary Britain. And well-written science fiction can even take place in the past, as with large parts of Stephen Baxter's *Time Ships*.

And all that leaves aside the even bigger argument in defining the boundary between science fiction, fantasy, and horror, and even between those genres and contemporary fiction in general. Are Anne McCaffrey's Pern books SF or fantasy, for example? They are set on another world, but they include a classic fantasy trope in dragons. But those dragons are explained by science. To rule these books as fantasy is to also include Jack Vance's *The Dragon Masters* in the same genre.

The explosion in interest in science fiction in the last

40 years has had the unfortunate effect of much being included that is not SF at all by any definition, and a great deal more that is forgettable dross. One thing's for sure, Ted Sturgeon's famous law that 'ninety per cent of everything is crud' still applies — it's just that there's now a great deal more out there to begin with. But there are still the shining jewels hidden amongst the dross, even if they might be harder to find. It could be argued that just makes the search all the more rewarding when one of those jewels is uncovered.

**[\*brg\* As Ursula Le Guin said during the Guest of Honour speech at the first Aussiecon, and I paraphrase: 'Not 90 per cent of everything is crud. 100 per cent of trees are not crud.'\*]**

Having said all of this, I have to admit to my own need to practise more of what I preach. I find that, in recent times, I have myself reverted to re-reading many of the 'classics', for which read SF books published before the 1970s, the latest being Ursula Le Guin's magnificent *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which is still as good, if not better, today as it was when I first read it 40 years ago. Perhaps you should just ignore the previous few paragraphs.

The Bruce Gillespie of 1992 could not have envisaged anything like the internet that we have today. He certainly could not have envisaged there ever being something like efanazines.com providing the opportunity for *SFC* and other fanzines to be read by a much wider circle of fans without much cost at all to the producer. There is no longer the need for a print run of 500 copies or more for someone to win a Hugo, because the potential is there for the zine to be seen by many more than 500. So, we can live in hope that one day *SFC* will receive its just reward.

**[\*brg\* The unfortunate result of the advent of the internet is that almost no real fanzines now appear on the Fanzine Hugos list. Nearly all the items listed each year have nothing to do with fanzines or fandom as we know it.\*]**

But, really, you are right in asking what greater reward you could get than to be the recipient of a thank-you note of the sort you received from Brian Aldiss. I have talked about my *Pariah* earlier. While I have no regrets about folding the zine after less than a handful of issues, I will always remember the thrill of receiving letters of comment from the likes of Harry Warner Jr and Fred Patten and artwork from Bill Rotsler, not to mention the wonderful fanzines sent to me in exchange.

The saying goes that we stand on the shoulders of giants. And your piece 'The early years: Yesterday's heroes' demonstrates the truth in the axiom. Just the roll call of names can evoke awe in anyone who has any knowledge of fannish history, especially Australian fannish history — Harding, Foyster, Bangsund, Edmonds, Graham, Turner, Jenssen, Broderick are all names to conjure with. You were indeed fortunate to have them as mentors, assistants, and guides.

George Turner could rub people the wrong way, probably because of his love for what you describe as a 'good verbal fight'. There are some I know who took that

very personally, which is definitely their problem and not George's. On the other hand, one of my fondest memories was the evening while we were organising Unicon VI, the university science fiction convention in 1980 that had Joe Haldeman as Guest of Honour. George had invited Alf Katz and myself to his place to discuss, amongst other things, the writers' workshop we were then planning, which, unfortunately, did not eventuate. Apart from the great advice that George gave us about organising such an event, some of the verbal sparring we had was worth the admission in its own right. I wish I could remember the details; I just recall the fun. I also wish that the workshop had gone ahead but, in the end the organising of the convention itself turned out to be almost more than we could handle on its own. Instead we settled for having George as Australian Pro GoH for the convention.

I remember all too well the 'limitations of producing fanzines with a duplicator'. My early apazines and all the issues of *Pariah* were done that way. There was making sure the keys of the typewriter were clean so they cut the stencil properly. My first apazine for the Sydney-based apa Applesauce was typed on a very old portable typewriter that was lucky if it cut the stencils at all. The result was barely legible pages. Doing headings by hand, again making sure the stencil was cut sufficiently but not so much that it fell apart. Later, cutting and pasting electrostencils into regular stencils. Like you, I was lucky enough to be introduced to Noel Kerr, in my case by Merv Binns. With Noel's help and invaluable feedback, I like to think that I did really improve. And there was a real feeling of achievement in producing a zine this way. Would I go back to it now? Not a chance.

If ever there was a fanzine produced in Australia that deserved to make money, at least enough to cover its costs, it was *SFC*. Unfortunately it was possibly a victim of its own success. This was a zine so good that everyone wanted to contribute to it rather than just pay money. Combined with you living in an isolated part of the world — not the USA — the chances were never going to be good.

I thank you for including the history of Norstrilia Press. I remember, when I attended Aussiecon in 1975, it was really rather exciting that there was a group of Australians setting out to publish works by Australians. I was especially thrilled that they took their name from the stories of one of my favourite authors, Cordwainer Smith. I even bought a copy of *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* despite being but a student at the time and therefore quite impecunious. I still have it but, to my great chagrin, have never gotten around to reading it. I must remedy that situation ASAP. Over the years I followed the fortunes (or, I guess, lack thereof) of Norstrilia Press, and bought copies of *The Altered I*, *The View from the Edge*, *Moon in the Ground*, *The Dreaming Dragons*, *When Pussywillows Last in the Catyard Bloomed*, *The Plains*, *Landscape with Landscape*, *Dreamworks*, and *In the Heart or In the Head* as my own small way of supporting this bold venture. It was sad but, looking back, probably inevitable that the enterprise eventually folded under the weight of financial pressures and the intrusion of 'real life'. But it was a glorious idea that did flame relatively brightly for a little while and showed what could be done with a bit

of gumption and a fair amount of naïvety.

**[\*brg\* I seem to have given the wrong impression. Norstrilia Press did not fold 'under the weight of financial pressures', because it never lost money. But it did not succeed sufficiently to give anybody a salary, especially Carey Handfield, who did most of the really hard work. As Nick Hudson, brilliant Melbourne editor and small publisher, once said to a meeting of the Society of Editors: 'Bestsellers are not cream on the cake of publishing; they are the cake. A bestseller pays for all the other books that merely make back their expenses.' We didn't have a bestseller, although Philip K. Dick: *Electric Shepherd* and *The Plains* eventually sold out their print runs. We would have needed a bestseller of, say, 20,000 copies every year or so to keep Norstrilia Press going after 1985.\*]**

I first read *Where Late The Sweet Birds Sang* around 45 years ago. It remains to this day one of my favourite books of all time, let alone science fiction books, and one I have re-read two or three times since, enjoying it all the more every time. So I thank you for reprinting Gordon Van Gelder's appreciation of Kate Wilhelm. She was clearly an amazing woman who has left the world a lesser place. I reproach myself that I have read very little more by her; a mistake on my part that sorely needs to be rectified.

I knew of Steve Sneyd, but nothing much at all about him. The tributes you have published here, especially the reprinting of the wonderfully quirky interview with Andrew Darlington, do much to enlighten me further about someone who sounds like an amazing individual. In a similar vein I thank you for providing the marvellous insight into others we have sadly lost about whom I previously knew very little — Randy Byers, Milt Stevens, June Moffat, and Derek Kew.

It was indeed very sad to hear of the passing of Merv Barrett. We corresponded very briefly in the eighties and I remember him fondly as someone who treated a young and sometimes impetuous fan with kindness and respect. He is greatly missed.

Very little SF poetry appears to be published these days — and, from what I read of him here, there will be even less with the loss of Steve Sneyd. So you are to be congratulated for finding poetry of a calibre worth publishing and then actually doing so in an age where so many seem to see verse as something quaint from a bygone age. I much enjoyed the poems you have published in this issue of *SFC*, especially those by Tim Train, as I have a bent towards humorous and nonsense poetry. Unfortunately I do not have the critical skills to say anything more meaningful about these particular works.

You certainly have an excellent reviewer-in-residence in Colin Steele. His reviews are short enough to keep the reader's interest and yet manage to capture enough of the flavour and essence of each book reviewed that you can very easily able to identify whether the book is one you want to read or even own. And many of the books reviewed here fall into both categories. Trouble is, with our space issues, if I buy any new books I have to find room by somehow disposing of one currently on the shelves. I could look for them on iBooks, but then there

is still the problem of finding the time to read them. Oh yes; the great problems of the twenty-first century.

Most of the books I am tempted to acquire are in the fiction reviews. I am something of a fan of Stanley Kubrick, but list myself as one of the Philistines who just do not like *2001: A Space Odyssey*. So a book about it is not likely to appeal. While I still love *Frankenstein*, I really think I have read enough about its making to do me for a lifetime. Similarly I have enough books already by or about Tolkien. *The Making of The Wind in the Willows*, on the other hand, is one I might hunt out one day. I still love the book as much as I did when I read it as a child, and would love to know more about how it came about. Similarly, I have very fond memories of the *Quatermass* TV series and adapted movies, so might well find *We Are the Martians* something worth reading. I definitely will get hold of a copy of *Dreams of Mars*, having read a sample of it in, I think, your own *\*brg\**.

I am not going to mention the fiction specifically. Suffice to say that most, if not all, have now been added to my long and growing list of books to somehow find time to read. This particularly applies to the Australian SF and fantasy, if only because it is Australian, though Colin's reviews make them all sound worth trying some time.

And so we come to the end of what has turned out to be not just my first actual LoC in many, many years, but also by far and away one of my longest. But, really, that's no great surprise. This issue of *SFC* deserves such an extensive and complete review. If you can go to the effort of producing a zine of such quality and substance then the very least I can do is to provide a detailed letter in response.

(25 June 2019)

#### **STEPHEN CAMPBELL Warrnambool VIC 3280**

Congratulations on your achievement — not only on the Fiftieth Anniversary of *SF Commentary* but also on the positive advancement of the field of science fiction.

I've drawn on your comment, 'Also, I feel that the field has abandoned its commitment to the future.' The backward-looking fiction about a 'never-never past' that some call 'sci fi' seems to me a natural degeneration of a literature that is placed in a genre category, where the rampant plundering of original ideas (called 'tropes' by some) and often clumsy explanations extract the wonder from the work and leave us with scepticism about the field as a whole. If SF has a commitment to the future, it is in the examination of possible futures as warning of the development of the present, particularly in the field of science. Some speculation from past writers have become 'facts' of modern civilisation, and the literature becomes prophetic in its pure form. Sci-fi is only the presentation of mind candy, but I see Science Fiction as a genuine cultural influence, quite apart from the enormous amounts of money it generates as a commercial enterprise. Will the future generate the progenitors of this thought called SF or will it vilify SF writers for

**(Continued on page 36)**

**Russell Blackford is a Conjoint Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Newcastle, NSW. He is the author of numerous books, including *Strange Constellations: A History of Australian Science Fiction* (co-authored with Van Ikin and Sean McMullen, 1999), *Science Fiction and the Moral Imagination: Visions, Minds, Ethics* (2017), and *The Tyranny of Opinion* (2019).**

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# Russell Blackford

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## Science fiction as a lens into the future

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[This is the written version of a talk presented to the Australian Defence College's 'Perry Group', Canberra, 7 June 2019.]

1

First, thanks to all concerned at the Australian Defence College for organising this event, and especially to Professor Michael Evans for thinking of me and inviting me as your speaker. I'm honoured to be here and delighted to discover that science fiction is studied by a collection of people such as the college's Perry Group.

It has been said (by the British novelist L. P. Hartley) that the past is a foreign country — that they do things differently there. A lesson from relatively recent human history is that the future is also a foreign country.

When I say 'relatively recent', we can put this in a broad perspective. Our species, *Homo sapiens*, is some 300,000 years old, and earlier human species from which we descended go back much further, millions of years, indeed, into the past. *Homo sapiens* has continued to evolve since the earliest fossilised specimens that we know of, becoming more gracile — or light-boned — in anatomically 'modern' humans. The rise of agriculture dates back about 12,000 years, and something recognisable as civilisation, with large cities, writing, and bureaucratic social organisation, emerged in the Middle East and other locations about 5000 years ago, give or take.

By contrast, what we now call European modernity is historically recent. If we could travel back to Europe in, say, 1500, or even 1600, CE, we'd find societies in which there was little sense of ongoing social change, though of course there had always been large-scale changes from specific events such as wars and conquests, plagues, and famines, and various other kinds of human-caused and natural disasters. But changes in technology, work methods, social organisation, transport, and so on happened too slowly to be transformative within a single lifetime. People were more aware of the daily, seasonal, and generational cycles of time than of gradual, progressive change driven by technology.

In the past, some religious and mythological systems described grander cycles of time than seasons and

generations, some societies looked back to a lost golden age from which they thought they had degenerated, and Christian writings prophesied an eventual end of worldly things to be brought about by the intervention of God. But none of this resembles our contemporary idea of the future, in which human societies are continually transformed by advances in scientific knowledge and new technologies.

That said, the sixteenth century in Europe was an extraordinarily volatile period — it immediately followed the invention of the printing press, with all that that entailed for distributing ideas widely, and the European discovery of the New World. Exploration and colonialism brought the cultures of Europe into contact with what seemed like strange — sometimes hostile — environments and peoples. For some European intellectuals, this provoked a sense of the historical contingency and precariousness of existing cultures and civilisations. The practices and beliefs of particular cultures, including those of Europe, increasingly appeared at least somewhat arbitrary, and thus open to change.

The sixteenth century began with festering religious discontent that quickly led to the Protestant Reformation, whose beginning we could date from Martin Luther's famous proclamations against Church practices, the '95 Theses', in 1517. Europe was soon wracked by the great wars of religion that extended, in one form or another, deep into the seventeenth century (the Thirty Years' War from 1618 to 1648 left much of the continent in ruins). The sixteenth century also saw the beginnings of modern science, including the radically transformative astronomy of Copernicus.

By the early decades of the following century, science had reached a form much more like we'd recognise today, especially with Galileo's observations, experiments, and reflections on scientific methodology. (Galileo was active 400 years ago — he first demonstrated his telescope, and turned it to the heavens, in 1609, and it was in 1633 that he was interrogated by the Inquisition and placed under permanent house arrest for supporting the Copernican claim that the Earth revolves around the Sun.) The rise, consolidation, and extension of science, throughout the seventeenth-century Scientific Revolution, and beyond, challenged old understandings



**Jenny and Russell Blackford. (Photo: Cat Sparks.)**

of humanity's place in the universe. It was the early success of modern science, more than anything else, that led European thinkers of the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment to imagine future states of society with superior knowledge and wisdom.

Enlightenment ideas of progress involved intellectual — especially scientific — and moral advances, though with little of our emphasis today on new technology when we try to imagine the future. Enlightenment thinkers hoped, and worked, for societies that might be better than their own. They looked to continued intellectual progress accompanied by social reform. This way of thinking nourished the great political revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century — the American Revolution and the French Revolution — and the upheavals that these produced inspired even more conjectures and schemes involving future societies.

Even when we look at the work of great utopians and social thinkers from the early nineteenth century, however, in the wake of the Enlightenment, there is little emphasis on technological transformations of society. In 1800, let's say, that thought was only in its infancy. The idea of the future that we possess today developed slowly and gathered force, responding to the Industrial Revolution, which commenced during the second half of the eighteenth century, at first in Britain, but then in other European societies. As the Industrial Revolution continued and renewed itself, with its steam engines, factories, and railroads, Europe and its colonies experienced something altogether new: continual — and visible — social change that was driven and shaped by advances in science and, above all, technology. As the nineteenth century rolled on, changes in the ways that things were done happened on a large scale and at a pace that could not be ignored. You could say that the nineteenth century was when humanity discovered the future.

## II

Much later, writing in the 1920s, the scientist and social

commentator J. D. Bernal observed that human beings normally take accidental features of their own societies to be axiomatic features of the universe, likely to continue until supernaturally interrupted. Bernal added: 'Until the last few centuries this inability to see the future except as a continuation of the present prevented any but mystical anticipations of it' (Bernal, *The World, The Flesh and the Devil: An Inquiry in the Future of the Three Enemies of the Rational Soul*, 1929). Humans might previously have imagined supernatural events in the future, such as the second coming of the Messiah, but they did not imagine events such as the invention of the steam engine, the spread of the railways, electricity, the telegraph, motor

cars, and aviation. But, as Bernal goes on to elaborate, the assumption of a relatively static society ceased to be tenable. This provided the social ground to fertilise science fiction.

In his fascinating, if polemical, book *A Short History of Progress* (2004), the archeologist and historian Ronald Wright makes the point that a citizen of London from 1600 CE would have felt reasonably at home two hundred years later, in the London of 1800. The city would have looked rather familiar. But, says Wright, warnings of threats to humanity from the rise of machines 'became common in the nineteenth century, when, for the first time ever, wrenching technical and social change was felt within a single lifetime'. Wright immediately adds:

In 1800, the cities had been small, the air and water relatively clean — which is to say that it would give you cholera, not cancer. Nothing moved faster than by wind or limb. The sound of machinery was almost unknown. A person transported from 1600 to 1800 could have made his way around quite easily. But by 1900, there were motor cars on the streets and electric trains beneath them, movies were flickering on screens, earth's age was reckoned in millions of years, and Albert Einstein was writing his *Special Theory of Relativity*.

Yet, it took visionaries like H. G. Wells to grasp this, spell it out, and incorporate it in a new kind of fictional narrative. In addressing the great changes of the nineteenth century, Wright refers to the misgivings of many Victorians as they confronted the rise of industrial machinery, and viewed its comprehensive social impact. This leads him to an observation about the beginning of what was originally called 'scientific romance':

As the Victorian age rushed on, many writers began to ask, 'Where are we going?' If so much was happening so quickly in their century, what might happen in the next? [Samuel] Butler, Wells, William Morris, Richard Jefferies, and many others mixed

fantasy, satire, and allegory, creating a genre known as the scientific romance (Wright, *A Short History of Progress*, 2004).

In this passage and the discussion that follows in *A Short History of Progress*, Wright is concerned with both scientific knowledge and the industrial uses of technology. The latter greatly altered and increased production while also transforming work and its organisation, the means of transportation, and the landscape — not in all respects, by any means, for the better.

I have emphasised technology to this point, but we should not lose track of science itself, which continued to advance and to shape understandings of the world. As the sciences developed, their practitioners were able to study a great range of natural phenomena that had previously resisted human efforts. These included very distant and vastly out-of-scale phenomena such as those investigated by astronomers, very small phenomena such as the detailed composition and functioning of our bodies, and (somewhat later, with the advent of scientific geology) phenomena from deep in time before human artifacts, buildings, or written records. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, the sciences were starting to imagine, and communicate, the extreme depth of time as well as the vastness of space.

Nineteenth-century geology suggested that we live on the surface of an incomprehensibly old planet, with the implication of a similarly incomprehensible number of years still to come. As you will know, this idea has since been confirmed, elaborated, and expanded by scientists from numerous disciplines, and, all in all, a new understanding of the cosmos has emerged.

To sum up at this point, the revolutions in science and technology during the centuries of European modernity introduced new ideas about the universe, ourselves, and the future. All of this amounted to a revised world picture.

As a result, it is now established — and was known in outline to educated Europeans in the second half of the nineteenth century — that we inhabit a vast universe whose origins lie deep in time. Like other living things, we are the product of natural events taking place over many millions of years. In all meaningful ways, so Darwinian evolutionary theory revealed, we are continuous with other animal species. Anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism have been challenged from all directions. Furthermore, our particular societies and cultures are significantly mutable. Human societies have changed dramatically in the past — and we can be sure that this will continue.

### III

All known social and cultural forms, and specifically those we have experienced in our individual lifetimes, are now revealed as contingent and temporary. Technological developments continually revolutionise the ways we work, play, plan, organise ourselves, and move from place to place. Even the relatively near future may turn out very strange by the standards of those now living. Not only is our origin as a species deep in time, our eventual destiny is unknown and perhaps lies in the

very remote future (assuming we don't find a way to destroy ourselves more quickly, or perhaps fall foul of a disaster such as a collision with an asteroid). This set of claims is the new worldview embraced, since the era of Queen Victoria, by most educated people in Europe, the Anglosphere, and other industrially advanced countries. It seems almost commonsensical, when considered by secular-minded people from the vantage point of 2019. But let me make two important points about that.

The first is that these claims are not *pre-scientific* common sense. The overall picture constitutes a dramatic historical shift in human understanding of the universe and our place in it. Not so long ago, historically, such ideas would have been viewed within European Christendom (and most other parts of the world) as intolerably radical and heretical. They met with much resistance, and they still meet with resistance from some quarters.

The second point is that even now we tend to live without being fully aware of the implications of deep time and the new worldview that we've inherited from the Victorian generation. We live from day to day, and consider politics, social issues, and the like, forgetful of the deep past behind us, and we ignore the implication of a similarly deep future ahead of us. Indeed, what can we even *do* with that sort of knowledge in everyday situations?

Nonetheless, as Wells knew, the rapid changes of the nineteenth century implied the likelihood of rapid — perhaps *more* rapid — changes to come. That reasoning applies equally to us. We should assume that the current century, and the many centuries to follow, will see great changes to the world and to human societies. Our own society has not reached a point of stability, though again it's not obvious what we can do with that sort of knowledge. Historically, this was all difficult to digest — and it remains difficult. But it offered new opportunities for storytelling.

In more than one sense, science fiction is the fiction of the future. In his 1975 book, *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on the Fiction of the Future*, the American critic Robert Scholes produced a short account of science fiction that influenced me when I was young and remains, the best part of half a century after it was published, a remarkably shrewd introduction to the genre. Scholes covers some of the ground that I am dealing with in this paper, in describing how science fiction relates to human history, and especially to the history of how we've conceived of time and history themselves.

Scholes writes of science fiction as a kind of fiction that is *about* the future, and he explains why that kind of fiction is inevitable in a world with a new conception of time, history, and progress, one in which the future will be, as it were, a country foreign to us, one where they do things differently. But that is not the only sense in which science fiction is a fiction of the future. Scholes also meant, I'm sure, that it was a form of fictional narrative that would *thrive* in the future, perhaps become a dominant narrative form, and produce great things. Science fiction has become far more visible and popular since 1975, and in my assessment Scholes has turned out to be right.

#### IV

When did science fiction begin? Some proto-science fiction narratives appeared even in the seventeenth century, such as a strange little book by Johannes Kepler, called *Somnium, Sive Astronomia Lunaris* (this was completed around 1608–1609, but not formally published until 1634). *Somnium* is sometimes called the first science fiction novel, but it has none of the characteristics that we normally associate with novels, such as telling a complex story and including characters with at least some appearance of psychological plausibility. It is really just a geography (if that's the right word) of the Moon's surface, based on the best observations that had been made prior to astronomical use of telescopes. The scientific lesson is framed by a thinly developed fictional narrative that showcases the discoveries of the time and allegorises the scientific quest for knowledge.

*Somnium* is not a fully fledged science fiction novel, but it foreshadows themes that SF writers have explored ever since. There is a trust that science can obtain knowledge of kinds that had previously eluded human efforts. At the same time, there is the sense that Kepler wants to portray a physically greater cosmos than was previously imagined. Along with this goes a recognition of our relative smallness in the total scheme, and of our limited understanding. Kepler seems to suggest that things are not always as they appear to us from our vantage point on Earth.

Notwithstanding *Somnium* and some other early works, science fiction is very much a child of the nineteenth century. As has been said by others, it could not have existed as a field 'until the time came when the concept of social change through alterations in the level of science and technology had evolved in the first place' (Isaac Asimov, *Asimov on Science Fiction*, 1981). As a result, we see little or nothing in the way of recognisable science fiction novels and stories until the nineteenth century, beginning with works such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* in 1818. *Frankenstein* famously depicts Victor Frankenstein's use of scientifically based technology to create something entirely new in the world: a physically powerful, but unfortunately repulsive, artificial man. As is well known, the actual term 'science fiction' was not coined for another century or so, with the rise of specialist SF magazines in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s.

Meanwhile, some of Edgar Allan Poe's stories from the 1830s and 1840s have science fiction elements, and the SF author and critic James Gunn regards Poe's 'Mellonta Tauta' (1848) as possibly the first true story of the future (*Inside Science Fiction*, second ed., 2006). Unlike earlier narratives of future disasters, such as Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), it portrays a future society with unfamiliar ideas and practices. 'Mellonta Tauta' is set in the year 2848 — thus, one thousand years after its date of composition — and its Greek title can be translated as 'future things' or 'things of the future' (or it might, I dare say, with H. G. Wells in mind, even be translated as 'things to come'). It's a very peculiar story, even by Poe's standards, taking the form of one character's rambling, gossiping, speculation-filled letter to a friend. In fact, it is more like a series of diary entries,

beginning on April 1 — April Fools' Day, of course — and it is composed by a well-educated but deeply misinformed individual, who reveals that she is on a pleasure excursion aboard a balloon.

In Poe's version of the future, humanity has explored the Moon and made contact with its diminutive people. However, much knowledge from the nineteenth century has become garbled and (at least) half lost. The story thus sheds doubt on historians' confident interpretations of the practices of other peoples living in earlier times. It is full of jokes, many of which are puzzling for today's readers, and even when they're explained it is often difficult to be sure exactly what ideas Poe is putting forward and which he is satirising. (Other material that Poe wrote about the same time suffers from the same problems of interpretation.) Nonetheless, Poe laid a foundation for the development of satirical science fiction set in future, greatly altered societies.

A more substantial body of work that resembles modern science fiction emerged around 1860, particularly with the French author Jules Verne, who is best known for novels in which highly advanced (for the time) science and technology enable remarkable journeys — to the centre of the Earth, around the Moon and back, beneath the sea, and so on. H. G. Wells's career as a writer of what were then known as scientific romances commenced two or three decades later, with a group of short stories that led up to his short novel *The Time Machine* (1895). The importance of this work for the later development of science fiction cannot be overstated. That great theorist of the genre, Darko Suvin, writes, without hyperbole, that 'all subsequent significant SF can be said to have sprung from Wells's *The Time Machine*' (*Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 1979). Wells followed up with his first full-length scientific romance, *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896), and his extraordinary career was underway.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, science fictional elements appeared in many utopias, dystopias (such as Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes* (serialised 1898–99)), and lost-world novels set in remote locations or even beneath the ground. The use of interplanetary settings took the idea of lost worlds and races a step further. The first published novel by Edgar Rice Burroughs, *A Princess of Mars* (originally in serial form in 1912), epitomised the trend. Planetary romance of the kind favoured by Burroughs defined one pole of early science fiction, emphasising action and adventure in an alien setting.

Another approach was the near-future political thriller. Works of this sort, most notably *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer*, by George Tomkyns Chesney (originally published in *Blackwoods Magazine* in 1871), were a prominent component of the literary scene in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They portrayed future wars and invasions, often involving racial conflict. These political thrillers typically contained melodramatic and blatantly racist elements, but they are noteworthy as serious speculations about near-future possibilities.

All of these forms of early science fiction have continued, in one way or another, to the present day. Literary scientific romances, particularly inspired by those of

Wells, and by those of authors who reacted to him, have maintained a pedigree partly independent of, and parallel to, what I call 'genre science fiction' (or 'genre SF'), by which I mean science fiction aimed at a relatively specialist audience of SF fans and aficionados. Genre science fiction is a phenomenon dating from the 1920s, and there is an interesting story to tell about its development under the leadership of its first great editors — Hugo Gernsback and John W. Campbell — through to the present day. But for current purposes, we'll have to skip over that. For more, see the opening chapters of my 2017 book, *Science Fiction and the Moral Imagination: Visions, Minds, Ethics*. Suffice to say that the pace of social, scientific, and technological change continued to accelerate. In response, as the twentieth century unfolded and segued into the twenty-first, narratives of technological innovation and humanity's future prospects became even more culturally prominent.

I'll also make short work here of the much-debated question of how we should define science fiction, and how, if at all, we can fence it off from other narrative genres or modes such as technothrillers, horror stories, and fantasy. In summary — see *Science Fiction and the Moral Imagination* again if you want more — I identify science fiction as combining three elements that we may call 'novelty', 'rationality', and 'realism'.

I intend each of these in a specific and rather narrow sense: *novelty*, in that the narrative depicts some kind of break with the empirical environment of the author's own society and historically recorded societies (this is what Darko Suvin refers to as the *novum*); *rationality*, in the sense that whatever is novel is nonetheless imagined to be scientifically possible (at least by the standards of some future body of scientific knowledge), rather than magical or otherwise supernatural; and *realism*, in the minimal sense that the events described are imagined as actually happening within the internal universe of the story — that is, the events, including the problems confronted by the characters, are to be interpreted literally, even if they have a further allegorical or metaphorical level of meaning. In other senses, of course, science fiction is not a variety of literary realism, but nor does it have the qualities of straightforward allegory, dream, or psychodrama.

Science fiction, then, is a kind of fictional narrative that is characterised by novelty, rationality, and realism. It typically and centrally imagines future developments in social organisation, science, and/or technology, though I hope I've said enough for it to be clear why it sometimes depicts amazing inventions in the present day, present-day invasions from space, or events that happened in the deep past, in pre-historic times. Science fiction can take many forms, but *at its core* it is fiction about the future.

## V

Although science fiction has a central concern with future societies, SF writers are not prophets and they cannot simply provide a transparent window that opens upon the future. Hence, the title of this paper refers to a *lens into the future*: something more probing — and perhaps more difficult to use, requiring more activity,

interpretation, and skill — than a window overlooking a future vista. In some cases, setting narratives in the future (much like the use of extraterrestrial settings) merely provides writers with exotic locales for adventure stories, something that came in handy as a plot device during a time when the surface of the Earth was increasingly being explored and mapped. To be clear, there's nothing terrible about adventure stories in exotic locales — I love them as much as anybody — but science fiction writers often engage more meaningfully than *that* with ideas of the future, or of possible futures.

Wells certainly thought — at least for most of his career — that it was possible to consider and imagine the future of humanity with some prospect of making successful predictions. He discussed exactly this topic in a famous lecture that he delivered to the Royal Institution of London in January 1902. This lecture, entitled 'The Discovery of the Future', helped to establish his reputation, and it was published as a small book not long after he delivered it. In 'The Discovery of the Future', he put the problem like this: 'How far may we hope to get trustworthy inductions about the future of man?' (We'd now say something more like: 'How far can we have a reliable science of the future of humanity?')

For Wells, speaking and writing in 1902, the present had arisen from the past through the deterministic operation of scientific laws, and the future would follow from the present in the same deterministic way. However, he suggested that there was an asymmetry between the past and the future, or at least in how we perceive them. That is, we can be certain about many events that happened to us personally in the past, and which we remember clearly, whereas we do not know what lies in store for us, as individuals, in the future. We have no future-oriented equivalent of personal memory.

However, Wells said, things are different when it comes to future events involving large populations. By analogy, he argued, we can't predict where individual grains of sand will fall if we shoot them from a cart, or even the shapes of the individual grains, which will vary greatly. But we can predict which grains — of what sizes and shapes — will tend to be found in different parts of the resulting heap. Wells considered the possibility that individual people of great energy and ability might be less predictable, and have greater effects on human destiny, than exceptionally large grains of sand. Nonetheless, he was strongly inclined to think that larger forces operating in history determined broad historical outcomes. For example, if Julius Caesar or Napoleon had never been born, someone else would have played a similar role in the history of Europe.

On this basis, Wells concluded that we have evidence available to us in the present that can help us to reconstruct the past, and that we *also* have information available to us now to help us predict how humanity's future will unfold on a large scale. He was very conscious of human origins in deep time, and with that in mind he placed a special emphasis on humanity's long-term destiny, the deep future of our species:

We look back through countless millions of years and see the will to live struggling out of the intertidal slime, struggling from shape to shape and from power

to power, crawling and then walking confidently upon the land, struggling generation after generation to master the air, creeping down into the darkness of the deep; we see it turn upon itself in rage and hunger and reshape itself anew; we watch it draw nearer and more akin to us, expanding, elaborating itself, pursuing its relentless, inconceivable purpose, until at last it reaches us and its being beats through our brains and arteries, throbs and thunders in our battleships, roars through our cities, sings in our music, and flowers in our art. And when, from that retrospect, we turn again toward the future, surely any thought of finality, any millennial settlement of cultured persons, has vanished from our minds.

This fact that man is not final is the great unmanageable, disturbing fact that arises upon us in the scientific discovery of the future, and to my mind, at any rate, the question what is to come after man is the most persistently fascinating and the most insoluble question in the whole world ('The Discovery of the Future', 1902).

In 'The Discovery of the Future', Wells repudiated any idea of a static human society, even as part of some utopian blueprint:

In the past century there was more change in the conditions of human life than there had been in the previous thousand years. A hundred years ago inventors and investigators were rare scattered men, and now invention and inquiry are the work of an unorganized army. This century will see changes that will dwarf those of the nineteenth century, as those of the nineteenth dwarf those of the eighteenth. [] Human society never has been quite static, and it will presently cease to attempt to be static.

Wells made certain predictions about the nearer future, before our species is eventually superseded, such as the emergence, perhaps not for hundreds of years, or even for 'a thousand or so' years, of a great world state. Toward the end of his lecture, he granted that humanity might be destroyed by a cataclysm of some kind, if not by the eventual death of the Sun itself, but he expressed his fundamental rejection of these outcomes and his belief in what he called 'the greatness of human destiny'. He claimed to have no illusions about human failings, but he saw a path of ascent from the deep past to the deep future:

Small as our vanity and carnality make us, there has been a day of still smaller things. It is the long ascent of the past that gives the lie to our despair. We know now that all the blood and passion of our life were represented in the Carboniferous time by something — something, perhaps, cold-blooded and with a clammy skin, that lurked between air and water, and fled before the giant amphibia of those days.

For all the folly, blindness, and pain of our lives, we have come some way from that. And the distance we have travelled gives us some earnest of the way we have yet to go.

He concluded 'The Discovery of the Future' with a radically optimistic sentiment that later found expression in much twentieth-century science fiction, and, I venture to add, in much current thought from transhumanists and similar thinkers about the human future:

It is possible to believe that all the past is but the beginning of a beginning, and that all that is and has been is but the twilight of the dawn. It is possible to believe that all that the human mind has ever accomplished is but the dream before the awakening. We cannot see, there is no need for us to see, what this world will be like when the day has fully come. We are creatures of the twilight. But it is out of our race and lineage that minds will spring, that will reach back to us in our littleness to know us better than we know ourselves, and that will reach forward fearlessly to comprehend this future that defeats our eyes.

All this world is heavy with the promise of greater things, and a day will come, one day in the unending succession of days, when beings, beings who are now latent in our thoughts and hidden in our loins, shall stand upon this earth as one stands upon a footstool, and shall laugh and reach out their hands amid the stars.

## VI

Let's return, in conclusion, to one of Wells's key questions in 'The Discovery of the Future': 'How far may we hope to get trustworthy inductions about the future of man?' I conspicuously have not provided an answer, although I've reported Wells's claim that we have considerable ability to predict the broad outlines, if not the detail, of humanity's future. Wells certainly did not think that the future for individuals was predictable — alas! — but it was possible, he thought, to work out the future's broad outlines for very large numbers of people, including humanity as a whole.

This idea seems to have been accepted, in large part, by the science fiction writers of the following several decades. You can find something like the same idea in Isaac Asimov's 'Foundation' series, begun in 1942, with its science of psychohistory developed by the protagonist, Hari Seldon. Asimov even grapples with the impact of a truly remarkable human being — a kind of super-Napoleon — in the person of the Mule, a mutant with the extraordinary power to bend others' emotions to his wishes. During the so-called Golden Age of science fiction, from the late 1930s to the end of the 1940s, something of a consensus picture of the long-term human future seems to have been shared by Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, and others. They embraced a vision, much like that offered by Wells in 'The Discovery of the Future', of a destiny in the stars for humanity and whatever beings might descend from us.

However, this vision has become considerably less popular in genre science fiction since the 1950s, and it might now be disputed by many professional SF writers. Also, there is an obvious alternative to this way of thinking about science fiction. The alternative is that the point is not to reveal the actual human future, or even an

approximation of it, so much as to investigate many possible futures. In short, science fiction is not predictive. On this approach, we could think of the future not as something determinate, but as something that could, at least as far as our practical knowledge ever extends, take many forms or go down many paths. If science fiction is a lens into *this* sort of future, it is a way for us to probe a dimension of possibilities, and to consider their implications. Science fiction can help us prepare for the real future by portraying possibilities. It is a lens into an indeterminate, but multiply imaginable, future.

Another approach, perhaps the dominant one in the tradition of scientific romance — that is, once again, in science fiction narratives outside of, and parallel to, genre SF — is to view imagined futures as most relevant and compelling when they are distorted pictures of the present, or its trends, created for the purpose of social commentary. If we think of it in this way, science fiction is not so much a lens into the future as a narrative form that uses imaginative pictures of the future to provide a lens into the *present*.

When we consider these models of science fiction and how it approaches the future, we might ponder H. G. Wells's own enormous contribution to SF. Wells made some impressive predictions, not least about armoured military vehicles, the importance of aviation for future warfare, and, in *The World Set Free* (1914), the development of massively destructive atomic bombs (admittedly rather different in operation from those that were dropped on Japanese cities three decades later). Did Wells offer 'trustworthy inductions' about humanity's future? Perhaps he did to some extent, though by 1945, the year before his death, he'd become despairing about the future's predictability. Was his science fiction a lens into the future in some sense, or even into the present, or into our world and the human situation in some other way?

This, I hope, gives us plenty to talk about, so let's open up the discussion about science fiction and the future of our species.

— **Russell Blackford**, 2019

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# Jenny Blackford

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## Writing Workshops at the Muslim School

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The flowers in the garden  
of the inner-city Muslim school

are kangaroo paws just like mine at home —  
hot pink, well mulched with bark.

One of the bright-eyed headscarfed girls  
shows me her Dickens–Austen mix.

Dashing from room to room, from class to class,  
I can't quite concentrate, but I'm impressed.

'Miss, are you married?'  
I tell them that the hoplites in formation

were the tank of the fifth century BC;  
that ancient Greeks had no tomato sauce,

chocolate or even tea; that the marble  
columns everywhere — so pale, so elegant —

were painted red and green and blue  
with gilded bits; that statues wore

bright-coloured robes, and even jewellery.  
'Miss, have you got kids?'

During the Peloponnesian War, farmers  
and village-folk from all of Attica were sent

for safety from the Spartans' swords  
within their city Athens's thick stone walls,

thousands of refugees penned up  
like sheep waiting for death.

The Plague killed  
one in three of them.

I ask the kids to pick a character  
and write a sentence or a paragraph

to start the telling of those lives cut short.  
A tragedy so far away in space and time

is made brand-new, but still as sad,  
by Aussie Muslim hands and shiny minds.

— **Jenny Blackford**, 2015

Tim Train is a human entity existing in the northern region of Melbourne between two cats, a worm farm, an in-house yeast colony, and two boxes of carbohydrate-gathering insects, who regard his comings and goings with frank suspicion. He is one of a team of MCs at Poetry at the Dan O'Connell (which is held every Saturday afternoon at the Dan O'Connell in Carlton), has published a book of poems with Ginninderra Press entitled *Hangover Music*, and has recently had a story and a poem published at *Antipodean SF* ([antisf.com](http://antisf.com)). He can be contacted by his Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/thatweirdopoet>, or his email, [timhtrain@yahoo.com.au](mailto:timhtrain@yahoo.com.au).

## Tim Train

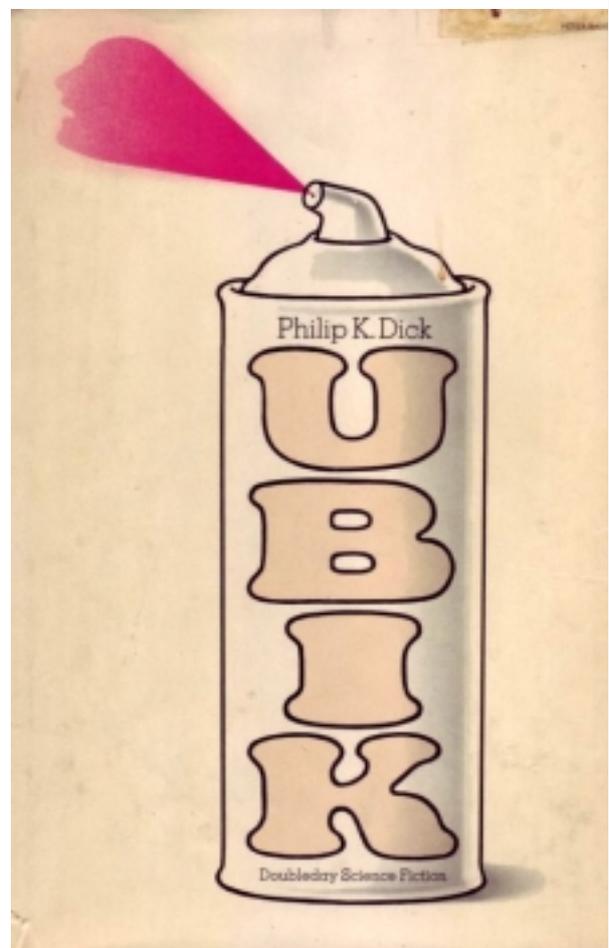
### My Philip K. Dick bender

So a Philip K. Dick bender it is then. In the past two weeks I've churned my way through five Dick books (and one documentary made shortly after his death). The mind-bending *Ubik*, a moody *Martian Time-Slip*, the comic lightness of *The Zap Gun*, the somewhat curious *Dr Bloodmoney*, and finishing up with the almost fable-like *Nick and the Glimmung*, an oddity that stands out even from Dick's other oddities — the sole children's book he wrote in his career. (The documentary was *A Day in the Afterlife*, which the BBC had the good manners to allow to exist in its entirety on YouTube).

But first to note the incongruities in Dick's future visions. *Ubik*, written in the 1960s, is set in the 1990s, at a time when space travel is common, telepaths and other psionics fight pitched mind battles for the control of vast fortunes, and the dead are kept in a kind of suspended afterlife in vast funeral halls, where their families go to visit them. *Martian Time-Slip* is in the early 2000s. *The Zap Gun* is in the 90s as well; the Cold War continues unabated: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Empire never happened. *Dr Bloodmoney*, written in 1965, looks forward to the near future in the mid 1970s, but also back to a nuclear disaster in the near past which never actually happened: so it is both a conventional SF novel set in the future and an alternative history. (And *Nick and the Glimmung* never mentions a precise year though it is, we gather, set at some point in the more distant future).

Charmingly, even though the novels look forward to an astounding future full off psionics and space travel and talking machines and time travel, the characters keep on doing quaint, homely, 1960s things: reading the papers ('papes', in *The Zap Gun*), which are delivered to the door or, sometimes, appear on a television screen; advertisements speak in the language of 1950s copywriters; even the rocket to the stars in *Nick and the Glimmung* seems curiously old fashioned now, in this age, post-Space Shuttle. Not only is the future not what it once was, but the past, which is what the future was until very recently, is not what it was going to be.

But who reads Dick for the predictions? If, as one person interviewed in the documentary *A Day in the Afterlife* proclaims, Dick predicted the effects of a technologically aware, interconnected, commercialised future, that is only part of the picture. Mostly, Dick's wild speculations seem to be purposefully too strange to fit into our conventional vision of the future, because he is interested in abstruse philosophical issues (Are we really



here? Are our perceptions of the universe really fooling us? If they are fooling us, given what we now know about the way in which perceptions can be manipulated through various means, who is doing the fooling?) Or, in some cases, he seems to be making, at one remove, commentary about his present. *Martian Time-Slip*, for all its brooding, menacing landscape, and its occasional excursions into hallucination or time travel, in the end turns on a simple property transaction.

In *Ubik*, we have a novel in Dick's grand philosophical manner. It is full of enigmas and ends up with several of the main characters discovering they have been caught in some kind of a large-scale hallucination; is the hallucination really part of a trick organised by another character, Pat, a powerful psychic and one of their team? In the end, they decide that they are dead, and it is their boss, Glenn Runciter (who they thought had died) who is communicating to them. (Funny how you just accept these revelations as taken for granted when you read Dick). But a plot twist at the end again seems to flip our expectations on their head.

As another of the enigmas in the novel, we get God appearing — or perhaps a God-like substance, a part of God — in a spray can. This substance, Ubik, has magical life-giving properties. In *A Day in the Afterlife*, Brian Aldiss explains the imagery this way: it is a satire on the very idea of God, displaying Him (or Her or It) as a tacky manmade substance, an invention, an absurd explanation for the uncontrollable facts of life. Tessa Dick (quoted on the *Ubik* page on Wikipedia) explains the imagery differently: 'Ubik is a metaphor for God. Ubik is all-powerful and all-knowing, and Ubik is everywhere. The spray can is only a form that Ubik takes to make it easy for people to understand it and use it. It is not the substance inside the can that helps them, but rather their faith in the promise that it will help them.'

And, talking about the theology of Dick — we can talk about that, can't we? I am writing this after all — what are we to make of it? Aldiss has very much the commonsensical interpretation of Dick's later years: 'Dick went crazy in the end.' Aldiss prefers to emphasise the earlier, fertile creative period in Dick's life. Although — as a writer who, at all stages of his career, entertained the notion that reality was a sham, that our perceptions were being manipulated, that God not only existed, but did so as part of a bizarre cosmic comedy, and that perhaps the people who had the best understanding of this were precisely those who were thought to be most mentally deranged (schizophrenics, paranoiacs, drug addicts) — perhaps Dick always saw himself as a kind of Blakean prophet who would go slightly kooky in the end ... But then again, Blake certainly didn't wait until the end to go kooky — and Dick didn't either. A more interesting question that Dick challenges us to ask, perhaps, is how crazy are we all?

I was considering all this while reading through *Ubik* and *Martian Time-Slip*, and it struck me how appropriate, then, that brooding and melancholy tone was to Dick's novels. How all the characters have this downbeat air; how all the action, no matter how fantastical, how bi-

zarre, frequently end up making a weak, ineffective, comic, or absurdly tragic gesture against the pre-determined cosmos. In *Martian Time-Slip*, for instance, manipulative union leader Arnie Kott goes back in time and attempts to manipulate events to his purpose, but utterly fails and comes back to the present not having achieved anything. Or in *Ubik*, when the main characters make a doomed trip to the moon: it seems from the start like a trap, and it turns out to be a trap, albeit a trap on which the whole plot hinges: a mistake, or merely a glum acceptance of their fate?

After all this, it was a pleasure to turn to the light comedy of *The Zap Gun*. In a neat twist on the common enough Cold War theme on the build-up of arms, Dick speculates about a future in which both sides of the Cold War are building ever more deadly weapons, but they are all for show: none of them actually works. Into this mock-tense environment, he throws an alien invasion. How about that for some real tension?

*Dr Bloodmoney* deals with a similar theme, though this time more tragic than comic: an alternative future world warped and half-destroyed by a nuclear war with unspecified causes. I don't quite understand it, and the main villain doesn't really work for me, though it was nominated for a Nebula Award at the time of its publication.

*Nick and the Glimmung* is an intriguing novel to end on, the sole children's book written in Dick's life, but it was never published. It is also a run-up to a slightly later novel by Dick, *Galactic Pot-Healer* (which I have not read, but now wish I had). In its own way, this little book charmingly rehearses the themes that Dick obsessed over in his whole life: to escape an oppressive government edict represented by the 'Anti-Pet Man', the Graham family leave with their cat to become colonists on a planet in another solar system — Plowman's Planet.

As in so many of the other, corny science fiction serials for children that Dick would have been aware of, the aliens on this planet all usefully speak English, but their eccentricities don't end there. There is a Wub, who can only communicate by rummaging around in a bag of cards with prewritten messages on them; sometimes they are hilariously out of synch with what is going on. There are the sinister Werjes and there are 'Father-things', who take the form of humans before completely replacing the humans. And there are 'Printers', formless blobs who can make replications of existing objects, but who have become so weak that the replications now are strangely lacking in detail. Dick's speculation about alien life, then, is that the strangeness and the threat in the aliens-humans encounter on this outer space planet is not physical (googly eyes and tentacles — though we are left to make up those details for ourselves) but philosophical. The aliens offer back to humans the same reality they are used to — only not as good. And so, in a lighthearted, fable-like form we get the same themes in *Nick and the Glimmung* that Dick tackled more seriously in his adult novels.

— Tim Train, December 2018

**CASEY JUNE WOLF** is a poet and writer of occasional, mostly speculative, short stories. Her writings have appeared in a variety of magazines and anthologies from *OnSpec* to *Room* (formerly *A Room of One's Own*). Find short essays and links to her creative writing at her blog *Another Fine Day* in the Scriptorium. Casey lives in Vancouver, Canada.

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## Casey June Wolf interviews Eileen Kernaghan

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**CASEY writes:** In the midst of a night of sleeplessness, it struck me that I wanted to ask my Canadian friend **EILEEN KERNAGHAN** a few questions about her writing life and current project, it having been a long time since I'd last done this. So I tapped together some questions and sent them her way, and she has kindly consented to indulge me on this.

Eileen is one of my favourite writers. She doesn't produce floods of books, nor are they great door-stoppers. They are beautifully written, thoughtful, magical adventure stories, each one evoking a time and place that fascinate, peopled with characters I could happily befriend — or avoid at any cost. Enjoy!

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**Casey Wolf:**

**Can you tell our readers a little about yourself and your career in the literary arts?**

**Eileen Kernaghan:**

I grew up in a small farming town where outside of haying season there was very little to do but read books, and in time that led to writing my own stories. I launched my literary career when I was twelve, when I sold a story to the children's page of the *Vancouver Sun*. Publication came with an illustration and a modest payment, my classmates and my parents were impressed, and though my next attempt at fiction was politely declined, there was really no looking back. For the next couple of years I turned to journalism as the local correspondent for the

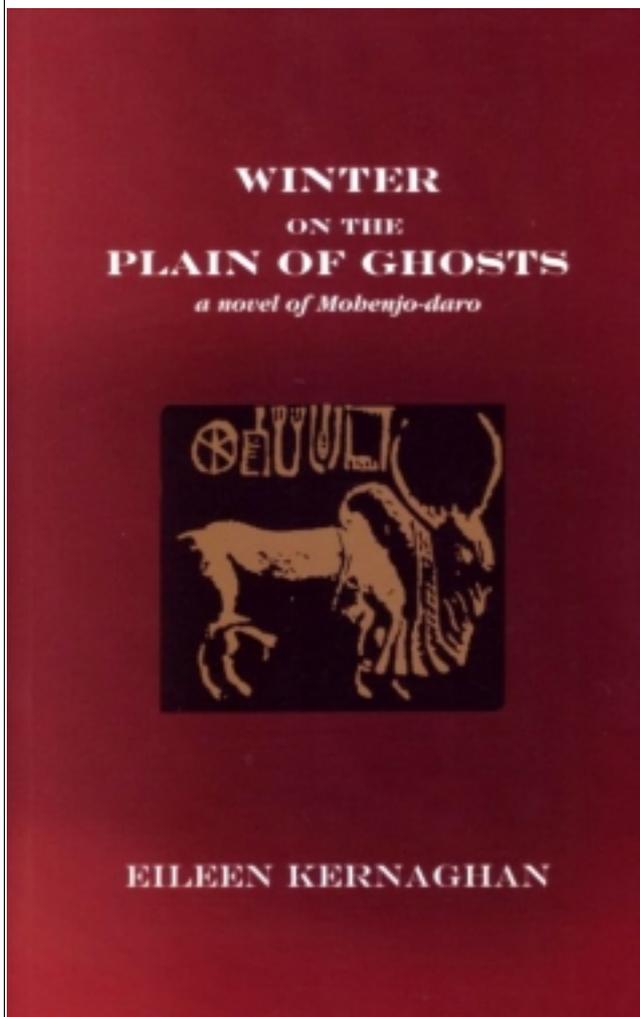
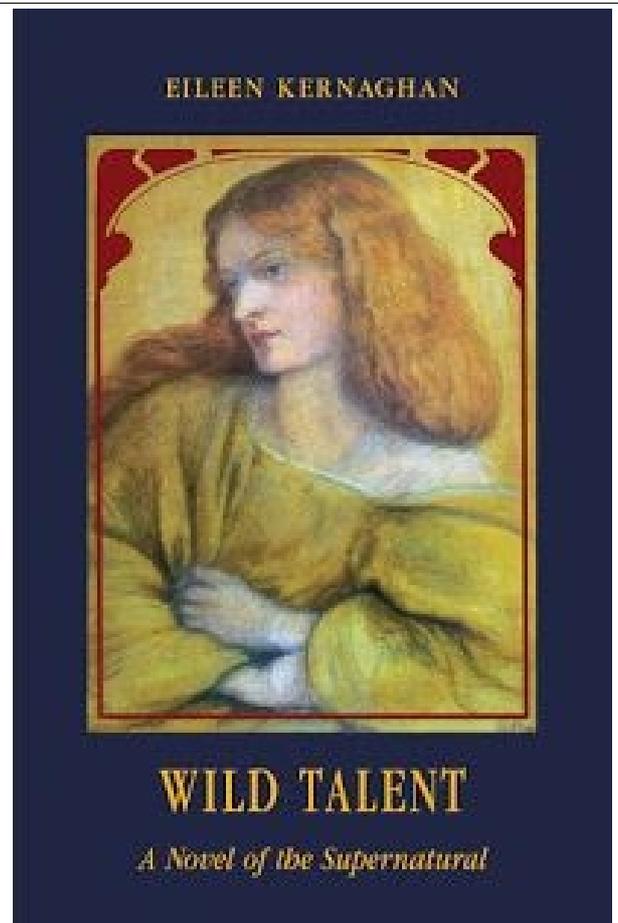
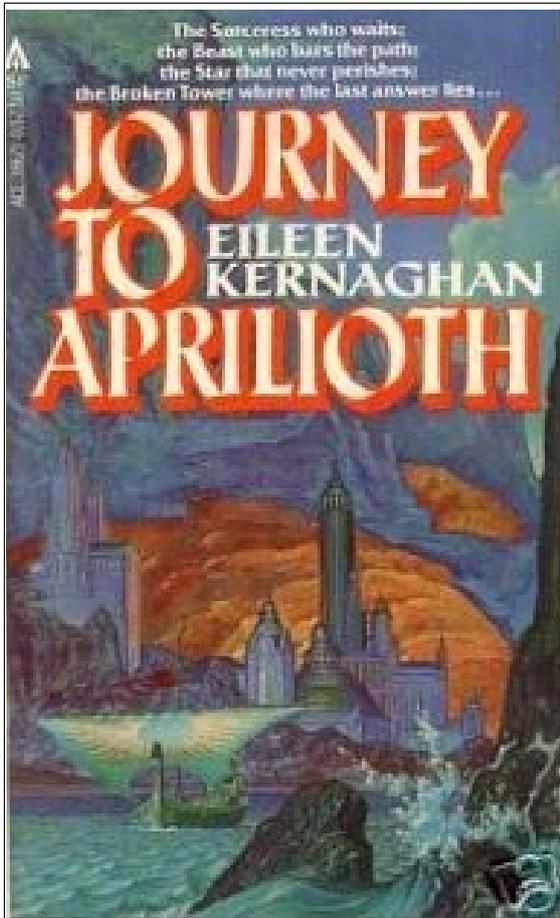
*Enderby Commoner*, which according to its masthead covered the (North Okanagan) valley like the dew.

There followed a long hiatus, during which I finished high school, went to the University of British Columbia, earned a teaching certificate, got married, and had three children. I started writing again when the kids were in elementary school and I had mornings to myself. I produced a couple of quite unpublishable stories, and then I sold a somewhat better one to *Galaxy* magazine ('Starcult', *Galaxy*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (1971)). My name and an illustration for the story were on the front cover. Success! But when my next attempts at short fiction went nowhere, I decided to write a book. My fantasy novel *Journey to Aprilioth* and the two that followed, *Songs from the Drowned Lands* and *The Sarsen Witch* (making up the 'Drowned Lands' trilogy) were published in the 1980s by Ace Books. However, my next novel, *Winter on the Plain*

**Eileen Kernaghan.**

**Casey June Wolf.**





*of Ghosts*, failed to find a home with New York publishers, and eventually I self-published it. (It has always baffled me that this novel didn't find a publisher. It may possibly be my favourite. Thanks to modern technology it's still out there, available from Amazon as a paperback and an e-book.)

At about the same time, though few Canadian publishers were doing adult speculative fiction, there was a growing Canadian market for YA fantasy. My next book was a YA, set in eighteenth Bhutan and it sold to Thistle-down, a Canadian literary press. To date Thistle-down has published *Dance of the Snow Dragon*, followed by *Wild Talent* (fin de siècle London and Paris) and *Sophie, in Shadow* (India under the Raj).

Along the way, I've co-written a writers guide — now long outdated — the book version of a documentary film, some short stories and poems, and a poetry collection, *Tales from the Holograph Woods*.

**CW:**

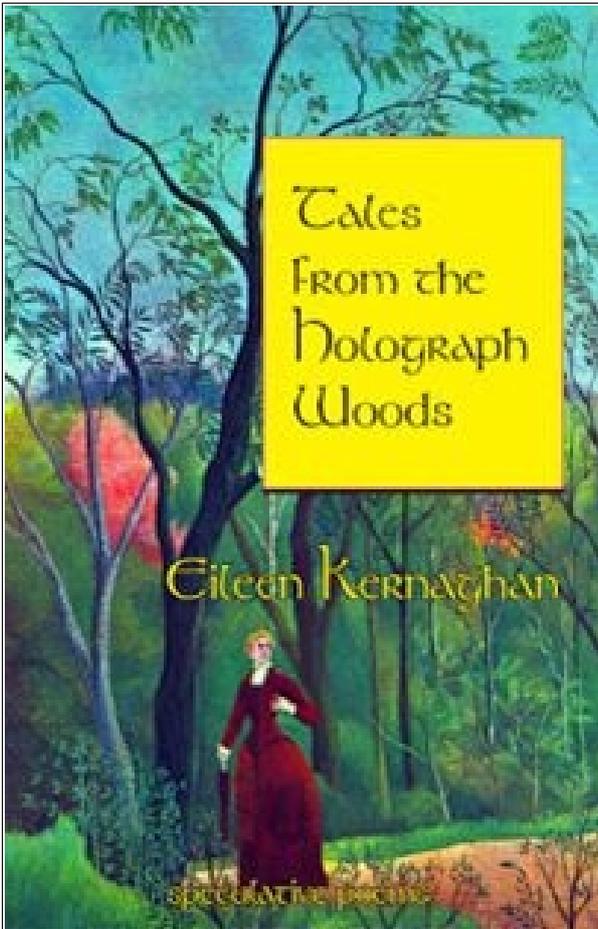
**Are you working on any writing projects at the moment?**

**EK:**

I'm working on the third book in the family story that began with *Wild Talent*. This one is set in Paris of the 1920s, and it's the story of Alex, the younger daughter.

**CW:**

**I've read frequently that writers need to create an outline**



**CW:**

What effect does that have on you, not knowing ahead of time how it is all going to go? Do you love it? Does it drive you to distraction?

**EK:**

I wouldn't say I love it. But neither does it drive me to distraction. I take a lot of time to write my books, and usually something — perhaps some bit of research — will turn up. There's a certain excitement in wondering how the whole thing will turn out.

**CW:**

I have read all of your novels, and one of my favourite aspects of them is the fascinating elements you draw from history and weave into your story. Without giving too much away, are there any social movements or characters from history or other intriguing things that you are particularly enjoying exploring for this book?

**EK:**

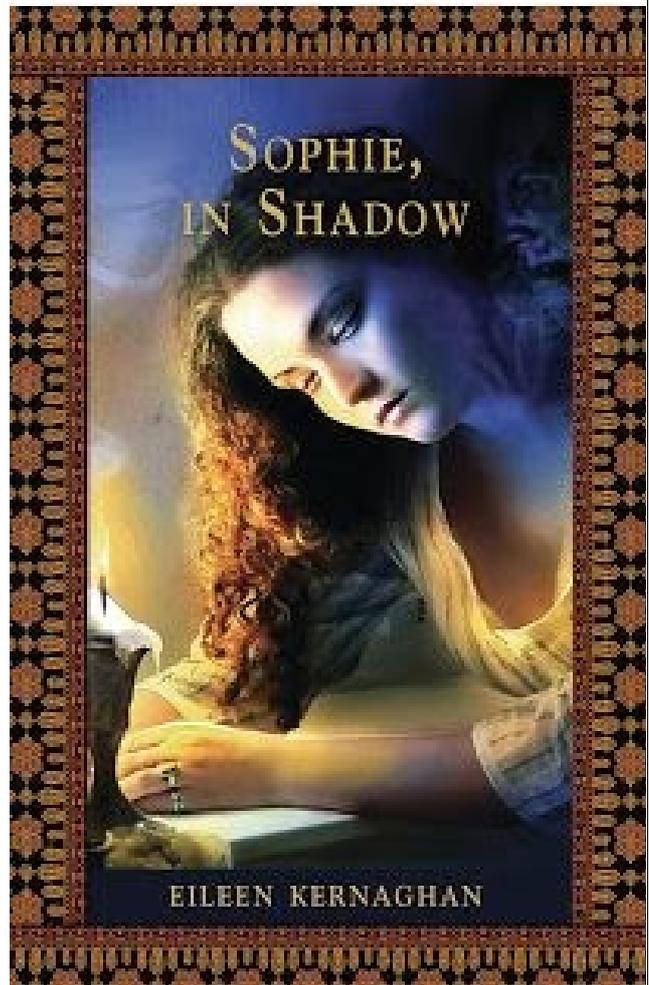
Yes. Russian exiles in the Paris of the 1920s; the search for immortality; inherited wild talents.

to their stories before writing them. Is that how you approach your writing? Why do you organise it in this way? If you create outlines of any sort, how much time would you say the outline for this book took, how complete is it, and how much is it likely to change?

**EK:**

I should create an outline. It would be nice to have an outline. But I tend more to the jumping off a cliff without a parachute approach to plotting. I have a central character and I have a time and a place. I start out by researching the period for the sake of the plot. Then as a rule the research starts to shape the plot, and takes it to places I was not expecting. As an example, here's what happened when I was writing *The Alchemist's Daughter*, set in Elizabethan England. I started out by reading a great deal about sixteenth-century alchemy, which in turn led me to stories of unsuccessful alchemists who, having promised gold they couldn't deliver, were very likely to be tortured and executed. That gave me my basic plot — how the daughter of a very unsuccessful alchemist set out to save her father from a foolish promise to the Queen.

It also led me to read about Dr John Dee, the Elizabethan alchemist who was rumoured to have discovered the philosophers' stone and buried it at Glastonbury. That fit nicely into the story and set my heroine, Sidonie Quince, on the road to Glastonbury.



**CW:**

**What is the role of the supernatural in your books – if indeed it serves the same purpose in each of them?**

**EK:**

In my recent books the supernatural exists not so much in the external world as in the unusual talents the characters possess. I think of them as traditional historical novels with a touch of the strange and inexplicable.

**CW:**

**You have a very respectable collection of books, stories, and poems under your belt, in addition to the nonfiction writing you have sometimes done. Can you give readers a sense of how you go from the initial spark to a complete tale?**

**EK:**

The initial spark is usually an interest in, a curiosity about, a particular time and place. Some research about that era usually suggests a main character, and how that character might interact with the society. And from that comes the plot. For instance, I chose to write about Bhutan (*Dance of the Snow Dragon*) because a friend was very impressed with a performance by the Bhutanese Royal Dancers when they came to Vancouver, and she suggested that Bhutan would be a fascinating setting for a book. So I started researching.

**CW:**

**Have these explorations in subject, history, theme, and craft affected your life in any ways that you might not have expected?**

**EK:**

I suppose a deeper knowledge of earlier times and other places than I could ever have gained in school or university.

**CW:**

**Do you find any value in belonging to writing groups, even though you are by now an accomplished writer? What do they offer you? What about teaching writing? Does this support your own writing in any way?**

**EK:**

I managed to finish my first novel, *Journey to Aprilioth*, because I was determined to bring a chapter for critiquing to every Burnaby Writers Society meeting. The feedback from the small writing group to which I've belonged for many years has been immensely helpful. And I wouldn't feel right about teaching writing if I were not writing myself.

**CW:**

**Where can readers find you and your books? Will you be doing any readings or participating in panels, and so on in the coming months?**

**EK:**

You can find my books in libraries, at Amazon, and at lots of other online sites. All but the earliest ones are now available as e-books. You will likely find me at the 2020 Creative Ink festival <https://www.creativeinkfestival.com/>.

**CW:**

**Thanks so much, Eileen, for taking the time to answer these questions. I'm very much looking forward to the third novel in the *Wild Talent/Sophie in Shadow* series, so I won't pester you any more and will let you get back to work.**

## **For more of Eileen Kernaghan and her writing:**

Eileen's books for sale, new and used, via:

Bookfinder.com

Eileen Kernaghan's blog

Eileen Kernaghan's website (with samples from her novels).

### **Bibliography**

*Strange Horizons* interview

*Challenging Destiny* interview

Eileen Kernaghan at the Internet Speculative Fiction Database

All text and images preserved at the Internet Archive. Read Eileen's story there!

— Casey Wolf and Eileen Kernaghan, 30 May 2019



Stephen Campbell

**(Continued from page 22)**

bringing doom onto the world? We hope that no doom will come to disturb our peaceful reading and criticising of science fiction.

Elaine's cover tapestry is a remarkable work, a piece of art. I believe that art is the true succour to our human condition, because our perception of beauty is inexplicable and wondrous. Music, to me, is the highest form and art, and your lists provide insight, if only through names and impressions — but I'm pleased to see poetry in the fiftieth anniversary issue of *SFC*. Three cheers for the development of culture! I am curious, though; is the name 'science fiction poetry' used in the same way as 'classical' or 'romantic'? It seems to incorporate both, or all, somewhat like the literature as a whole.

Around the time of the genesis of the first *SF Commentary* I was 14 years old, and had read any book or comic I could get my hands on. You gave me Philip K. Dick's *The Zap Gun*. I realised that it was a story that understood something of my own alienation as well as exciting my mentality with its imagination. It was this imagination that had me wanting to read more of the literature called science fiction. I realised that your interest was connected to a whole network of people called fandom. When you told me of your fanzine and included me in its production I was delighted (but quiet) because this

venture looked to me to be Art, which was the career path I had already decided to pursue. A published fanzine went to an audience, and I was eager to display my skills, which is why I joined ANZAPA, to John Foyster's dismay. As I remember, it was because he feared I would show the apa to my mother. She didn't see ANZAPA, but she did see *SF Commentary*, and I remember she was a bit perplexed at what it meant and thought that you wanted to become a professional publisher. Fifty years later, *SFC* is now a book that rivals the appearance of any prozine, and its contents exceed the quality of many, but my mother would still not understand how a lifetime could be devoted to the appreciation and intelligent criticism of 'those strange books'. Thank you for this devotion, Bruce. (Thanks also for making traditional paper copies.)

My year is being mainly devoted to realising the exhibition of my work at the local gallery here in Warrnambool. Last time I had to hire a space and organise the opening night, but this time the gallery (run by my local council) is sponsoring me and taking care of all the practical arrangements. For this I will have to pay an exploitative commission of 40 per cent of any works sold. Such is modern life.

(6 May 2019)

**SFC 100:** As always the reviews are informative and interesting. I particularly like Jenny Bryce's voice as

heard in her writing, and look forward to reading her new book of fiction.

Your lists always astound me with the volume of things that would worth reading and listening to. The world I occupy is a fairly ascetic one, and I rarely can buy luxuries. I'm lucky that David Russell keeps me up to date with gifts, some of which are recent science fiction books. Your lists remind of the utopian qualities of reality, and I'm delighted to see the headline 'Criticanto' again.

(13 December 2019)

**JOHN HERTZ**

**236 South Colorado Street, No 409,  
Los Angeles CA 90057, USA**

Happy 50th anniversary (gosh!) and thanks for printing my appreciations (even leading with the Byers piece, gosh!). Congratulations on 2018's Ditmar and Lifetime Achievement Awards.

Martha Argerich is indeed a wonder. So is (literary present tense) Dorothy L. Sayers. Have I recommended to you her translation of *The Divine Comedy*?

(23 May 2019)

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## Ultimate late letter of comment

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**RICH HORTON**

**The Golden Age of Science Fiction:  
The 1973 Ditmar Award for Best Fanzine:  
SF Commentary  
(Black Gate 15)**

The Ditmar Awards, for achievement in Australian science fiction (including fandom), have been presented annually since 1969. In most years some variety of a Best Fanzine Award has been given.

SF Commentary, edited by Bruce Gillespie, won the 1973 Ditmar Award for Best Australian Fanzine. Overall, Gillespie has won 18 Ditmars, for Best Australian Fanzine, Best Fanzine Editor, and Best Fan Writer. He has also won three William Atheling Jr. Awards for Best Criticism. (The Atheling Awards are part of the Ditmars, I believe, so in reality Gillespie has won 21 Ditmars.) *SF Commentary* first won the Ditmar Award in 1972, and most recently just last year, in 2018.

SF Commentary began publication in 1969. 100 issues have appeared to date. It appeared very regularly through 1981, was revived from 1989 through 1993, again between 2000 and 2004, and one or two issues per year have appeared since 2011, these latest primarily in electronic form. In the early years John Foyster and Barry Gillam occasionally shared editorial duties with Gillespie.

I have been reading issues of *SF Commentary* in this latest (post 2011) series regularly, and I have corresponded regularly with Bruce Gillespie in various fora since for the past 15 years. Bruce is intensely interested in SF and in its literary ambitions, and his magazine has long reflected that. *SF Commentary* issues are huge, and stuffed with long critical articles and reviews.

**For this article I took a look at scans of the 1972 issues, most of which are available at Fanac.org, thanks to the**

**efforts of Mark Olson.** Issues 26 through 31 appeared that year, and four of those can be found at Fanac.

Issue 26 is huge (110 pages), and quite significant, particularly for Darko Suvin's essay 'Cognition and Estrangement: An Approach to the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre', and for Gillespie's opening salvo in a survey of the novels of Brian W. Aldiss. Issue 28 comprises four long essays, each quite personal in tone, about 1971, by Leigh Edmonds, Bill Wright, Harry Warner, Jr., and Gillespie.

Gillespie's essay includes a list of his 20 favourite stories from 1971, heavily weighted towards stories from Samuel R. Delany and Marilyn Hacker's excellent original anthology *Quark*, the four numbers of which all appeared in 1971; and towards Damon Knight's *Orbit*. Here's Bruce's top 5:

- 'The View From This Window,' by Joanna Russ (*Quark*/1)
- 'Bodies,' by Thomas M. Disch (*Quark*/4)
- 'The Encounter,' by Kate Wilhelm (*Orbit* 8)
- 'The God House,' by Kenneth Roberts (*New Worlds Quarterly* 1)
- 'The Pressure of Time,' by Thomas M. Disch (*Orbit* 7).

By sheer coincidence I just read (as part of 334) Disch's blackly (viciously so) funny 'Bodies'.

Issue 30 is mostly devoted to discussing Eastercon 1972. And Issue 31 includes a fascinating letter from Philip K. Dick, as well as a transcript of his speech to the 1972 Vancouver SF convention.

I will say that in my mind there is little doubt that Gillespie and *SF Commentary* deserved their Ditmars, and I only wonder that neither *SF Commentary* nor Gillespie has won a Hugo.

(28 July 2019)

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## Voyages with my fanzine

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**LEIGH EDMONDS**

**46 Hocking Avenue, Mt Clear VIC 3350  
(change of address)**

I'm afraid that this short letter will be small recompense for the 50th anniversary issue of *SFC* that thudded its way into my letter box a couple of days ago. I looked at the number of \$1 stamps on the envelope and thought of how much it must have cost you to post out so many copies. I shrugged; 'A fan's gotta have a hobby', I said to myself, 'and this is a better hobby than most.'

I can't say that I've read all of this issue. I just don't have enough hours in the day at the moment to take in all 80 pages, and I hope you will forgive me for that. However, as you may have gathered from Valma's comments on Facebook, we've bought a new place, and the process of moving into it takes more time than you would think (as well as researching and writing a commissioned history at the same time). A brief description of this new place includes: four bedrooms, a bedroom/study, four living areas, a theatrette, a small swimming pool, and other bits and pieces. Most important as far as storage goes, it has two huge double car garages, a his-and-hers garage, as I like to tell people. What this means is that we will have space to store all the stuff that we have accumulated over the past getting-close-to 50-years together. And there is a lot of it. (We didn't win the lottery. This new place is partly the sweat of our brows and partly the

result of a generous inheritance that made us reevaluate our circumstances and what we wanted to do with the time we have left.)

We've been moving stuff from our storage house out at Springbank these past few weeks, and it has needed an initial sort in our new place. No doubt it will take us a year or more to make a sense of it all, and that doesn't count all the stuff we've got stuffed into our place here.

So, unpacking all this stuff ties in with many of the reminiscent pieces that you have in this issue of *SFC*. One thing is the electric typer that we bought after our golfball typewriter stopped cutting decent stencils. This typer also has a rather large data slot in the back for the kind of connection that probably no longer exists and used to connect, through a hideously expensive little box, to our first computer, so this would have been used to cut the stencils of my first word-processed fanzines in the early 1980s. (Strange to think now of the combination of the newly emerging technology of computing with the old technology of stencil duplication.) I also came across our first computer, a TRS-80, which looks more like a portable sewing machine than a computer.

*SFC* made me reflect on the process of mimeo duplicating and other stuff I came across which is now totally useless, but which I won't be throwing out: a half-used box of Roneo stencils, a box of old electro-stencils and some original artwork and, best of all, a couple of bottles of corflu, one still in its box unopened. (Strangely,



**The new Villa d'Edmonds — the photo from the real estate agent's publicity.**

although everything else I found was Roneo, the corflu bears the Gestetner brand.) All I did was open the top on the half empty bottle and take a whif, and a whole world of experience came dashing back. Our old Roneo 750 got left behind in one of our previous moves, perhaps because we didn't have room for it, or the expense was too great, but now we are moving into a place with a lot of storage I feel a little sad that it won't be coming to live with us again. Not that I would ever use it. Modern modes of fanac are so much easier.

I'm not sure that I appreciated all those obituaries: too many names of those who no longer move among us to make me happy. I'm also not sure about all those Colin Steele reviews: too many books that I will never get to read.

Thanks also for *\*brg\** 104 and 105 [*\*brg\** fanzines for ANZAPA\*]. All those lists! I could bore you again by wondering where you find all the time and energy for so much exploration, not only favourites, but contenders, and then to ponder over making lists too. The only list I could make would be of the shows that we've seen on Netflix since we started getting it, but I haven't kept track and most of shows are fairly forgettable. Most of the stuff that we've seen has been very much written to a formula and not much of an advance over *Forbidden Planet* in terms of content and plotting, though the special effects are much improved and I wonder if viewers are supposed to be so impressed by them that they ignore other weaknesses. The fantasy is even worse. Of all the stuff we've watched, the only two shows that come to mind at the moment are *Grace and Frankie* (in which old people are allowed to make ageist jokes) and *Black List* (in which a sociopath is happy in his work). We are currently working our way through *House of Cards*, which might make it onto the list, or it might degenerate into another soap

opera, as happens to many other shows that run for more than a couple of seasons.

Of course, my two favourite things from 2018 are out two new cats, Tristan and Isolde (most people wonder where the names come from, but not *SFC* readers, of course). They are now in their ninth month and more or less fully grown. The still do a lot of frolicking, and woe betide any box of tissues that is left unguarded because its contents will quickly be shredded and spread around the house.

I've seen the final ready-for-print copy of my chapter 'Australian Fandom', to be published by the University of Iowa Press. Less exciting, from your point I assume, would be another book chapter and a journal article on Victoria's old stone gaols, which should be published in the reasonably near future. The history I've working on for Haileybury is coming along more or less on schedule. The history of Australian civil aviation is close to finishing, and then the decks will be cleared to continue with the history of Australian fandom. In some ways it is a good thing that the Haileybury history has intruded into my work, because it has confronted me with some technical and moral issues that I might have struggled with in the history of fandom, had I not had to deal with them now in this project.

Let me conclude where I started this letter, with hearty congratulations on having published — more or less continuously — for 50 years. It's a magnificent achievement.

PS: Attached is my most recent SAPszine which goes into a bit more detail about our new place and how we came to acquire it.

(19 April 2019)



Meet the new masters: Tristan and Isolde. (Photo: Leigh Edmonds.)

**\*brg\*** Both your letter and your SAPszine are highly informative, especially the material about your new house. We would also like to inherit some money, but there's nobody on either side of our families who is in the least likely to send us any. The main reason for wanting to a half a million in the bank is that we could then retire from working, which isn't possible right now. In fact, after a 2018 in which Elaine had about three months of no paying work, she's just finished the longest and most intense period of work in her career. She would much rather sit and do embroidery and knit, which was what she was doing all Easter.

Cat pics and stories always enjoyed. Elaine looks at the *Daily Kitten* website every day.

Somebody — completely anonymously — sent me a nice cheque to print the 50th anniversary edition. I thought the money would cover both *SFCs* 98 and 99, but alas! most of it is taken up in the printing of *SFC* 98 (150 copies, including the really expensive colour cover) and the bloody postage (three-quarters of which was spent on the overseas copies). Cross fingers for the good health of Bill Burns at efanzines.

Thanks very much for the response to No. 98, especially while doing all those things involved in shifting house. I doubt if we would shift house

again. This house is very satisfactory, and the area is wonderful, but of course we have run out of bookshelf/CD-shelf space after 15 years. I'm trying not to buy new books, and keep reaching for books that have been on the shelf un-eyetracked for 40 years. I remember vividly that for months before our move in 2004 Elaine did little but things involved in shifting — ending up at 3 a.m. on the day before the shift, when we knew the movers were going to arrive at 5.30 a.m. Elaine let me have two hours' sleep, but didn't get any sleep herself until the next night.)

Glad to see that the *History of Australian Fandom* has not slipped away from view. I trust that some stray comments in my little history of *SF Commentary* will be useful, although the 'History of Norstrilia Press' covers the period immediately after your cut-off date. Still, it seems essential to telling the story of 1970 to 1975 that three blokes in their mid to late twenties could think that the Australian scene was healthy enough to sustain a small publisher devoted to publishing books that the big publishers wouldn't touch. Even if the capital funds should appear magically from nowhere, I doubt if I would take up such a project again. In the age of the internet and much reduced newspaper reviewing space, there seems no point to releasing books that won't be reviewed.\*]

Please tell Elaine that she is a Bad Person. I didn't know about *The Daily Kitten* until now, and it has addicted me.

We plan to organise the move from here over the coming few months because we need to do some expensive work to make the house and yard at the new place cat proof. We should keep Tris and Issy in doors and have this place organised so it is virtually escape proof. The new place has lots of lovely ways for a cat to find the outdoor world and we need to plug them before we move them.

I recall all too well the experience of moving in a day, having done it a couple of times, especially the packing, which takes forever, and the unpacking, which takes even longer. Having got all our stuff out of our Springbank place and into our new place we now need to get that organised and then start moving stuff from here to there in the back of our station wagon over weeks and months. There will still be a day when the removalists arrive and take all the big items such as book cases, etc, etc, but I hope to be able to manage the process so we're not living in a house full of boxes for endless weeks. That's the plan anyhow. I've located my other computer at our new place, and have all my Haileybury work on a portable hard drive so I can work as well there as here. This has already proved a good use of time while waiting for tradies to turn up according to their schedule rather than mine. I had hoped to be installed in our new place in time to watch Le Tour de France in our new theatre but at the speed things are moving I'm not as optimistic as I used to be.

I was, of course, astounded to find almost half a million in my bank account. My first thought was, 'What am I going to do with it?' It didn't take too long to figure that out. I think we were very lucky to get the money and

then to find the house that is just right for us after a couple of hours cruising the interweb. If we hadn't found the ideal place so quickly we probably would have given up looking sooner or later. Roscoe smiles on good fannish fans!

Publishing and posting fnz these days is truly an expensive hobby, but there are many of us who are glad you're doing it. Anyhow, what else would you do with your time? I have no doubt that after we've all passed on to the Tucker Hotel, scholars will be studying old issues of *SFC*, writing articles and PhDs on topics we can't even imagine at the moment. One of the things I hope to do with the history of fandom (when I get back to it) is to explain to future readers that fanzines and the fandom it served was fundamentally a social activity — you hint at this when you mention the emergence of academic studies of stf in this issue of *SFC* and how it differs from fannish discussion of stf. To use the term that I'm hearing too much these days, fnz and even works like the Dick book were a way of 'reaching out' to other like-minded people. You did and do it with more stfnal material than I ever did, and will do, but I think the social intentions are similar. The starting point is what we read for pleasure (I'm starting on my fourth stf book in the past twelve months) because of the way it indicates the kinds of people we were and are. That might be part of the reason why I find current fandom so mundane.

(20 April 2019)

Just a note to let you know that Robin Johnson has delivered your latest opus into my safe and welcoming hands. I've flicked through it but I've put it aside to read when I have the opportunity. I'm not quite sure when this will be as I have no trips to Melbourne scheduled for the foreseeable future and I'm in the middle of a writing frenzy with the Haileybury history. I shall do my best.

I did read your story about Harry the cat, very touchingly written, as one should write about old and faithful friends. The story about him bolting out the back door, driving off the enemy and hurtling up a tree was very much the story of what cats are like. If you were to come to visit us these days you would find the note on the front door saying to come around to the back of the house to the laundry door. When you get there you would find a slightly longer note saying that the reason you have to come in the back door is because we are using the back door and the door between the laundry and the rest of the house as a kind of cat-lock to keep them in. They may dash through the door between the kitchen and the laundry and try hiding behind the washing machine, but the back door remains closed while they are there. There is also the door to the garage from the laundry. While Tristan and Isolde find great delight in barging their way into the laundry, they have yet to make it out the back door or through the door to the garage. This means that they live in fairly small area but they make the most of it with a lot of hurtling around and jumping up and down on things.

Every so often, though, they become obsessed with the kitchen door and go and sniff at the back door. But — at least that is our plan — they will never see the other side. I did make the mistake of having the laundry door and the garage door open at the same time last night and

little Isolde was through them in a flash. I thought, here's trouble, and thought to do what you did with Harry, just wait for her to come in to the rest of the house again in her own good time. No need to worry; she took one quick look at the vast empty echoing emptiness and dashed back into the kitchen again. I wonder what she thought of her experience, suddenly seeing what the rest of the world might be like.

At this very moment the two of them are taking a rest from the excitement of the past day with not one, not two, not three, but four visitors. Isolde is lying on the bed next to the heater and Tristan is lying in his box on a shelf next to me — they both used to be able to fit into it but he's grown too big and fat so now she has had to go and find somewhere else to do her snoozing.

I could go on like this all day. It's more relaxing than trying to find a way of explaining the relationship between three-year VCE courses and student enrolment numbers, and making it something people would want to read.

(9 July 2019)

The copy you sent me of *SFC* 99, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition Part 2, has been sitting in my back pack these past few months waiting for me to go travelling, but that hasn't happened and I've spent the past three months in intensive writing of the history for Haileybury. What I thought would be a fairly simple project turned out to be one of the most complex projects I've ever done, not in the big details, which are fairly straightforward, but in the micro details that I can ignore for most projects but which needed to be explored fairly thoroughly for this one.

Having finally got a draft off to Haileybury, it was time to have a meeting to see what they thought. Yesterday was a beautiful spring day; blue skies the land lush and green (by Australian standards) and there was no sight of clouds and the sun was bright without having that hot bite that will come in a few weeks. It was a great day to be alive. However, I spent most of my time with my nose in *SFC*. I looked up a couple of times to see what was going on outside my window and I see the government is doing a lot of work upgrading the line down to Melbourne. Most of it is duplicating the line out to Melton, but there is also some extensive work, with new platforms being built at Bacchus Marsh and Ballan. We stopped for a few minutes just outside the new station they are building at Rockbank, I think, to watch an artist at work. Back when I was writing the history of Main Roads Western Australia people talked about — and I saw a couple — of artists with graders, the men who could take half an inch off a surface with the blade tilted just right to give just the slightest slope for water run off, or judge the inclination of a curve in the road just by eye and then execute it with the skill of a surgeon. So, the driver of the machine I saw yesterday was just such an artist levelling off an embankment, using the lip of his bucket with more deft skill than most of us would have with a paint brush. Unfortunately the train started moving again just as I was starting to really enjoy watching him at his work, but it was enough to set my day off to a good start.

I really enjoyed this issue of *SFC*, mainly because of

the rich variety of the letters. You have an erudite and personable collection of correspondents who are not shy in writing about the joys and miseries of their lives. The result was that I felt more as if I was enjoying a languid afternoon listening to friends converse rather than hurtling across the countryside and, less pleasantly, suburban Melbourne. (What a smelly, noisy place it is, and so crowded too. I think I saw more people on the corner of Spencer and Collins Streets in a minute than I've seen in Ballarat in a month. I mentioned this at the meeting at Haileybury and was told that is nothing in comparison to the mass of humanity in China (where the school now has a campus).)

For once I felt compelled to make some notes in the margin to remind me of some of the things I wanted to comment on, but the only writing implement I had with me was a red gel pen I use for working on drafts (I've gone through a lot of them on this project) so I'm afraid I've somewhat defaced the copy you sent me. So, let's see if I can make any sense of the red squiggles today. I should add that there are no such marks against parts of this issue that discuss stf seriously and so I have nothing so say about Partrick McGuire's long letter and his comments on George's *The Sea and Summer*. I thought it was a nice and interesting read, but I don't know that I'd be able to go on about it at such great length — which is probably why I didn't turn into a literature academic.

I do see a red splodge in the margin here which, when I peer at it, seem to indicate the paragraph where Patrick says you don't need to do a PhD because those things aren't necessary. He is right, of course, but I reckon that the one I did was valuable to me in making me study areas that I would not have looked out without some kind of compulsion. By this I mean that in everything you've done you've followed your own inclinations whereas when I did my PhD (lo! those 25 years ago) my supervisors suggested lines of enquiry that would not have occurred to me had I been following my own nose. (Had I not looked into those areas of knowledge I would not have learned the techniques I now use and I wouldn't have done all the work I have.) The other thing to me, but perhaps not to others, is that I looked upon my postgraduate work as a form of advanced training in being a historian, which was better than me trying to train myself. The other thing that occurs to me some times in reading your work is that there is sometimes a lack of rigour in your thinking which demonstrates an under-graduate rather than a postgraduate mode of thinking (not that I don't do the same thing all the time). Sorry for being so blunt.

**[\*brg\* I keep patting myself on my editorial back for steering away from the academic way of writing, but many of my contributors are academics who like writing in plainspeak. I became very irritated with academic style when I was book-editing for clients such as Oxford University Press. If I undertook a PhD these days, I would have to kowtow to assumptions and linguistic tricks that I loathe. :: But mainly I object to the idea of a PhD as a neat little set of letters to paste to your name in order to get a job. (Jobs? What jobs? I read yesterday that half of Melbourne University's staff are on**

**short-term contracts, and another one-quarter are on sessional rates.) A PhD should be awarded purely for a startling piece of original research, surely? Something unsuspected, newly discovered? Since I have no large subject areas about which I have some original insight, I cannot even consider doing a PhD. Especially not at the age of 73, when all I want to do is be able to afford to retire. I like writing individual essays on writers who interest me, but I have a limit of 5000 words per essay. And the only people who appreciate what I do (not many of them, but a few) are readers of my magazines.\*]**

I enjoyed Robert Day's letter, in particular his comments on Patrick Leigh Fermor and his quest for knowledge and experience across Eastern Europe. Apart from a week spent in Budapest at a conference, I have no experience of that part of the world, and yet it is a source of so much of Western culture. Robert sounds more than a little wistful about his own travelling ... melancholic perhaps?

On the next page, Robert writes about his model of the Tupolev Bear. I went off to his website and had a look at the write-up and photos of his models and it is truly an impressive beast. I've been put off making that model because of all those propellers, but he has tempted me. Since acquiring our new place with plenty of storage space I've also acquired a couple of big model kits, one being the A model Martin Mars (after seeing a beautifully made one at the ModelExpo I missed the final day of the Melbourne convention to go to. There was also a magnificent 3D printed 1/72 Saunders Roe Princess that I'm valiantly resisting temptation about buying, though I fear that I might give in to temptation eventually.) One of the things I liked about Robert's Bear was that his close-up photos show a few blemishes here and there so it is not a 'perfect' model but one made by a human. The Provost he mentions in his letter looks very nice too. In Robert's next paragraph he writes about the problems of book buying these days. (As an aside, I'm seeing stacks of Margaret Atwood's latest book everywhere these past couple of days, in K-Mart and piled up at the railway station, I hope it makes her very rich.) These days almost all my book buying and model kit buying is done on line. I have such obscure tastes these days that what I see in shops is of little or no interest so I have a book on British imperialism that I wish to read coming from a distributors locally who is probably air freighting it in for me, judging by the cost. Similarly, Robert will be aware of Hannants in Britain, which is my main source of kits, although I bought the Martin Mars online from a source in Estonia or some such place. Book shops and hobby shops have to run at a profit and they wouldn't do so if they stocked what interests me. They probably will do well with the new Tamiya P-51D, which is getting rave reviews, but instead what interested me was the new Grand Models PZL Dromader (a water bomber quite common locally), which I bought from a shop in Holland on which the postage was almost as much as the kit itself.

I spent a lot of time gazing out the train window and thinking after reading Steve Jeffery's paragraph about

the aesthetics of looking upon a flower. What is it, I wonder, that makes a person think that the sex organ of a plant is beautiful? It is, I suppose, in the mind of the beholder, and that a dung beetle might have a different view of beauty to a human. It also struck me that the attitude that 'I understand beauty because I am an artist' is a particularly Romantic view and that that would have been a very strange way to express oneself at the time of the Enlightenment or in the Classical period. Would it be a Baroque way of seeing the world? As Steve says, there is nothing soulless about science or mathematics or other fields of human endeavour, and I think that to show a preference for romantic ideas of beauty over other ways of seeing it is the kind of arrogance that alienates such artists from the rest of the world. It certainly alienates me. This led me on to thoughts about the role of technique in artistic — or scientific — understanding and expression, which may have led to my contemplation of craft as opposed to art, as expressed by a man sculpting an embankment near a railway station.

I may have come across Judy Buckrich in the context of history and the Professional Historians Association. In any event, her recounting of her year suggests that her life as a historian is much more exciting than mine. This might be because she is younger than I and therefore needs to be out and about more often than I care to be these days, or because she lives in Melbourne, where there is a lot more activity than there is in Ballarat. The PHA held a session in Ballarat earlier in the year, which I went to, but, as with conventions these days, I sat up the back as an old-timer and watched the younger people trying to make their way in the world. That expression seems to suggest that I have reached my destination, which is not actually the case, though I've found a rather comfortable hotel to lodge in for the moment along my path. I was interested to read that Judy has resigned herself to not getting sufficient recognition or income from the establishment. I reached the same conclusion a couple of decades ago. There is more egoboo to be found in the letter column of a fanzine than there is to be found in professional history in a year. Still, I chose the path into the history of technology that is even further from the mainstream than Judy's, so I have nothing to complain about. Fortunately for me, that view of history led me into several forms of social construction theory which has been my main tool in researching and writing history, and which has yet to fail me.

Unlike Judy, I've never been nominated for or won any awards in history, and don't expect to. I always took the view that it was a job, and that if people paid me for my work that was the best compliment I could get, and it paid for stuff I like too. Thinking about this, I realise that, apart from a couple of forays into aviation history, all the books I've written have been commissioned, which may be very fortunate but I've sort of taken it for granted. It is likely that this book for Haileybury is the last commission I will write to. In the time I have left to me it will be topics that interest me, hopefully focusing in the history of Australian fandom again next year.

I was also struck by Judy's comments on her father's belief in communism. I would call myself a socialist, but not a communist. I reckon that one of the great disasters of the twentieth century was the victory of the Bolsheviks

over the Mensheviks in Russia which led to the kind of Lenninist and then Stalinist (and dare one say Maoist) communism that is the same kind of oppression as most dictatorships. Better the kind of socialism that developed in Germany in the 1890s and still seems to be the basis of much European political thought. At least capitalism has the benefit of being driven by greed, rather than the kind of social theory turned into doctrine that drove communism.

Reading Doug Barbour's comments — and others — about what we prefer in musical performances made me think back to Steve Jeffery and the comments on aesthetics. I sometimes try to rationalise why I prefer one performance over another, and in the end I think it might come back to my own aesthetic tendencies as a Classicist rather than a Romantic, so I am not a great fan of the way in which some pianists play with tempos and timbres and, now that I reflect on it, why nothing by Liszt would be in my top 100 pieces if I were to concoct such a list. Schubert is currently top of my list, but he is early Romantic, and that movement has lost me by the time we get to Schumann. We are in complete agreement, however, when it comes to his statement that the 'Shostakovich quartets are one of the greatest masterworks of twentieth-century music'. For me, those and the Beethoven quartets are wells that never go dry.

William Breiding's comment that full-time retirement will never come to him made me wonder why anyone would want to be retired. I guess that it must be an attractive idea to those whose paying jobs are not a delight to them, but the idea of doing nothing during the day but indolating seems very strange, to me anyhow. When I decided to quit the public service back in the 1980s and find another job, it was with the intention of finding something that I could do up until the day I died. Hopefully I've found it. I imagine that many fiction writers feel that they have been similarly blessed.

**[\*brg\* You can want to be retired if (a) you have been doing physical work all your life and your body is letting you down; and (b) you have other, more interesting things to do.\*]**

There are a few other red blemishes that I'd like to comment on, but you're in danger of getting another long rambling letter of comment from me, so I will curb my inclinations.

Before that, however, there were a few more general things. One was the several comments on Peter Nicholls, include the one from Greg Benford. I recall meeting him only once, which was, as I recall, around a swimming pool so it must have been at a convention. He stuck me as the kind of person who was very sure of his own opinions and thought that they were important. So I probably shared half a dozen words with him before wandering off, since neither strongly opinionated people or swimming pools being among my favourite things.

Someone in this issue noted that so many of our number are dying these days that the rest of us are starting to experience 'survivor guilt', or at least that's the way I read it. Alongside Lloyd Penney's letter I've written the enigmatic 'historical process', which expresses my feelings about the way in which we are dying off, and will all be dead one of these days. I am not looking forward to my own death, or the deaths of my friends, but it is part of the natural process and we may as well make the best of it that we can. Besides, if we were to hang around forever we would be holding back human development, particularly if, as the idea of paradigm shift suggests, the big changes only come with the following generations.

I do, however, feel a bit of survivor guilt after reading of the difficult financial situations in which many people find themselves. I know the feeling, having been down our last couple of hundred dollars a decade or so ago. These days however, due to a lot of forethought and an even greater amount of luck, plus a fair amount of hard work, we are doing very nicely thank you and have bought the new house and engaged an architect to plan and do some alterations for us. I'm thinking that, with the extra cash that will result from yesterday's discussions, I might splash out on some more nicely built book cases but, and I'm being serious about this, I doubt that we would have enough books to fill them all. 'No problems,' I hear all your readers cry. Too right. But I know what I'm like if I let myself loose in a bookshop. An alcoholic in a pub comes to mind.

I have to go off and do the work to pay for the bookshelves. Congratulations on your work on the Nova Mob. We'll make a historian of you yet. Which reminds me that I didn't get around to comment on Gillian Polack, another historian, having gone over to the dark side with her obsession of writing fiction.

(19 July 2019)

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## Another *Dreams of Mars* book?

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**JOHN LITCHEN**  
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Having completed the book *Dreams of Mars* — 130 years of stories about Mars — I thought I was finished with it. There were many early stories that weren't included in this volume that I had read about in other more scholarly books regarding Mars fiction (stories published towards the end of the nineteenth century) but I thought they

would only be found in academic archives in other parts of the world. Most of them were mentioned in passing, or the comments regarding them were rather general without giving much away, which made me wonder if the authors of those scholarly books actually read the stories or only glanced at them or referenced them from other sources. Eventually, curiosity got the better of me and I started searching for them. I discovered quite a few were available as downloadable PDFs, thanks to the Gutenberg Project making available long-lost books or books

out of print and copyright.

I also found a website that has many Mars stories, both short and long, listed from the early pulp fiction decades. Some of these are downloadable as PDFs, scanned from the original magazines, while others can be read only online. They come with the original magazine illustrations, which makes them quite interesting. I couldn't resist obtaining some of those, and — would you know it? — before long I had a stack of 'new' material to read. Well, new to me, mostly published before I was born.

Another source turned out to be *Armchair Fiction*, from Medford in Oregon USA, which has been re-publishing novels, novellas, and novelettes from the 1920s through to the 1950s, in single and double editions sourced from the original pulp magazines. Among the hundreds of books they have revived and reprinted there are quite a lot about Mars. I managed to buy some of these, as well as others by authors I felt nostalgic about, and have thoroughly enjoyed them. Wildside Press is another publisher of early mostly forgotten material where I have discovered a few Mars stories.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Mars was far more popular as a setting for stories than I had imagined, so my collection of books from the 1950s and on could barely be called a collection, since there were and still are so many Mars stories that I had never known existed, stories that I should have had. Over the last 12 months I have begun to rectify that situation.

After a long hiatus Mars is once again on everyone's mind, with NASA announcing it will go there after returning to the Moon in 2024, but with *Space X* still claiming it will go to Mars around 2024, and with the Russians and the Europeans and the Indians, and perhaps even the Japanese, all preparing expeditions of some sort to Mars within the next 10 to 20 years.

Hundreds of authors have been writing and continue to write novels and stories featuring Mars that are mostly self-published, or independently published as e-books (and overpriced POD paperbacks). Apart from some better-known authors whose Mars stories are published by traditional publishing companies, the e-book market is flushed with stories about Mars, about first contact, about wars between planets, aliens versus humans, and so on. Since Amazon sells probably 70 per cent of the world's e-books, all these new Mars stories can be found there, somewhere, lost among the million or so books Amazon has listed.

I have 28 recent e-books as well as a new stack of paperbacks on my unread pile, all of which are Mars stories in one way or another. But again, there will be many missed, because they are overpriced, or they just don't appeal.

I don't think there is any way in which someone can keep track of all the new Mars books, and by 'new' I mean those published in the last 10 years as well as those about to be published during the next 10 years. Some of them are not individual books but books in a multi-volume series. I don't like series that appear to go on indefinitely, so I am unlikely to invest money in buying them. I have bought the first volume of some stated trilogies, the intention being to read it; if it shows promise I will get the following volumes to finish the story. If the story is too derivative, or is badly written, or badly produced, then I won't bother with the subsequent volumes.

Unfortunately, many of the writers today who are writing Mars stories (among other SF writers) have not read earlier works, let alone contemporary ones, or perhaps have not even read much science fiction. Their writing shows a lack of knowledge regarding science fiction's common ideas, plots, and story lines, and while they think they are coming up with something new, all their ideas have been done before, anything up to a century ago, and usually much better. In general, their writing or their use of ideas is inferior, often lacking the excitement those early pulp writers infused into their fiction. When I go back over some of the early pulp magazine stories I missed when I was too young to know of them, I am astonished at how well some of them hold up today. They are full of excitement, a positive belief in better futures, and almost all are entertaining. Of course, some are dated, but that often adds to the charm of the story, especially when you read the names of the devices mentioned that were extrapolated from the science of the day, and projected into a future that would be an alternate reality to our own recent past. I think of them as 'retro-futuristic', but that term is debatable, as anyone reading that very early material will form their own view of what it is or was, and what or how they would reference it today.

My dilemma is: do I incorporate discussions regarding the books I have read subsequent to the publication of *Dreams of Mars* to prepare a revised and expanded edition, or do I prepare a separate new volume covering the more recent readings? I have over 100,000 words written at the moment about the books I've found after finishing *Dreams of Mars*. If I add them to the original volume it is likely to be unwieldy, with an added couple of hundred pages. A second volume may be the answer, but there are still a lot of books waiting to be read before I can finish it, which suggests the total may simply be too much for an expanded edition. A second volume may be more realistic. Such is life

(21 October 2019)

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## Letters of comment to *SF Commentary* 96, 97, 98 and 99

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**MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER**  
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You mention that Damien Broderick wanted you to issue a *Best of SF Commentary*, but you couldn't because of the rights involved with your Stanislaw Lem controversy. But hasn't fanac.org's industrious posting of back issues of *SFC* proven an alternative? They say that in the past month they have posted over 20 of your early issues online, and they say they have posted 83 per cent of the back issues of *SFC* up until the point the issues on efanazines take over. Doesn't this solve the problem? (And why was there an eight-year gap in issues between 1981 and 1989?)

**[\*brg\* This hardly solves the problem of publishing a 'Best Of', but it wonderful that now I can point to all the great articles and letters of SFC's post and say: 'Read on! Read on!', thanks to Mark Olson's scanning skills and Joe and Edie's hosting of fanac.org.**

**There was an eight-year gap between 1981 because I ran out of money (1981–84) and enthusiasm for SF during the eighties. When I had a firm income (1984–96) I had little time for fanzine publishing. Searching for something different, I began *The Metaphysical Review* in 1984 to publish a fanzine about anything that interested me. The last few issues (during 1997 and 1998) were the best fanzines I ever published, but the local fans couldn't summon the effort to give *TMR* a Hugo nomination in 1999. 1999 was the thirtieth anniversary issue of *SF Commentary*, so after celebrating that event I closed *TMR* and returned to sporadic publishing of *SF Commentary*. The non-SF articles then appeared in \*brg\*, my fanzine for ANZAPA, and, much later, in *Treasure*.\*]**

Ray Sinclair-Wood says that schools 'try to pull culture down to the age of the students'. I'm not sure which schools Sinclair-Wood is talking about, but here is an example I found after reading Robert Pondiscio's *How The Other Half Learns*, an account of how he spent the 2017–18 school year observing Success Academy, a very successful charter school chain in New York City. (I don't know what the Australian equivalent of charter schools are, but in the US they are government-funded schools with a great deal of independence in what they teach and whom they can hire and fire.)

Pondiscio shows that the schools are very good at getting low-income and minority students to behave in the classroom, work hard, and get test scores that are equal or superior to those offered by schools in richer suburbs. He shows that the teachers are very compassionate in telling students about the hardships they overcame in life. But he offers no evidence that anything the

students read is given to them because the teachers thought they would enjoy it, or which offers students something inspiring or by a great writer. What I got from reading Pondiscio's book is that everything done in Success Academy is done to pass required tests, including the giant rally held in Radio City Music Hall the week before the statewide tests take place. At 61, I am ancient enough that I read *David Copperfield* and *Silas Marner* in high school, but I can't imagine students doing that now.

He asks if you go to a classical music concert you shouldn't be expected 'to come away *with information*' in the same way you would if you attended a lecture by Stephen Hawking. Last month I went to a concert of the Maryland Lyric Opera that consisted of arias from great composers. It concluded with a trio from *Der Rosenkavalier*, which is probably the best part of Richard Strauss's greatest opera. The great advantage of going to a concert hall with good acoustics is that you get the music undiluted and you can concentrate on it. What I heard was 10 minutes of great and uplifting beauty that put me, for that moment, on a higher plane of existence than where I normally reside. That's different than 'acquiring information'.

My anecdotes about Brian Aldiss aren't as interesting as Greg Benford's. I met Aldiss twice, at the Netherlands in 1990 and in Glasgow in 1995 and both times my comments were along the lines of 'You're Brian Aldiss! Ook ook! I'm your number one fan!' However, Jerry Pournelle gave me my start as a professional writer. In 1982 I attended a conference at the Library of Congress on science and literature, which mostly featured Jerry Pournelle versus a group of pretentious English professors who didn't understand him. My memory of the event is Pournelle bellowing and explaining that he had become deaf because of a Korean War injury and that the representatives of the humanities were showing they didn't know anything about science. I dutifully wrote it up and mailed it to *The American Spectator*, which got a response along the lines of 'Wow! Who the hell are you?' They published it in their May 1982 issue, which was the first time I had ever appeared in a magazine.

Gianpaolo Cossato mentions the death of Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu. I did see the documentary *Gurrumul*, directed by Paul Williams, which I think is a good introduction to the man and his works.

I share your enthusiasm for the writings of Michael Dirda. However, he didn't win the Pulitzer for a book, but for being the best critic of the year. What I like about him is his passion and enthusiasm for what he reads; he's always well informed. I am also amazed about the number of relatively obscure Victorian and Edwardian novels he has reviewed; I don't think anyone else would, for example, have published a Dornford Yates appreciation in the *Washington Post*.

Here is a review of the dumbest play I've seen in the past year, Lucas Hnath's *A Doll's House Part 2*, set 15 years after the Ibsen play. Nora has become a writer of success-

ful pseudonymous novels about women who leave their husbands. But a judge threatens to reveal that Nora wrote the books unless she obtains a divorce from Torvald. Much agony occurs for the first 80 minutes until Torvald relents and agrees to sign the papers. But then Nora says she doesn't want a divorce because she wants to be a Free Woman just like 15 years ago. When she said this I blurted out loud 'Say what?' but then I realised you can't talk back in a theatre the way you can in a movie theatre.

By contrast, the best play I saw, *The Heiress*, adapted into a movie in 1948 that won Olivia de Havilland an Oscar, was very well done and very satisfying and makes me eager to read *Washington Square*, the Henry James novel on which the play is based.

(18 November 2019)

[SFCs 98 and 99:] I'd like to read Leigh Edmonds's *Australian Fandom*, but his comment that reviewers thought his book was 'too fannish and undertheorised' croggles the mind. Isn't a book about fandom supposed to be 'fannish?' Would a reviewer of a history of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad complain, 'There is too much information about trains?' I gather the book has not been published, and I'd love to know the publication date.

**[\*brg\* Leigh wrote a single chapter for an academic book about fandom, and that chapter was initially considered 'too fannish and undertheorised'. His *History of Australian Fandom* book has not been finished yet.\*]**

Murray Moore has a brief review of the 2018 Corflu. Well, I went to the 2019 Corflu, travelling on that hideously unfannish mode of transportation, the bus, because the convention was 10 miles away from me. In fact, I had dinner with Murray and Mary Ellen Moore one night and Alan Rosenthal and Jeanne Bowman on another night. I can't say we talked very much about you, but there was a lot of good conversation, mostly about our lives, but also quite a bit on the history of fandom. I had a good talk with Jim Benford. He was the fan guest of honour, so we heard actual science, as Benford talked about his research in preparing for starships to fly to Proxima Centauri. I was glad to talk to both the Benfords, who are very nice people.

There is a class of conventions that I will go to if they are in Washington or 25 miles away in Baltimore. This is why the six World Fantasy Conventions I went to were the three in Baltimore, the two in Washington, and I went to New Haven once. The four Corflus I went to included the three in Washington, and in 2002 I went to Annapolis, which is 27 miles away. I enjoyed the 2019 Corflu, and thought Michael Dobson and Curt Phillips did a good job running it. Dan Steffan's print that Corflu gave us of a geisha with ATom-style aliens on her back is on a little shelf of stuff next to my desk. But Corflu isn't exciting enough to me to travel more than 30 miles to.

As for your history of *SF Commentary*: I'm reasonably sure I first read the magazine when you were a Hugo nominee in the early 1980s and the Luttrells were distributing it. I'm not sure if the subscription I took out then

was ever completely fulfilled, because I think it expired when you had your eight-year gap. I am reasonably sure I reconnected with you on issue 79, your Tucker issue, because there was a notice by Arthur Hlavaty in *The New York Review of Science Fiction* about it and I sent you money.

What I like about your zines is that they combine the sercon interest in sf with the fannish emphasis on your personal voice. I've always liked your lists and your descriptions of what you've read and seen. I like that you are continuing to try out new works and new writers. My problem with fannish fanzines is that they are only about their authors' lives, and that fannish fans think autobiography is, as they say today, 'privileged' over other means of communication. But I don't think most fans' lives are that interesting. I'd much rather have fans discuss what they've seen or read because you then get into the lifetime discussion about our field that deserves to be kept going.

Your history of Norstrilia Press: I asked George Turner to sign a copy of *In the Heart or in the Head* at Aussiecon II in 1985. I think Norstrilia Press gets many points for discovering Greg Egan, and his first novel sounds somewhat similar to Neal Stephenson's *The Big U*.

John Litchen asks if email was as prevalent in 1997 as it was today. I remember at LACon III in 1996 they had an '@' party, which was for people who had email addresses. I remember when I was preparing to go to Australia in 1999 I wanted to do an article about breweries in Australia for *All About Beer*. I asked the Australian embassy for information, and their librarian told me, 'Why don't you use the Internet?' I made appointments at breweries by calling them with a calling card and pay phones, because cell phones were not as prevalent in 1999 as today. But when I went to Glasgow in 2005, I dutifully used the Internet to do research.

I am also sure that the last overseas fan ever to send a letter to thank me for sending him something was Ken Cheslin. I had very much enjoyed his fanthologies, and saw an article in the *Washington Post Magazine* about *The Goon Show*. He sent a thank-you note in around 2003, which is the last one I've gotten from overseas.

I'm sorry to hear about the death of Harry. I've never had cats because I'm allergic to them, but I've always respected cats. I know of my parents' cats, Bagheera III was always quiet when his half-brother Sue was alive because Sue was a major talker. But as soon as Sue died Bagheera started talking! He was also the only cat who would always come whenever you drummed your fingers — then he would be open to a few rounds of petting before he went back to his feline business.

Do you live in the country or in a suburb with large lawns? Your cats seem much more outdoors cats than cats in my country are. And I hope you get another cat because you always need two cats to play with each other and groom the top of the other cat's head.

**[\*brg\* I have described our place in Greensborough before in fanzines, but mainly in apazines for Acnestis and ANZAPA. The large back door/window looks out on the back garden, but about a quarter of that garden is separated by a wire enclosure so that the cats have their own bit of garden, and can**

**see out into the main garden, but cannot go gallivanting among the birds or hurtling over the back fence. Our suburb mainly consists of large blocks of land that used to be the sites of large houses, but many of the blocks are now occupied by two or more single-storey flats. The Plenty River flows to the north of where we are, then south to the Yarra River. It's easy to escape suburbia by walking by the side of the river or through other parks.\*]**

I thought your history of the Nova Mob was thorough and interesting. It's good that you wrote it down, because I know of no comparable history of an American club. The Philadelphia Science Fiction Society is the only one I know that has papers similar to the Nova Mob, but I don't think anyone has written their history in a comparable way. It's good that your club remains a vital part of Melbourne fandom. My local club, the Potomac River Science Fiction Society, discovered that spreading the meetings among several members worked better than having them in one fan's home.

(2 December 2019)

**SFC100:** I very much enjoy Colin Steele's reviews, but he should know that Tade Thompson is British, not American. I also question his claim that Sir Philip Pullman's 'Dark Materials' series were not filmed after *The Golden Compass* because of religious pressure in the US. I think that American evangelicals are numerous enough to support films by buying tickets, which is why there was a second Narnia film, but not numerous enough to cancel films. Moreover, I believe the *Catholic Herald* is a British publication, not an American one.

I always enjoy your best-of-the-year lists. With books, the only one on your list that I read this year was Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines*, which I picked for the book club I belong to because of the movie. I thought the film had great backgrounds and set design and an inferior plot, which was taken from the book (except the endings are different). I don't particularly like steampunk because I'd rather read real Victorian fiction than contemporary fiction set in Victorian times. But I thought Reeve's book was imaginative and entertaining, although I don't know if I'll read the eight or nine sequels.

With films, you mention Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, which I finally saw two years ago thanks to the American Film Institute. I gather the film had a lot of technical problems, including having to be reshot because they used an advanced Kodak film that Soviet laboratories couldn't handle and much of the film had to be reshot. In addition, I gather Tarkovsky stripped most of the sf elements from the film because he hated sf. I thought the result was a bleak mess I don't have to see again.

Here is my Tarkovsky story. In 1987. I called a meeting of the Silver Spring Depressing Science Fiction Film Society to see *The Sacrifice*, which went to films that were sf, foreign, and life denying. 'This film won the Palme D'Or at Cannes,' I said. 'It's about a Swedish family that undergoes psychological collapse in the dead of winter until they face the white-hot fury of a nuclear holocaust!' We spent three hours taking in the nails-in-the-head depressing action and enjoyed ourselves because the

film is sf, foreign, life-denying, and *ambiguous* because you're *not sure* if there's a nuclear holocaust.

I agree that Cuarón's *Roma* had to be seen in a theatre because of its great cinematography, particularly in the last scene in the water. *Annihilation* was not a Netflix film in the US. I thought it was a good film that strained to be a great one, including a good performance by Natalie Portman, but I didn't understand the last 20 minutes. In baseball terms, *Annihilation* was a double where the runner was thrown out at third.

(27 December 2019)

**WILLIAM BREIDING**  
**3507 N. Santa Rita Avenue, Apt. 1,**  
**Tucson AZ 85719, USA**

Gail and I went out and saw *Blade Runner 2049*. I agree completely with your assessment. The script was incredibly weak and ponderous. The photography was outstanding, at times transcendent. The (mediocre) soundtrack was far, far too loud, trying to make up for the lack of import in script. There were moments of nuanced acting. The scene when the replicant cop and the Wallace's replicant assistant (or 'angel') meet for the first time was a fine set piece, where it seemed the cop was trying to 'pass' for human. Overall, however, it was a failure. We had an added attraction at our viewing (which was a very sparsely attended Saturday matinee), however. We had two guys that were talking loudly, and (not purposely) hilariously, with such comments as 'This isn't anything like the one 30 years ago!', and after one of them went to what I thought was the bathroom, but came back with his popcorn tub full, proclaiming to everyone 'I got it refilled for free!' The other guy said, 'Why?' 'Because it was free!' the guy replied. This went on for quite awhile, and Gail and I were in stitches. It was like viewing a live version of *Mystery Theater 3000* (if you don't know about this, Google it for a sample). Eventually some man a few seats ahead of them told them to shut up. Instead of saying 'Be quiet' or 'Shut up', he rambled on for several long sentences, in a very loud voice, which we also found hilarious. So, while Gail hated *Blade Runner 2049* (and I was merely disappointed), she found it a fun experience.

I found your concept of fan and non-fan as a mixed marriage amusing and true. I'm accustomed to the occasional vitriol towards my reading and viewing habits, though sometimes I've been able to make converts with certain books and writers.

(30 October 2017)

We saw a very good film yesterday, *Lucky*, starring Harry Dean Stanton in one of his last roles before he died this year. It is a moving portrait of a 90-year-old man living out his final days in a small desert town, and coming to terms with his inevitable sooner-than-later death. Great performances by all concerned, and Harry is magnificent.

(30 October 2017)

**[\*brg\* I saw *Blade Runner 2049* twice because it is an extraordinarily good-looking film. Film is still**

fundamentally a series of images. Most films these days have photography that looks like shades of mud. :: I enjoyed *Lucky* as much as you did. Harry is/was magnificent. A pity he has left us forever.\*]

When I read through your dream version of 'The Best of *SFC*' I said to myself: 'Somebody should actually publish this.' Maybe I should publish this. Then I got to the part where you mentioned that very little, or none, had been digitised, and realised it would remain within the realm of dream, and \*sighed\* to myself.

There was much to move me in the long Tribute section. Andrew Darlington's lovingly written piece on Steve Sneyd. Steve touched many of our lives with his constant activity and generosity, and Andrew's portrait was a vivid reminder of how truly said it was that giants do walk among us.

Kate Wilhelm: I gorge on her short works now and again. Her novellas are meditative. I keep meaning to return to *Where Late the Sweet Bird Sang*, one of my faves from the seventies, but keep putting it off. Van Gelder has nudged me closer to finally pulling it from the shelf and immersing. I've always dismissed her mysteries. I'm not sure why, except that there is within a basic ambivalence towards the genre as a whole. An article on the cadences between Kate Wilhelm and Kit Reed would be fascinating.

Milt, Randy, June  
A touch of Roscoe and Ghu  
Sparkled magic  
Nurturing glowing dew

Your reminiscence of Norstrilia Press made me faunch and salivate for two different reasons. One, of course, would be to own all those books so lovingly made; and two, I do have printer's ink in my blood, and so reading your account of the Press pushed my publish or perish button. I put out three fiction anthologies in the eighties, and since publishing *Portable Storage* the urge to publish has flourished again, with fantasies of all sorts proliferating. With the advent of Print on Demand making self-publishing relatively easy and cheap it is difficult to restrain myself. I let the fantasies fly wild.

(13 May 2019)

**CHRIS GREGORY**  
30 Stennis Street, Pascoe  
Vale, VIC 3044

[\*brg: late June 2018\* I'm listening to you on 3RRR's 'Off the Record' at the moment. Sorry I couldn't get to the launch of your LP of Gerald Murnane reading his and others' poetry, which Gerald told me about. You

could well have sent a review copy to me, but maybe you don't have my current snail mail address. My turntable is still in good working order.\*]

The Carlton Readings was being renovated. They have 200 of the LPs. Gerald and I got 50 each, but a fair few of them have had to go out in exchange for other things (we got the rights to use the lyrics of a Devo song and a song by Killdozer in return for signed copies, which was nice).

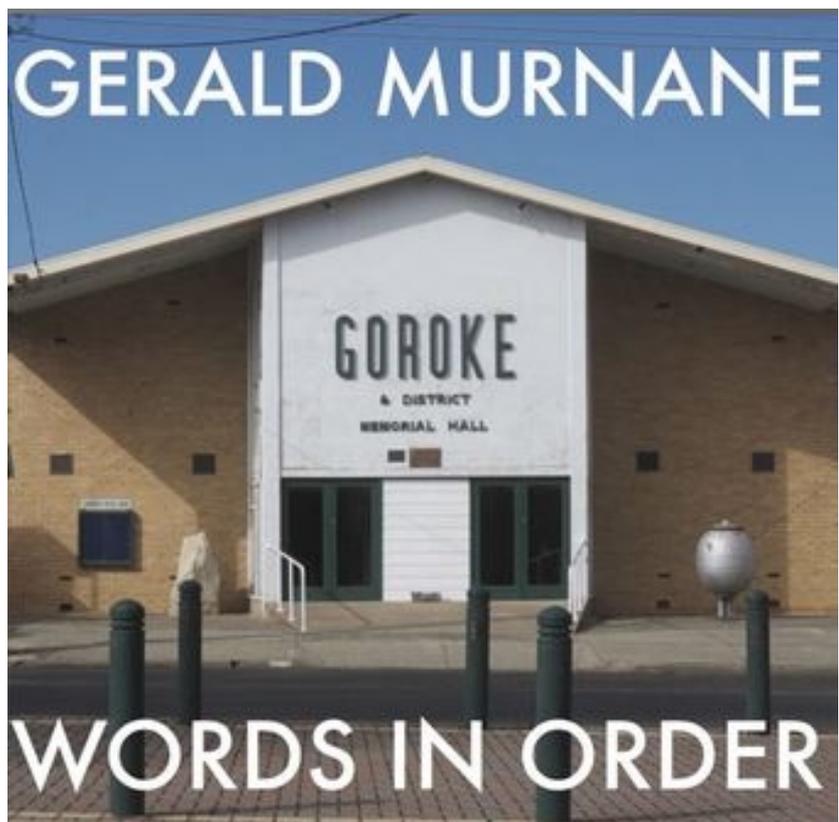
It's more musical than you imagine, I suspect. And I've actually started recording Gerald singing and playing violin for a second album ... something more in the folk vein, by which I mean Ursula Le Guin's 'Music of the Tesh' or The Residents' 'Eskimo, or Magma', a fake Hungarian/Australian folk music with invented instruments. It'll be very, very weird.

Our cat died some years ago, which was a surprise. We always thought she'd try to take us with her. She was a pretty mean cat. Our two dogs feature on the record, quite literally, but you'll discover that yourself ...

(26 June 2018)

I've been pretty quiet for the last fifteen years after I injured my back. I've had a few operations, but it wasn't until the last one about two years ago that I could manage without a lot of painkillers. So as soon as I got over the drug withdrawal (lots of fun) we hopped on a plane to Japan, my first trip overseas ever, thinking my back was likely to deteriorate again. But it's held up okay; going back to Japan next March, hopefully to do some work with some Japanese musicians.

I've been meaning to write out some production notes for the album — I guess I tried to construct in a



way that was analogous to the way Gerald writes. So the music has a lot of references and jokes and things that are probably opaque to most people, and there were specific reasons for choosing material. I don't know if you'd be interested in running something like that in *SFC*. I can also give you a pile of free download codes (I print them out on little vouchers) to include with the print issue, it being the anniversary and all. That seems a reasonable thing to do given the support you've given Gerald all these years ...

(30 June 2018)

**[\*brg\* I did offer to publish any article Chris might have written about producing the LP *Gerald Murnane Words in Order*, but I didn't hear back. The cover notes don't even list Greg as producer. I don't know if there are any copies left, and there has been no word of a sequel LP.\*]**

### CASEY WOLF

**102–2610 Grandview Highway South,  
Vancouver, British Columbia V5M 4P5, Canada**

Favourite books read during 2018:

- The Ruin by Dervla McTiernan
- Among Others by Jo Walton
- Normal People by Sally Rooney
- Brother by David Chariandy
- How to Be Famous by Caitlin Moran
- Ballet Shoes: A Story of Three Children on the Stage by Noel Streatfeild
- The Happy Prisoner by Monica Dickens
- The Golden Age by Kenneth Grahame.

(3 April 2019)

As I mentioned in your new *SF Commentary* Facebook group, it is brills, Bruce, to have the group. Whenever anyone posts there it refreshes my awareness of the magazine. An hour ago when my lap was covered by dog and I was looking for something interesting to read, I remembered to go to efanazines.com to look at the Fiftieth Anniversary issue, which I am very much enjoying (as I always do *SFC*). I have missed commenting on your zines, but I am a creature of habit, and my habit is to make light pencil notes in the zine and then write up my remarks in one fell swoop. It strikes me I can (duh!) just give you a few brief notes without having finished the whole zine. That way I get *something* to you, anyway.

I love that you chose Elaine's needlework for the cover. It is fantastic, really beautiful, and it's a tribute to her that you used it for such an auspicious issue.

I'm loving the articles and your day-to-day commentaries. I'm sure I've read most or all of the reissues before, since I have been reading the zine since 1985 (and it is a testament to your continuity of commitment that I remain a newcomer to your work). That doesn't make them any less interesting, and having Gillian Polack's interview and your reminiscences and the interplay between you and Brian Aldiss all together makes for absorbing reading. (Though I admit my butt was getting pretty sore from the weight of the dog).

Oh! I loved Alex Skovron's poem 'Carousel Days'. I

was swept up to the stars right along with him.

My two years of fear over housing, followed by too many months of medical appointments and other tiring things, are either (a) behind me or (b) pausing as I visit with my slow-moving relations, allowing me to concentrate on something else for a second or two. Again this morning I awoke from an anxiety dream about moving — I had entirely forgotten that I am safe and happily housed at last — so clearly there is a way yet to go to recover from the fear and loss of my longtime home (30 years!).

I really like my new place, and I've made great strides in getting my vegetable gardens in working order. I'm also doing what I can to plant wildlife-supportive plants, things that will feed insects and birds and give them places to rest over winter. I provide bird food and clean water for all as well, and it is a pleasure to watch the birds right outside my patio window.

Before I left for Ontario last week I managed to hang three stained glass windows that I took from the house I moved out. It was being torn down, just as this last one will soon be. I put them up in what is supposed to be the bedroom. Since I moved from a bachelor flat into a (small but not miniscule) one-bedroom flat I decided to keep that room mostly for yoga and meditation — my clothes and such are in there, too — so I hung them in the three-panelled window in there to make it more of a sanctuary. I can still see outside around the edges of the stained glass, but they bring a rich, cool feeling to the whole room, especially with the big bay laurel outside backing two of the panes. Gorgeous.

(22 April 2019)

I love the fact that people have sent you money even though you told us not to. I gather that one person made a large donation. I'm glad folk are showing their appreciation. Do you need to use airmail? Have they gotten rid of surface mail in this wild futuristic age?

**[\*brg\* Many many years ago. And on 1 October airmail rates went up again.\*]**

That's a great little article in *The Age!* I had forgotten that Gerald Murnane had been your supervisor many years ago. I have his latest book on hold at the library — I look forward to reading it when I get back to Vancouver.

Last night I downloaded *A Winkle in Time* on audiobook from the library. I've read it a couple of times over the years but I thought it would be fun to listen to as well. I listened to a Garner book as well. I love being read to, but I seldom listen to books. If the reader's style or voice is just a little irritating I can't listen at all. Mind you, if the same people were just talking to me I wouldn't even notice, or if they were a friend reading to me I would be delighted no matter what their voice was like. But apparently I have very particular tastes when it comes to audiobooks.

(23 April 2019)

I'm sorry I haven't looked the last two zines yet, Bruce. Before I went away I was madly trying to finish a project and organise my trip, in between throngs of doctor appointments, then I was away for a month, and since



### Wolf's-eye view of Venice.

returning I've been exhausted and ill and up to absolutely nothing I can avoid. For some reason my feet have been very painful lately, as well, so I've been hobbling around with canes (!) from bed to loo to kitchen to bed.

So, all blurriness aside, all I can say is that I love reading (and rereading, and in some cases — since I read the originals — re-rereading) your writing about fandom and SF, people you've known and things that have mattered to you over the years. I am so impressed that your fanzine activity has surpassed half a century, and I am grateful and happy that a fluke or two led me to meet you back in the '80s, leading to our friendship and much pleasurable reading for me. (It's also great to have the zines in my hands again. And I love Elaine's 'Purple Prose' cover.)

What I finished before going away was an eight-year poetry project, all the poems connected by subject matter (and organised, thankfully, by an editor, sparing me the chance of screwing that up). There are also short essays, an extended glossary, and so on and on. In other words a mountain of work that I thought I would never finish. Now I am supposed to be sending it out. (Groan.) It actually has a niche audience that would be interested, but I refer you back to the first paragraph, and you'll know how well that is going.

The trip was a first for me. Although I have spent a week in London and several weeks in Ireland, I'd never been to continental Europe. I realised that if I didn't go soon I never would. (I refer you to paragraph one ...) So I cast my fate to the wind and toddled off to Switzerland to meet my brother-in-law and his family for the first time, and then to Italy to visit an old friend who moved there six years ago. I was afraid of being in more pain than usual because of bad beds, but to my shock both places had reasonable mattresses for me to sleep on, and I did fairly well.

Hanspeter and I travelled around Switzerland a little, and walked a *lot*. I enjoyed myself very much and had

many impressions of the country, mainly favourable. One remarkable thing is that very seldom did I hear music in restaurants, and the people spoke quietly among themselves whether in the restaurant or on the street, so that it was much more relaxing than going out here, where the music blasts away and people yell at each other and it is impossible to hear your companions. It is also insanely clean. I am certain someone went out and scrubbed the buildings and the streets every morning before I got up. A very pretty, very expensive place. My friends there were lovely and friendly, and I came away very glad to have been. I'll add a couple of photos to give you a glimpse.

Italy was another story. I was happy to see my friend, but she had just learned that she has to have brain surgery and was quite stressed out, so it was not as happy-go-lucky a visit. It was nevertheless a good visit, and I'm glad I was there for a brief time during her illness, because we were able to talk about it at length and in ways we couldn't have through email. She lives in Trieste, so I was in the north the whole time — one short trip to Venice (oh, my lord!) and otherwise lots of getting acquainted with her new home town.

Contrary to scrubbed Switzerland, Italy's buildings are surprisingly unscrubbed. From a mixed town/rural setting with Hanspeter I moved to an urban residential neighbourhood with Erynn. Narrow sidewalks, narrow streets, few buildings less than a hundred years old, dog poo left to litter the sidewalks, and where Switzerland has thousands of bicycles, Italy is chock-a-block with Vespas and cars. In some ways Trieste reminded me of Haiti. Not smelly like Haiti, which has no infrastructure to deal with garbage, little refrigeration, etc., but old and beautiful and very alive. The food was so good. So. Good. And I drank more wine there (all delicious, all local) than I have in my life, because we had wine every day at least once. (Normally I slosh back almost a bottle a year, spread out over the months.)

So I am glad I have those weeks to digest over the rest of my years. Much to think about, remember, wonder over. And be grateful for.

(3 November 2019)

**MURRAY MOORE**  
**1065 Henley Road, Mississauga,**  
**Ontario L4Y 1C8, Canada**

Of the 2019 Hugo nominees I listed the titles of the three 2018-published SF novels that I have read.

I read *Space Opera* and *Blackfish City* and *Trail of Lightening* for two reasons: reviews and availability.

Reviews: I listen to one SF-related discussion podcast, Coode Street (Johnathan Strahan and Gary K. Wolfe). Both were enthusiastic about *Blackfish City*. Wolfe, I think, and maybe Jonathan as well, put *Space Opera* on

his list of 2018 novels. *Trail* I decided to read because its author last year won the Campbell and the Short Story Hugo Awards and, this year, her *Trail* is a Nebula nominee.

Coode Street is one of six Fancasts on the 2019 Hugo ballot (and the sole all-male-team fancast). All of these podcast talkers about SF can influence listeners to read certain authors. I am not intrigued sufficiently to listen to every 2019 fancast nominee's 2018 output to look for patterns. I encourage someone else to do so and share your findings. My point is that I assume I am not alone in being influenced in my choice of reading.

Also relevant is the number of listeners for each fancast. *Coode Street* has enough followers who like it to be a regular Hugo Fancast nominee but so far not a winner.

Availability is the other reason I read *Space Opera* and *Blackfish City* and *Trail Of Lightning*. I borrowed all of them from my public library.

(5 April 2019)

**ALEX SKOVRON**  
**172 Hawthorn Road,**  
**Caulfield North VIC 3161**

When I spoke to Elaine and you the other day, I hadn't yet noticed that the embroidery reproduced on the cover was made by her. It's a beautiful work, alive in its intricacy and colour. Please pass on my admiration to Elaine.

(14 April 2019)

Just a note to thank you for coming to my reading yesterday at the Dan O'Connell Hotel. It was good to catch up with you (a little), and I appreciated the support.

Apologies again for not having responded sooner to *SF Commentary* 99 (50th Anniversary Edition, Part 2) and a nice surprise to see my letter from a year ago published.

(25 August 2019)

**JEFF HAMILL**  
**4903 Fremont Avenue North,**  
**Seattle, WA 98103, USA**

Time for my annual letter!

Enclosed is some cash as a present. No need to send me a print copy of anything, but keep me posted when a new PDF comes out of whatever you've done.

I at long last finished *Red Star Tales: A Century of Russian and Soviet Science Fiction*, as well as the Strugatskys' *The Doomed City* and *The Snail on the Slope*, but if I wait until I can write even sketchy reviews of them it will take me months to finish this letter.

There seems to be a resurgence in interest in the Strugatskys' work, which I can only welcome. The fact that their work can now be published free from the bloody scalpel of the Stalinist censors is even more welcome. (The new translations are very good, too.) *The Doomed City* is a complex novel, and I plan to re-read it later this year.

I am also reading Robert Sheckley's *Untouched by Human Hands* — clever, but too genre for my taste —

and Samuel Delany's *Babel-17*, which is considerably more interesting, even though I find the middle section rather bogged down in technical problems. (And a spaceship built without a way of seeing what's outside? Really? No airlock? No door?)

I'm still doing volunteer graphics work for Pathfinder (the Socialist Workers Party's publishing house), listening to lots of classical music (I've been on a Schubert and Vivaldi kick for a few months now), and Agnes and I have been watching *Midsomer Murders* several times a week (we're up to Series 18 now).

I've begun another long-term project. I've been collecting one of my other favorite Soviet-era authors, Ilya Varshavsky, who had started writing SF late in life and died youngish too (1908–74), so his output — about 100 stories — is not very great. There is a website with a list of his translated stories — <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ch.cgi?13005> (part of The Internet Speculative Fiction Database) — but the list may not be complete.

(There is another website with a list — <http://translatedsf.thierstein.net/tiki-index.php?page=Ilya%2BVarshavsky> — but the two seem to list the same 21 stories.)

My project is to eventually translate all of Varshavsky's stories into English. This may take me several years at least, especially since my literary Russian is not great, but it will be fun to try.

(15 April 2019)

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

Off to Eastercon in an hour or so. Not far this year as it's just out by Heathrow Airport. Heathrow Eastercons are always odd because it's just a bus ride away, albeit a one-and-a-half-hour bus ride often along suburban back roads where buses were not designed to go. We travel everywhere by public transport, so usually Eastercons involve pre-booked train tickets, and for best value that usually commits us to travelling on a certain train without the option to take a later or earlier alternative. But today we just cross the road to the bus stop, take a 10-minute ride to the West Croydon bus terminal and get the next bus to Heathrow. Of course as Claire is involved it's all meticulously planned, but it still feels uncharacteristically ad hoc.

(18 April 2019)

**TIM TRAIN**  
**8 Ballarat Street, Lalor VIC 3075**

My poems are in very good and esteemed company, and that the question I had asked you in the car on Sunday (about correspondence from Phil K. Dick) was answered in *SFC* anyway!

I greatly enjoyed the published correspondence with Brian Aldiss, including his carefree mention of your dislike (though maybe that's too strong a word) for his Helliconia trilogy. I quite enjoy the way Aldiss could brush off criticism like that.

The choice of Elaine's tapestry for the front cover is spot on.

(18 April 2019)

**[\*brg\* Aldiss's response was all the more remarkable because he's been known to take offence at remarks much more trivial than anything I said. As you would see in his autobiography *Twinkling of an Eye*, he regarded the Helliconia trilogy as his major work, never noticing how much he had failed to include many of his best writing qualities. I've never read the third novel of the trilogy, I must admit, although I have a copy.**

**I was never snippy about Aldiss's work, or treated him as just part of woodwork, as happened so often in Britain. He's still very nearly my favourite SF writer, apart from Philip Dick and Cordwainer Smith.\*]**

I know of Aldiss's special sensitivities around the Helliconia Trilogy. He mentions it in several interviews as his neglected book, probably because he spent so bloody long on it. I've read all three. I didn't mind the trilogy, but I think you're right though: it doesn't play to his strengths.

I was watching an interview with him on YouTube where he talks about his working (briefly) with Stanley Kubrick. He says that Kubrick said to him at one point, 'You know Brian, you have two styles in which you write. One is brilliant, and the other is — not so good.' (Aldiss then laughs, seeming not at all uncomfortable or crushed by the judgment of the great director).

I had better delve through my Aldiss collection. I feel pretty sure there's somewhere in there a book I haven't read yet.

(19 April 2019)

## **IOLA MATHEWS**

**123 Alexandra Avenue, South Yarra VIC 3141**

Congratulations on the 50th anniversary of *SF Commentary*, and thanks for sending us a copy. The cover is absolutely beautiful, and how touching that Elaine did the embroidery for your birthday. It must have taken a long time to do!

Please see info below about my latest book, of which I will send you a review copy.

(21 April 2019)

Your *SF Commentary* 100 has just arrived and I've read your review of my book. Thanks so much! You are as always, extremely generous. And nice to see your review of Janeen Webb's book there too.

(19 November 2019)

## **RACE MATHEWS**

**Address as above**

**[\*brg\* Race, you have been looking for current SF books worth reading. I've attached a few files that might be able to help you with your SF quest:**

- **\*brg\* 105, which is the result of our March Nova Mob meeting about the Basic SF Library. I realise most of the books listed will be familiar to you, but you might also pick up on some interesting book titles from recent decades.**

**Add to the list Dave Hutchinson's great political SF with a twist, the 'Fractured Europe' series. Not distributed in Australia, so you would have to order the four volumes (paperbacks) from Britain.**

- **My 'Favourites 2018'.**
- **Is Alastair Reynolds counted by you as good hard SF? Merv and Helena Binns think he is a great writer. My feeling is that his books are far too long, and it's because of their length that I have not read the Neil Stephenson blockbusters that I bought. I want SF books about the length of the great SF novels — 80,000 words — but they don't seem to be published any more.**

**In talking about interesting SF, it's probably best to talk to Dick Jenson (about recent SF) or me or Rob Gerrand. Or read Colin Steele's 'The Field' column in most issues of *SF Commentary*.\*]**

Thanks for your lists and commentaries, and interesting to note how old favourites persist in the Basic SF Library lists. *Earth Abides* was among the very first novel-length pieces of science fiction I read, and my memories of it have remained golden.

(3 June 2019)

## **ROBIN MITCHELL**

**Lawnton QLD 4501**

I am Bruce Gillespie's sister. I'm not really into science fiction, although I love Clive Cussler's books, some of which are almost science fiction. I received *SF Commentary* 98 yesterday. Thanks, Bruce. I have started reading it and am really impressed, as always, with your style of writing, knowledge and memory. I just want to say publicly that I am really proud of you.

(24 April 2019)

**[\*brg\* Thanks, Robin. Most correspondents enjoy Elaine's cover embroidery. It looks just as amazing on the wall here at home.\*]**

## **RON SHELDON**

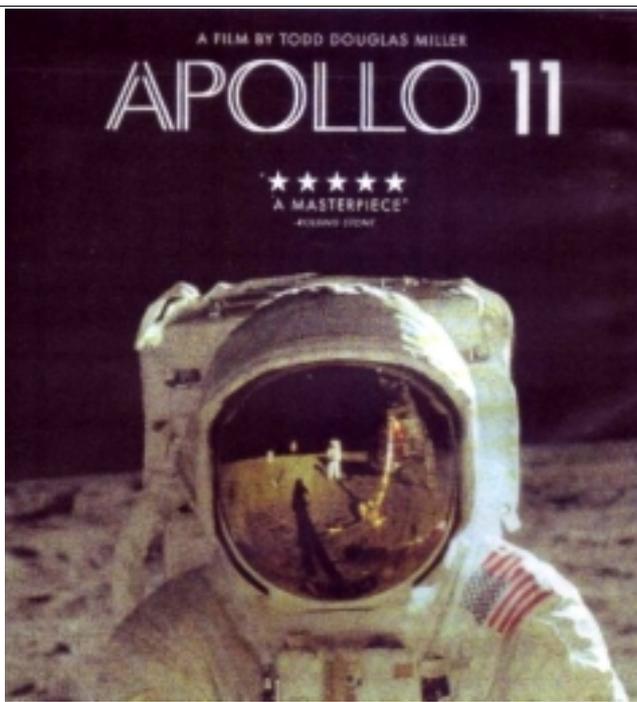
**4 Rossiter Place, Aroona QLD 4551**

My copy of the 50th Anniversary edition of *SF Commentary* has made its way safely to Queensland. Thank you. I have enjoyed reading about the history of the publication. Especially enjoyed the Aussie poetry of Tim Train.

(24 April 2019)

**[\*brg\* I hope Tim sees your message, Ron. Tim writes most of his poetry for performance (at the Dan O'Connell Hotel, Carlton, every Saturday afternoon, and lots of other places), which means most of his poems are very funny. His new book of poems is worth googling.\*]**

Here are my recollections of the *Apollo 11* Moon landing and moon walk.



One of the most watched television events of the twentieth century happened on Monday 21 July 1969 at 12:56 pm (Australian Eastern Time). It was one of the few times in life when I clearly remember where I was at the time. I was in our lounge room with Chris, who was my girlfriend, along with other family members.

We, along with another 600 million people on earth, were holding our collective breath as Astronaut Neil Armstrong uttered those memorable words 'The Eagle has landed!' I clearly recall the excitement and tension in our lounge room as we watched, our eyes glued to the small black-and-white television screen.

But the excitement and relief were echoed around the world as well. The Mission Controller in Houston radioed back to Armstrong that there were 'a bunch of guys there, about to turn blue'. (Ten years later, on a guided tour of Houston in 1979, I had the pleasure of seeing that same control room).

Then just a few minutes later, we heard the words, transmitted from 384,000 kilometres away; 'That's one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind'.

During those few minutes, the men in the control centre in Houston Texas were attempting to capture and send out to the world the clearest possible picture of Neil Armstrong's descent down the ladder of the lunar module. Neil Armstrong was waiting on the ladder for the go-ahead to step down into the fine dust on the lunar surface. Astronaut Buzz Aldrin was waiting inside the lunar lander while Mike Collins was nervously listening and watching in the orbiting Command Module.

At the time, I was studying Communication Engineering at Melbourne's RMIT and was particularly interested in the role Australia was playing in the relaying of the telemetry and television signals to Houston control.

Houston was having trouble capturing clear video of the event until eventually we heard the words 'Switching video to Honeysuckle'. The space monitoring station at

Honeysuckle Creek in Australia had managed to receive a much better picture; this was then relayed to the watching world for the remainder of the broadcast.

If you have watched the movie *The Dish* you will know of the role played in the *Apollo 11* mission by the Australian tracking station at Parkes in New South Wales. Not many people however are aware of the vital role played by the other Australian tracking station at Honeysuckle Creek.

The Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station also kept recordings of the event. The eight-minute video from Honeysuckle Creek tracking station records the event from the perspective of the Australians involved in the Space Program at the time. Forty years after the event, a television documentary was produced, called *One Small Step* (2009). You can watch this movie for a distinctly Australian perspective of this momentous event. See how the communication link almost didn't happen. See the reactions of those involved when Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon and of ordinary Australians actually watching, in real time 'one of mankind's biggest achievements'.

(9 July 2019)

**[\*brg\* Thanks, Ron, for your recollections of the first Moon landing. Although I've written little about the anniversary here in SFC, Melbourne fans celebrated in several ways. Geoff Allshorn conducted a panel at Continuum 15 in June, before the Anniversary, then delivered his own talk to the Nova Mob a month later. (One of the best talks we've ever heard at the Nova Mob.) Elaine and I went to watch the film *Apollo 11* at the Melbourne iMax theatre, then watched it later on Blu-ray.\*]**

**RAY WOOD  
PO Box 188, Quorn SA 5433**

I was surprised and delighted when I received *SF Commentaries* 97 and 98, because I hadn't sent anything to you recently. I haven't been all that well for a while — perhaps just getting old. I am 83 now, though I can still walk, and I still go hiking two to three days a week. But though my legs still work, the rest of me hurts more than it used to. Arthritis is a problem (combined with the late effects of polio).

I also hadn't done anything more about the Poetrytalk group for the same reason. It was great to see Alex Skovron's beautiful poem 'Carousel Days', and then a Poetry Corner as well, including one of Daniel King's poems.

I have an article in mind for you: 'SF as a Sub-genre of the Fairy Tale', something I've been thinking about for a while now.

(26 April 2019)

**[\*brg\* Any time you have time to write it! Sorry that poor health has stopped you sending your usual wonderful flood of letters and articles.\*]**

**RON DRUMMOND**  
**somewhere on the West Coast of USA**

The lovely 50th anniversary episode of *SF Commentary* arrived today. It's a beauty! An honor for me to be included in it, and in the list of names at the end. Thanks so much for sending it. Congratulations, Bruce.

(27 April 2019)

**(27 April 2019) Dream narrative by Ron Drummond:**

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

In the living room, Randy and I knew these were our last moments together. I dearly wish I could remember what he said to me. Our eyes were wells. At the last, he said he wanted to show me something, and led me up the broad stairs to the book-filled alcove. From the left-hand wall of books, near the back, from a middle shelf he took a tall, slender trade paperback, opened it to a particular page-spread in the middle, and handed the open book to me. I remember the feel and weight of the paper, its heft and comfortingly rough texture. Though I didn't recognise the volume it was in (a mixed-author anthology), the text that Randy had turned to was my own, a short essay or story or myth-telling. In the dream I instantly recognised precisely which piece of my writing it was; that it was that piece and not another was significant. [I can't help but wonder now if it was 'an open doorway on the sand.'] One passage, or perhaps the entire piece, had been translated into Spanish

.(27 April 2019)

a gentle cognate of affection, gratitude, and generosity. A giving-forth, an opening wide for a close embrace.

(19 June 2019)

**MATTHEW DAVIS**  
**15 Impney Close, Church Hill North,**  
**Redditch B98 9LZ, England**

Just received the latest *SF Commentary* in the post today. Particularly appropriate that it's an anniversary retrospective, as the Fanac.org website has recently been posting a lot of your *SF Commentaries* from the 1970s. So I look forward to reading them in conjunction a little later in the year. Fanac has also just started posting a lot of issues of Richard E. Geis's *SF Review*. It's another critical fanzine with some reputation, so I look forward to seeing how *Commentary* compares to *Review*. Unless of course you and he were bitterest rivals. In which case: *fight!*

**[\*brg\* Hardly. Dick Geis was a great help when I started publishing fanzines. He also sent me books to review for SFR. However, he had a quite different view of the publishing industry from mine. I wanted only The Best SF Books to be published. Dick judged**

**books by their commercial viability, their ability to please the central SF audience. So to me he represented Old Wave SF versus New Wave — but, like me, loved a controversy more than supporting one side or the other. He published many of the major articles of the American New Wavers, such as Harlan Ellison, as well as many articles by the Old Wavers. Geis's letter columns were splendid.\*]**

Fanac has really made a lot of effort over the last year or so. There are articles by Fritz Leiber in various California zines I thought I'd never read, but now there they are. Similarly, Avram Davidson's letters seem to have been an adornment in many a fanzine in the very early 60s. Worth reading in their own right just for style and amusement, but every so often there's a throwaway factette such as that he, Philip K. Dick, and Ray Nelson once plotted a novel together: *The Great Year*, and also unwittingly possibly the saddest letter ever.

My good deed for the decade is that after finding some hitherto unknown John Sladek pieces in a digital archive of countercultural magazines and sending them on to David Langford; it apparently tipped Mr Langford over the edge, and in barely three months he compiled and published a new book of John Sladek stories, essays, reviews, and ephemera, *New Maps*. It may not quite rank me among the Secret Masters of the Universe but *ca suffit*.

(30 April 2019)

**ANDREW DARLINGTON**  
**Spa Croft Road, off Manor Road,**  
**Ossett, West Yorkshire WF5 OHE, England**

A nice lady just delivered *SF Commentary 99: 50th Anniversary Edition Part 2*. I'm immediately attracted by the Nova Mob documents; there's something beautifully nostalgic about the typeface and cheap duplication; even though I wasn't there, I can sense it, tactile on my fingers. It's so good to get a proper printed SF read after all the online projects that exist only in cyberspace. Thanks for making me a part of the project, and building that skybridge across hemispheres from you to me. It's great to shrink the planet.

(10 August 2019)

For no particular reason, I thought I'd give you the full tedious story of today's meandering stroll. I've been getting itchy to get out walking. I've had a few ideas I was eager to explore. But things seem to have conspired against me, and got in the way. This morning was drizzling, but the forecast was good, so I caught the bus into Wakefield, then another out to the Calder and Hebble canal. I was the only passenger on the bus. Not a lot of people go to this stretch of the canal. The bus driver didn't even know it was there. He makes a point of dropping me off beside the old church, on the most direct path, which slopes downwards through open cow-grazed fields. I've walked in one direction along this towpath; today I set out in the other direction, unexplored territory, vaguely north ... towards Castleford. There are big blue dragonflies. There is wild rhubarb growing along the verge. Walking with one wary eye on

gatherings of dark clouds, which breeze past, and the sun shines.

Eventually I arrive at lock-gates where a woman is having problems. She has a houseboat, and it's difficult to carry out the full lock-gates process unaided. She enquires if I'm interested in becoming a temporary lock-keeper? Naturally, I gallantly step in. I'm expecting those old capstan-wheels to manually heave and turn, but no, this has an electronic set-up. She briefs me on the procedure, and returns to her houseboat in readiness. As I get ready, another woman arrives. She's walking a big white dog. She stops to watch me. I ask if she wants to cross before I open the gates. She says no. She's never seen the lock-gates open, and she wants to see it happen. I explain that I'm simply a random passing member-of-the-public who has been mugged into the task. It might not go as intended. She, and her dog, watch me anyway with an unnerving close scrutiny. I turn the key. Press the button. The gates slowly yawn open. The houseboat woman navigates her boat into the lock. I manage to press the correct button, and the gates close behind her. Then I must transfer my attention to the other gates. I open the sluices, and the water floods in, raising the houseboat by slow degrees. When both water-levels are equal I hit the right key and the second set of gates open. She steers the houseboat through, and I manage to close the lock-gates behind her, feeling both relieved and pleased with myself. The whole thing must have taken around ten minutes.

Suitably impressed, the woman and white dog cross the gates and continue their interrupted walk. The houseboat woman reaches out and gives me a KitKat chocolate biscuit as a reward. I ask her which is the best way to proceed towards Castleford ... as she has come from that direction. She directs me away from the main towpath, which ceases a little way further on, and along a spur waterway that is beautifully neglected and overgrown, with huge lily-pads, cruising swans, and what looks like some permanently moored houseboats where water-gypsies live. I pass beneath Fairies Hill Viaduct. The houseboat woman had promised me that along this path there's The Wheatsheaf Pub, which sounds like a promising hostelry to pause for refreshment! When I get there I find it derelict. It might have been a good venue six months ago, or maybe even three months ago. But no longer. Not now. So I sit in the empty pub garden beneath the sun, in the shade of overhanging trees, drink water from my bottle ... and eat my well-earned KitKat. No doubt there will be other adventures to come. Enough for today.

(17 August 2019)

## ROBERT DAY

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

Many thanks indeed for the delightful surprise of the hard copy *SFC 98* (and thanks to 'Joe Phan' for helping make it happen). Whenever I get cynical about the book trade, publishing, the state of fandom, and the price of beer, some fannish Good Deed comes along to prove me wrong; long may it continue! If only similar good deeds

came along in the Rest of the World ...

I found the story of Norstrilia Press interesting. I have a couple of NP titles in my collection: George Turner's *The View from the Edge* and Keith Antill's *Moon in the Ground*. Seeing Gerald Murnane's name reminds me that he was mentioned in BBC Radio 4's *Saturday Review*, by somebody who reviewed *A Season on Earth*. Though not having come across him before, the panel of critics spent part of the segment talking about who he was, and the rest of it looking at the book, which they assumed was just another thinly disguised misery memoir of abuse in a Catholic boys' school. Partly that was metropolitan snobbery over any literature that doesn't easily fit into their own self-defined shoeboxes; but partly that was also ignorance of the canon of Murnane's work, which would have enabled them to set this book in context. Anyway, the show may well be available on the BBC iPlayer (Radio 4, Saturday 25th May at 19:15 hours).

Seeing Colin Steele reviewing Tolkien's *The Fall of Gondolin* and some other titles on Tolkien, I need to comment that I have just re-read *The Hobbit* after something like 50 years. I was not impressed; it was all right, but I rather had the feeling I was listening to J. R. R. telling Christopher his bedtime story, especially when we got paternal asides along the lines of 'And what do you think the funny little dwarves did next?' (I've compared this to the BBC's *Listen with Mother* that I remember from the early 1960s.) Overall, I felt it was a sketch for the detailed work that became *Lord of the Rings*. One thing the novel does is actually depict Gandalf as a magic user; the films back-pedal on this quite a lot, mainly because of the amount of fx work that would demand; not even Peter Jackson could probably countenance the number of fx shots that would be required to depict Gandalf accurately in this respect (especially the multi-coloured aerobicic stunt smoke rings). Fortunately, Tolkien didn't go to the other extreme and use Gandalf's powers as a 'get out of jail free' card.

One other thing that I noticed in the films and this novel confirms is my impression that somewhere behind Middle Earth is a reasonably advanced technological society, because Bilbo Baggins' hobbit-hole is too well made and too well stocked with manufactured artefacts — crockery, kitchen utensils, furniture, and so on — for these things to have been made individually by artisans. The wood panelling in his rooms is too well finished to have been produced by simple hand tools. And the novel goes further, confirming the existence of butchers' shops (rather than just vendors of meat), lawyers, and auctioneers, not to mention bacon and coffee. Perhaps this is my sf reader's eye looking too closely at the world-building; but like Poul Anderson's *A Midsummer's Tempest*, wherein every word Shakespeare ever wrote was true, resulting in a seventeenth century with a full-blown industrial revolution because Shakespeare included things only known to Elizabethan gentlemen in the mouths and minds of the Romans, the everyday assumptions about life that Tolkien put into his bedtime stories result in Middle Earth having anomalous technology. We won't even ask where Bilbo Baggins got the money for his comfortable bourgeois lifestyle before he went off treasure-hunting ...

I have been catching up on my reading quite a lot of

late, organising myself to try to get through some more of my TBR pile now that the years are creeping up on me. Lately I've read Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon*, Simmons' *Endymion*, Wilson Tucker's *The Lincoln Hunters* (where the plot was fine but the main character irritated me), Ken Macleod's *Cosmonaut Keep*, and Scalzi's *Red-shirts* (which didn't impress me) and *Lock In* (which did). You'll see from this that my reading had been a bit too strictly over-regulated in the past, and I've suddenly felt that I needed to adopt different measures to organise my reading. You heard about that Japanese lifestyle guru who said you should only have 30 books in your house? That's how many I have on my bedside table.

Meanwhile, back in Real Life, I have been asked to take on temporarily the role of our company's Technical Author. The current incumbent announced his intention to leave the company a few weeks back on one of my 'working from home' days. The first conversation between senior managers where my name cropped up as a possible replacement took place the same day. By the time I was back in the office the next day, three people (including the current incumbent) were mentally thinking that I was the ideal person for the job, though my Project Manager was not 100 per cent certain, as he'd had perfectly good reasons for appointing me to the testing job they advertised in the first place. My view was that the company had to decide where I could best add value and I said so to the Project Manager; he slept on that over the weekend and decided come the Monday that perhaps I could add value as a Technical Author after all. Anyway, we're treating it as an interim appointment whilst we see what sort of fist I make out of it. Even if I only do the job temporarily, the current guy leaves at the end of this week, and if they do go out to recruit a replacement, the amount of work that'll build up in the interregnum can't be left undone; and having someone who can do handover will be useful.

My main concern is getting to grips with having a formal workflow again; the sort of testing we do is rather free-form and intuitive, based on risk analysis and serious thinking about users and the ways they use (or mis-use) our product, and I've found that approach very conducive in the two and a half years I've been in this job. Of course, there's no extra money on offer, but I'd like to think that note will be taken when it comes to bonus time next year.

(11 June 2019)

**ROBERT LICHTMAN**  
**11037 Broadway Terrace,**  
**Oakland CA 94611-1948, USA**

Apologies for being slow to reply! Since I received your letter, you've lost your cat of many years (so sorry!) — a sad occasion, and you and Elaine have my complete sympathy. It's never really happened to me, having only had two cats long long ago. The first, being an outdoor cat, just wandered off never to be seen again except maybe once — from a distance near the trash bins of a supermarket, perhaps about to leap in and forage for meaty leavings. And I gave the second cat away when about to take off from San Francisco for Tennessee — to

fan artists and cartoonist (and cover girl on *Fanac* #53) Trina Robbins (who was Trina Castillo back then). The latter cat was a beautiful mostly white Persian, and she had her for around 20 more years.

As for our health, it's holding. My myeloma treatment is keeping me on an even keel, and just last week my oncologist said I'm likely to go on for years — while pointing out that there is so far no cure. I can live (ahahahaha) with that! We are both just old — 76 and 80 — and slowed down by age and milder infirmities. One of my problems is getting enough sleep.

As for other things, I point you to the penultimate page of *Door Knob* 142, where I write about our auto accident of mid-December. To that I'd add that I'm well used to my new car now, and that we're still hassling with insurance companies over getting money to reimburse our paying for it.

(7 May 2019)

Friday before last, I finished up my August FAPAzine and sent it off to the OE, who is Ken Forman these days. I packed up that issue and my two most recent SAPSazines and sent them off to you and to Claire and Mark. You lot are the only regular outside distribution for them. Last Monday the mail brought *SFC* 99 and *Banana Wings* 74, and I was struck by the synchronicity of it all.

Thanks so much for the *SFC*, which so far I have only looked through, since another apa deadline and some overdue correspondence needed to be taken care of. I'm particularly looking forward to the tribute section and to Yvonne's piece — which I surely must have read in its original appearance back in 2001, but that's long enough ago that it will be like reading it anew. Randy's cover photograph is deliciously moody!

**[\*brg\* Thanks, Robert, for the news catch-up and the copy of Carl Brandon (see my discussion of it on page 17.)**

**Carl Brandon was often referred to in fanzines after I started trading SFC for overseas fanzines in 1969, but I can't remember anybody writing (post 1968) a full coverage of Brandon's role in fandom. Very few people in Australia received 1950s and early 1960s fanzines. Foyster's early files were destroyed in a house fire in 1966, and I'm not sure which fanzines he received or kept during and after the ASFR days. Leigh Edmonds donated his fanzine collection to the Murdoch Library in Western Australia when he was living there, and there it sits, nicely archived by Grant Stone.\*]**

I wonder if some of the references to Carl Brandon would have been to the Swedish version, aka John-Henri Holmberg, who published a Swedish-language *Fanac* from 1963 to at least 1967. He went by 'Carl Brandon Jr.,' though, so I may be wrong. I'm glad you have the Brandon book, and hope you'll find time to read it carefully. I also strongly suggest you download the *Fandom Harvest II* e-book from Dave Langford's TAFF site and catch up on Brandon's writing there.

Given the long time frame on which *SFC*'s publishing schedule operates, you may be the only one who really notices the delay. My situation with *Trap Door* is the exact

opposite: I don't lack money for printing and postage, but I lack material with which to fill the pages. Right now I have a bunch of LoCs, and that's it. But I should have material from Greg Benford and Andy Hooper by and by, and I'm after various others to write for me.

As far as our health goes, we're doing okay. My treatment for the multiple myeloma is keeping me reasonably alive, and other than that I'm in pretty good health. I saw my regular eye doctor a couple days ago, and soon will have two pairs apiece of reading and computer glasses, plus some prescription sun glasses. On the latter, I could get away with regular off-the-shelf sun glasses, but he says he can tweak the prescriptions to get the 20/30 right eye to work perfectly with the 20/20 left eye. Since our vision insurance covers that (but not the reading and computer ones) I'm happy to go for it.

(12 August 2019)

**DOUG BARBOUR**  
**11655-72nd Avenue, Edmonton,**  
**Alberta T6G 0B9, Canada**

Along with my fantasy novels (I've been reading the new just-about-to-be-published Guy Gabriel Kay novel in preparation for interviewing him at his reading here on 21 May), I have read some very good science fiction as well as some literary fiction.

Recent classical CD listening includes the two Maria Jaoa Pires box sets, which are wonderful. The five-CD set of concertos features mostly Mozart, whose work she plays with a wonderful delicacy, as she does the two Chopin concertos and the Schumann. Then there's the 12-CD set of her *Complete Chamber Music Recordings*, a must-have. It's really interesting to have her (and Augustan Dumay's) set of all ten Beethoven Violin Sonatas, especially alongside the Argerich/Kremer set. Both are superb. I'd say the Pires/Dumay duo take a slightly more gentle approach to their interpretation of the sonatas, while both are wondrously subtle and profound. They take on the Brahms sonata and trios (the latter with a young cellist Jian Wang), as well as the Grieg sonatas (which I didn't have) and Schumann, Chopin, Frank, Debussy, and Ravel. That's giving me pleasure almost every day.

But I also wanted to tell you about a late discovery, but a fine one: the music of the twentieth-century Danish composer Vag Holmboe. Do you know him? He wrote a lot. A few years ago at some online sale I chose three of his 20-plus string quartets, and came to love them. So this past Christmas I received the seven-CD set of his *Complete String Quartets* played by the Kontra Quartet (on Da Capo). As well as his *Works for Violin and Piano* by two Danish musicians, and his (you could say petite) Sinfonias I-IV. I now want to get all his concertos. He's a bit Bartokian, with hints of the Viennese School, but his own composer, utilising Danish folk motifs, etc, but also all he learned from the grant tradition. What I like is the skittery yet highly melodic feel of his work. Very modernist, yes, but with lots of hummable bits. His work doesn't seem to be performed much by symphony orchestras here (but perhaps more so in Denmark). His music wouldn't be hard to sell to symphony audiences:

a new sonic addiction.

I've also been listening to some newer ECM (I'm happy to call it) chamber jazz, and a couple of fine Scott Hamilton CDs.

When it comes to roots music, I tend these days to stick to the great stuff I have, such as Frasey Forde, Natalie Merchant, Alison Krauss, and occasionally Janis Joplin. Nothing new there this year, except the latest Cowboy Junkies CD (and there's another female voice I love).

I'll be interested to see your latest lists. Keep the fannish aspidistras flying.

(13 May 2019)

I now have a set of Holmboe's concertos in the post to me, but have been basking my way through the string quartets, and continuing to find them lovely, fascinating, and often challenging. A friend who is deeply into classical music likes Holmboe a lot, but says he is a 'minor' composer, in the sense that he did nothing really new or innovative. Probably correct, but to write in a post-Bartok era manner and remain original, playing the game of mixing melody with assonance in a way that charms, seems good to me.

I can only lament that I didn't discover Pires sooner (as with Argerich), but at the moment those two are pretty well my favourite pianists. They make for an interestingly contrasted pair, both magnificent in their interpretations and their work with others in chamber settings (though Pires has made more solo albums with specific composers over a series of CDs).

As for roots music: I've heard Colin James's CD *Hearts on Fire*: great: bluesy ballads, some rocking out, good lyrics, and a very hot and tight band behind him. A Canadian singer/songwriter.

'A Whiter Shade of Pale' has been an earworm for awhile for some reason, so I borrowed a big double CD of Procul Harum. I am surprised by their range beyond that song, and the bluesy tone they could achieve sometimes. Also, I heard an intriguing song by the Jayhawks on the radio the other day, so took out their latest.

I'm deeply into Ada Palmer's amazingly complex and philosophically challenging future, having read *Too Like the Lightning*, which is every bit as strange as people say. I am now beginning *Seven Surrenders*.

I'm carrying on, with various bothers, because of ageing. I'm at the moment free of the catheter, so a diaper is fine with me.

(7 July 2019)

I didn't buy many roots etc albums this year; it's been classical and jazz when I've bought anything (and I've borrowed a lot from the library).

I do have the new Leonard Cohen CD, which you have to listen to carefully. And the new Cowboy Junkies CD. I can't remember all the ones I've borrowed from the library, which means some weren't as interesting as I'd hoped. Jason Isbell's *Nashville* certainly was good. I've borrowed a live Traffic *On the Road* CD, from a period they were really into jazzed-up jams, having added the Muscle Shoals rhythm section of Roger Hawkins (bass), David Hood (drums), and Barry Beckett (keyboards). Great long versions of some of Traffic's best songs.

We watched the CNN documentary on Linda Ronstadt, just released. It reminded us of how good she has been, and how savvy, and of how hard losing her voice has been for her. YouTube has an excerpt from a 1977 Atlanta concert that is great. The whole concert does exist on DVD I think.

**[\*brg\* And on CD. I have copies of both.\*]**

I received a bunch of ECM CDs for Christmas, so will begin listening to them soon; I have already played the first three of the Argerich CDs.

Meanwhile, I hope Melbourne remains relatively safe, and you two. We now have our own tragedy to deal with: 63 Canadians or people bound to Canada aboard that airliner shot down near Tehran, and we not able to do much in response, while the crazy baby in the White House shouts his self-praise and demands assassinations without any thought for all the consequences.

We have to hope that the rest of 2020 won't be quite so apocalyptic.

(19 January 2020)

## STEVE JEFFERY

**44 White Way, Kidlington,  
Oxonford OX5 2XA, England**

A familiar name just cropped up a few moments ago at the close of tonight's Front Row arts program on BBC Radio 4: it was announced that next week's program would be reviewing Gerald Murnane's novel *A Season on Earth*.

I just checked back in the history of Norstrilia Press in *SFC98*, the 50th Anniversary issue, which I was reading behind the church hall book table while things slack, to see if it was related one of the titles that NP published, but the *Guardian* describes it as a 'lost novel' from 1976.

I wonder if this is the 'large book that he could not sell' that you write about typing up in manuscript and from which you detached and published a 20,000 word section as *The Plains*?

**[\*brg\* No, that was a book called at the time *The Only Adam*. The only section of it that has been published in full is *The Plains*. At least one other section, 'The Howling', has been published as a much shorter story. So the book still might appear in its intended form sometime in the future. :: *A Season on Earth* is the complete version of the novel half of which was published in 1976 as *A Lifetime on Clouds*.\*]**

The *Guardian* article mentions *The Plains*, but without mentioning the publisher: 'In Murnane's third novel, *The Plains*, a documentary film-maker goes to the inner reaches of Australia to capture the aesthetic truths contained therein, and particularly to get a woman's perspective from the wife and daughter of a plainsman who takes him in. You can feel the erotic longing and unnatural detachment as the wife is posed endlessly against the blank expanses of the plains, communicating with the protagonist only through her daily movements of the

curtains to vary the light that filters into the library.' <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/mar/07/a-season-on-earth-by-gerald-murnane-review-lost-novel-holds-the-key-to-authors-success>

(19 May 2015)

I do enjoy a good spat — at least when it keeps the on right side of being personal — and the one between Patrick McGuire and John Litchen (with Greg Benford weighing in from the ringside) that runs over several pages of *SF Commentary* 99 is a good one. Even better for not having much idea (until I find and re-read the last issue) just what this is all about.

I am surprised though, at John's admission that he was unaware of the similarity of a plot element in *Mars Underground* to the opening of Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (film and book) and with Clarke's earlier classic story 'The Sentinel', on which it was based. That's rather like a music critic admitting being unaware of, say, *The Magic Flute* or *The Rite of Spring*. I probably haven't seen *2001* in 30 years, but I certainly remember it. (Kubrick's inspired choice of Ligeti as background music, after throwing away the original commissioned score, has a lot to do with that. At the age 14 or so, *2001* was as startling to the ears as it was the eyes.)

Thanks for Gillian Polack's nice tribute to Vonda McIntyre and (as you point out) Yvonne Rousseau's review of Gene Wolfe's *Peace*. It certainly tempts me to pull *Peace* down from the shelf and re-read it sometime, but I realise I'm starting to say that more and more recently.

Ron Drummond dreams about Randy Byers (a strange, sad dream that has a feel of saying goodbye and letting go about it). Meanwhile I had a strange dream a few nights ago about Claire Brialey and a baby ostrich. I have no idea what that was about.

Vikki says (and I agree) that that photograph by Laurraine is one of the nicest photos of me I've seen in ages. I am notoriously unphotogenic, at least since I started losing both my hair and teeth at a distressing rate. My passport photo makes me look like someone who drowns kittens for a living.

Since it will be likely be some time before the con report that Nic Farey persuaded/conned me into appearing in the next issue of *Beam*, I just want to thank everyone involved in or at Corflu 36 and the Corflu 50 fund for giving me such a memorable, enjoyable, and indeed rejuvenating trip. (I am told that one of our friends remarked that when I attended our monthly pubmeet a few days after getting back that it looked like years had been scrubbed off me. So don't waste your money on anti-ageing creams and treatments; go to a Corflu and have five days of fun with a bunch of friendly and welcoming people instead.)

**[\*brg\* That's what I did in 2005, thanks to the Bring Bruce Bayside trip, and I've never been healthier than during and after that trip. These days I don't even feel like leaving Greater Melbourne, let alone the state of Victoria or the country of Australia.\*]**

I know there has been some disagreement over the

structure of this year's FAAN Awards (although I don't think anyone seriously objects that the people who got an award shouldn't have got one or didn't deserve one), but from all accounts Corflu 36 was a brilliantly run and organised convention, and something of a model for organising future ones. (I've just read the InTheBar transcripts about this in Rob Jackson's *Inca*.) Huge thanks must go to Mike Dobson, Curt Phillips, Rob Jackson, Andy Hooper, Bill Burns, and a host of other committee members and volunteers — probably amounting to more than half the convention — for this. All I basically had to do was turn up and have fun, which I did in spades.

I have a pencil mark against Dales Speirs' comment that 'it is said that all knowledge is contained in fanzines, to which I [Dale] reply "Just try to find it."' Well said. Pete Young's work on the fanzine index of the ISFDB is a starting point, but of course is only a content index. It would be good to link them to the actual fanzine items themselves in eFanzines or fanac.org, but I have no idea how difficult this would be. (Quite or very, I suspect). And it would be good for eFanzines to have a similar searchable contents and names index.

(As an aside to Damien Broderick, if you email those corrections to Peter Young I'm sure he'd update them or pass them on for correction in the ISFDB.)

Stephen Campbell, responding to Ray Sinclair-Wood's article on SF poetry, writes about a similar exultation effect on the brain from listening to music and poetry. Reading this I wondered that if you took away the grunge/grime/industrial backing (I'm guessing here; I have no idea which is which) from rap, would ancient Anglo Saxons or Icelandic bards recognise the rhythms, patterns, and cadences of rap as a bardic form they were familiar with?

There has been a completely unexpected and surprising flood of fanzines by post and email all in the same week, heralded by the latest issue of *Banana Wings*, with Rob Jackson's *Inca* awaiting me on my return from work yesterday evening. I've not yet looked at your history of the Nova Mob, or Yvonne's discussion of Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*.

(10 August 2019)

John Purcell's *Askance* has just added itself to the back of the fanzine queue, but I really ought to crack on with some of the ones in front.

Indexing is, like, work. And, our friend Glenda keeps telling us, like sword swallowing and high wire chainsaw juggling, best left to professionals. But working part time for Elsevier, she has a vested interest.

I really ought to index my Prophecy contributions. I did one a few years ago, and then extended it to the books people had reviewed or mentioned over the previous year. Then I could stun people with my eidetic memory when I wrote 'as X mentioned in issue 102 ...' whereas I would be just looking the title up in Excel.

(11 August 2019)

Joe Siclari and friends from fanac.org set up a scanning station outside the con suite at Corflu (in easy reach of beer and nibbles) and worked through a pile of fanzines and ephemera people had bought to add to their

website, and were still working through the backlog in the weeks after the con. Sterling work. Between that and eFanzines (for those fanzines available or produced as PDFs) and also material uploaded as free ebooks to taff.org.uk, there is now a considerable (if scattered) archive of material available to fans and researchers. But there doesn't seem to anything that ties all these together.

I have a similar problem at work, with project documentation (code, validation, maintenance) scattered across multiple network folders to the point I've had to set up an organising folder (or sometimes a web page) that contains shortcuts and notes to where the actual content can be found. Tedious at the time, but you bless yourself for doing it years later.

Outside of *SF Commentary*, *Treasure*, and *\*brg\**, the only other Australian fanzine I remember seeing and responding to was Ron Clarke's *The Mentor*. The last issue of that on eFanzines.com appears to be No. 96. dated 2001. eFanzines also has a page for Bill Wright's *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*, for which you wrote an introduction.

(11 August 2019)

That's an impressive amount of work you and your research elves have put into compiling a near complete history of The Nova Mob to date. I'm impressed you could list talk topics, venues, and people attending for so many meetings over a period of more than forty years.

It's a tremendous bit of research. I'm rather boggled by your mention of going through 40 thick manila folders of memorabilia in search of material. I don't think I've got more than a half dozen, and two seem to be filled with scraps of artwork (one for John Berry's spoof 'Hemlock Soames' stories).

The piece that arrested me was Yvonne Rousseau's account of her first meeting, which absolutely captures that feeling of feeling conspicuous, vulnerable, embarrassed, and like an imposter in a strange place. I'm sure many of us have been there. I know exactly how it feels, and not even that long ago. (But absolutely not at Corflu 36. Despite not having been to a convention for almost 10 years, I had a feeling of coming home to somewhere I hadn't realised I had missed.)

The paragraph that stands out for me is Yvonne's description of the series of choices and steps presented and not taken in between leaving the room and finding herself on the tram home. It's a masterfully done sequence of choices presented and refused, in each of which things might have turned out differently.

As I say, I've done that, although in my case, I didn't even get to the stage of making it into the room in first place. I arrived too early to find the address I'd been given, tucked into a little side street, still closed. I stood around for a while until I started to feel uncomfortable and a bit conspicuous before I wandered around a few more streets and had a coffee in a nearby café. When I got back, the place was teeming with people I didn't know with someone taking names and money at a table by the door. Since that wasn't at all what I was expecting, I assumed I had the wrong place or the meeting had been cancelled. After standing around for bit hoping to see someone I recognised, I gave up and caught the bus home. It turned out the meeting was in a little side room

**MURRAY MacLACHLAN**  
**35 Laird Drive, Altona Meadows VIC 3028**

Further details for the 'Nova Mob Diary' (*SF Commentary* 99):

Scheduled meetings for 2013: first Wednesday in the month:

- 6 March: **Terry Frost** on **genre film**, its current state and where it's going
- 3 April: **Caitlin Herington** on **Lois McMaster Bujold**.
- 1 May: **Chris Johnstone** interviews **Tim Hehir**: Tim's Victorian time-travel adventure novel *Julius and the Watchmaker*. <http://textpublishing.com.au/books-and-authors/book/julius-and-the-watchmaker/>
- 5 June: **Bruce Gillespie** and **Tony Thomas** on **Graham Joyce**: 'Simple Writing Made Spectacular'.
- 3 July: **Justin Ackroyd** leads the round-table discussion on the **Clarke Awards**: nominees vs winners. Enthusiastic readers will be called for beforehand.
- 7 August: **Lucy Sussex** on **Rosa Montero**: *Tears in Rain* <http://www.amazon.com/Tears-Rain-Rosa-Montero/dp/1612184383>
- 4 September: **Lucy Sussex** on **Fergus Hume**: '130 Novels: Puffery and Bestsellerdom'.
- 2 October: **Robert Degrauw**: *Night of the Earwig*: a satire about bad writing, frustrated ambition ... and giant earwigs. <http://www.nightoftheearwig.com/>
- 6 November: **Alan Stewart**: 'A short word about 8 million of them: Anthony's *Xanth*, and Jordan and Sanderson's *Wheel of Time*' (3.6 m and 4.1 m words respectively).
- 4 December: End of year dinner.

**KIM HUETT**  
**4D, 36 Glenorchy Street, Lyons ACT 2606**

For the record Bruce the scans taken from *Norstrilian News*, *Chunder*, and *Fanew Sletter* that I sent you were actually created at the instigation of Julian Warner, who posted on Facebook a query about the Nova Mob history. Mr Warner never did say what he planned do with this data, and as far as I'm aware he never did take it any further than asking so it's nice to see somebody finishing the job.

Your piece in *\*brg\** is quite interesting but could do with one more editorial pass-through. For example, on the second page you have Paul Stevens, John Breden, and South Yarra renting a flat together and I doubt that's what you really meant. You also imply in that paragraph that the MSFC was in abeyance and I'm not sure that was true. Paul Steven included very detailed instructions on how to find the MSFC in one of his contributions to ANZAPA and I doubt he would do that if the club wasn't functioning. However, given his description of the South Yarra flat I very much doubt any films were being shown there, as it seems to have been every bit as cramped and difficult to access as the quarters the MSFC had just vacated. Also, that Bangsund quote includes The Returned Starmen's League when it should be The Returned Spaceman's

League, as can be seen in the reprinted flyer on the opposite page.

Attached is a PDF of the original Facebook discussion set off by Julian's original request. Lots of interesting detail there but for the most part it would need to be confirmed by a second source before I took any of it as gospel.

(19 October 2018)

**ALAN STEWART**  
**PO Box 7111, Richmond VIC 3121**

Some extra Nova Mob notes, from the diaries of Alan Stewart. Usually the only entry was 'Nova Mob'. Meeting places are imputed from the dining places listed.

**1990:**

*June–November*: Pre-meeting dinners at Erawan Restaurant, Richmond. Meetings at the home of Alan Stewart, Richmond.

*December*: Annual Yum Cha: Westlake Restaurant, Melbourne.

**1991, 1992, 1993, 1994:**

*February–November*: Pre-meeting dinners at Erawan Restaurant, Richmond. Meetings: Alan Stewart's.

**1995:**

Meetings at the home of Alan Stewart, Richmond.

*February–April*: Pre-meeting dinners at Erawan Restaurant, Richmond.

*April–November*: Pre-meeting dinners at Swami Restaurant, Richmond.

**1996:**

*February*: Meeting at home of Alan Stewart.

*March–November*: Meetings at home of Julian Warner and Lucy Sussex.

**1998:**

Meetings at home of Julian Warner and Lucy Sussex. Pre-meeting dinners: Arian Restaurant, Sydney Road, Brunswick.

**1999:**

*March meeting*: Pre-meeting dinner: Satay Inn, Melbourne.

*November*: Meeting at home of Julian Warner and Lucy Sussex.

**2000:**

*Pre-meeting dinners*: Saigon Inn, Melbourne.

**2001:**

*April*: Pre-meeting dinners: Saigon Inn, Melbourne.

*August–October*: Meeting: home of Andrew Macrae and Sara Marland.

*November*: Home of Julian and Lucy.

**2002:**

*June–November*: Home of Andrew and Sara.

**2003:**

*February*: Home of Julian and Lucy.

*March–September*: Home of Andrew and Sara.

*October*: Home of Julian and Lucy.

**2004:**

Meetings begin at North Carlton Library.

(8 October 2018)

off the main hall and the place had been double booked with a choir practice group.

After clearing up the misunderstanding and no-show, the next meeting a month later wasn't much better. I found the right room this time, but after about half an hour realised that everyone else already knew each other and I had little in common with most of them. When they decided to decamp to a local pub, I made my excuses and left for home. I didn't go back again for over a year. In fact it was only after Corflu that I realised the problem wasn't with the group but with me, and re-established contact and started going again.

(18 August 2019)

I think I have received and responded to some six or seven different fanzines starting from the day *Banana Wings* 74 dropped though the letterbox, probably more than I've done in the previous few months. It was a bit like the old days in the run-up to a Novacon weekend when it sometimes felt you were being doorstopped for votes for the Nova Awards (and quite probably were).

I even had a quick browse in eFanzines.com recently to see if I'd missed anything significant. There's Chris Garcia's *Drink Tank*, but it doesn't seem to have a letter column, at least from the couple of issues I looked at, and *Journey Planet*, which seems to have gone off in a different direction from what I see as fanzine fandom. It's also big. There's a point after which I find it difficult to respond properly to something that takes ages to scroll through. (It might be different if I got around to set this PC up with twin monitors, as I have at work.)

(19 August 2019)

## ANDY ROBSON

63 Dixon Lane, Leeds LS12 4RR England

The lengthy obituaries are all quite positive, which led to expectations for the rest, which didn't disappoint.

Your piece about the trials and tribulations of publishing only brought back memories, and the comments of a very successful American publisher who said: 'Never meet the authors. They're all complete bastards.'

Nice to see the revival of the poetry pages. Fanzines always used to have flippant and chummy pieces until the mid 1980s, when Terry Pratchett and *Lord of the Rings* etc suddenly became 'respectable' literature, and the SF gang suddenly decided that they had to be serious, knowing, and intellectual as well. *SF Commentary* was always a serious magazine looking for professional presentation, and probably saves it from the winds of whimsy and trends that quickly sink other zines unless they can maintain funds and material to carry them through two or three 'unsaleable' editions. Yes, most fanzines aren't actually sold, but they need a constant turnover of readers — and odd years can leave you floundering in a billy-no-mates zone.

More to the point, you actually started *SFCat* at the dawn of civilisation (without the pseudonymous Noah) on Mount Ararat, a legend in itself. Zines usually have a lifetime of three to 42 years under one individual, so 50 is a truly momentous occasion for one title. Those of us (and there are many) who were carried away drooling

and gibbering incoherently after 42 years know just how far through the pain barrier this must be. Your ambitions have reached a point where both publishing fanzines and making atomic bombs have gone out of fashion. But they are still being made. As long as people continue to put away laptops (work) on trains and get out novels (brain play) on trains you still have readers.

I enclose the usual for postage.

(20 May 2019)

**[\*brg\* Thanks, as always, Andy, for the dollars for postage. I'm not encouraging people to subscribe, but contributions are always welcome until I can get rid of the print edition altogether.\*]**

## DOUG NICHOLSON somewhere in Sydney NSW

One of the things at least some of the 'smart drugs' do for you is to help you continuing to read when you would otherwise have either read the same page a few times without taking it in or lapsed into unconsciousness. They are not 'smart-making' in my experience, but can give significant help: concentration, memory, and I suspect motivation. I started reading up on them when my memory lapses began to worry me, and I started to misuse words, then I started guinea-pigging myself. No miracles, but helpful. I suspect I might have about exhausted what they can do for me. The symptoms are coming back. Self-assessment of brain function of course is notoriously difficult. Remember how Freud declared it was not possible to psychoanalyse one's self, then undertook doing it?

I was sorry to hear of Bill Wright's troubles. We talked quite a bit in the past and enjoyed our conversations despite having very different views about the science fiction world. He was always very interested in fan publishing for its own sake, and I never was. At one stage I wanted to start a science fiction consumers' association that would focus on reading, writing, assessing, and publishing science fiction rather than a lot of other fan activities in which I had less interest.

What has happened to Lee Harding, or Leo as I knew him, Harding? I haven't heard of him for yonks. Lots of people seem to assume that I am dead, and I suppose I tend to return the compliment in some cases. Leo and I shared a favourite story, 'All the Way Back'.

Ballarat is not too far away — do you hear from Leigh Edmonds? We had a great old yarn when he dropped in here one day after visiting Chris Nelson in Canberra. His good lady called wondering where the hell he was, as we had found so much to talk about.

I have seen Chris Nelson a couple of times when his job has brought him to Sydney and have been rather tickled that he became such a close penfriend of Arthur Haddon. Short-back-and-sides rather conservative Chris and sailor Haddon, who once fought a formal duel with another fan, ex-soldier Alan Wilkes, with seconds and a referee, over Arthur's relations with Diana Wilkes, and once had to be taken to hospital for a stomach pump after he had skulled a half-bottle of scotch.

The other rambling man is Damien Broderick. I

worked out an address for him, I think from clues in *SFC*, but have done nothing about writing to him. I gather that, like so many of his contemporaries, his health is not good and he has eyesight problems. I do too — one eye has given up the ghost completely. I can still read OK and passed my compulsory old farts' driving test. Nina is not always happy about me running around in her new car though.

I can't say I am likely to write you anything of interest for *SFC*, but you never know. Sometimes the urge to ramble on at length overcomes me, as you will have seen from my emails.

(22 May 2019)

**[\*brg\* I published some news of Bill Wright in *SFC* 100. After spending seven months of 2019 in hospital, he's now undergoing a cataract operation.**

**Lee Harding is still living in Moonee Ponds, a suburb of Melbourne. We meet him every month or so in a small group organised by Dick Janssen.**

**Lots of news of Leigh Edmonds in the letter section of this issue of *SFC*.**

**As far as I know, Chris Nelson is still living in Canberra. He seemed to have stopped publishing his fanzine *Mumblings from Munchkinland*, but a new issue turned up recently.**

**And for about the last 20 years Damien Broderick has lived in San Antonio with his wife Barbara. He still published vigorously; his books are available as Books on Demand editions from Amazon.com.\*]**

**JOE SICLARI  
Fan History Project, Chairman  
jsiclari@gmail.com  
<http://fanac.org>**

It's been a busy winter for us, both fannishly and, unfortunately, medically. We've attend several conventions and at both Boskone and Corflu, FANAC has had scanning stations, and we did thousands of pages at each. Medically, I had complications with my quadruple by-pass and spent three weeks in the intensive care unit. They took good care of me though, and I am doing much better.

I wanted to give you an update on the *SF Commentary* issues we have scanned and put online. We have 29 individual issues online at [http://www.fanac.org/fanzines/SF\\_Commentary/](http://www.fanac.org/fanzines/SF_Commentary/). They comprise 41 numbers because of the combined issues: 1 to 9, 31, 33, 35-7, 39 to 50, 53 to 60 are all done. 10 through 14 are scanned and will be going up. More will be done soon.

As for help, I was wondering if you can give me some contact information for John Bangsund, John Foyster, and Leigh Edmonds. I'd like to add some of their zines as well.

(27 May 2019)

**[\*brg\* I've already replied to Joe's last paragraph. Leigh Edmonds' address is in this issue of *SFC*; and I've sent current details of contacts to John Bangsund and the John Foyster Estate.\*]**

**LECH KELLER-KRAWCZYK  
Radom Academy of Economics.  
ul. Starej Bani 8 m. 84, 01-853, Poland  
[h.keller@gmail.com](mailto:h.keller@gmail.com)**

I received your email address from Dr Van Ikin, who was a reviewer of my doctoral thesis 'Visions of the Future in the Writings of Stanislaw Lem', which I wrote in the early 2000s at Monash University in Melbourne. It is now also as a book published by Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, 2010. I attach a PDF of this text. The matter is such that my very good Polish-Belorussian friend, Dr Wiktor Janiewicz (Victor Yaznevich, [lemolog@gmail.com](mailto:lemolog@gmail.com)), expert on Stanislaw Lem, because of the upcoming 100th anniversary of Lem, plans to publish a 'fat' volume in Polish and Russian titled *Stanislaw Lem: Non Fiction*, containing three parts:

- 1 Lem's biography
- 2 Lem's Bibliography (mostly in Polish, Russian, English, and German)
- 3 Index (persons and subjects).

He has already almost 95 per cent of the information and texts he needs, but desperately needs some important texts by Lem from *SF Commentary*:

- 'Letter' (untitled) dated 24 June 1970, *SF Commentary* No. 14, Aug. 1970, pp. 5-6, 20
- 'Letter' (untitled) dated 13 Jan. 1972, *SF Commentary* No. 26, Apr. 1972, pp. 28-30, 89-90
- 'A Letter to Mr. Farmer' *SF Commentary* No. 29, Aug. 1972, pp. 10-12
- 'Letter: (untitled) dated 9 Sep. 1974, in *SF Commentary* No. 41-42, Feb. 1975, pp. 90-2
- 'Letter' (untitled) in *SF Commentary* No. 44-45, 1975, pp. 96-7
- 'Letter' (untitled) dated 6 Feb. 1980 in *SF Commentary* No. 60-61, June 1980, p. 4
- 'On Lem' in *SF Commentary* (???)

as well as:

- Farmer, Philip José, 'A Letter to Mr. Lem', *SF Commentary*, No. 25, Dec. 1971, pp. 19-26.

See also:

- <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/pe.cgi?32684>
- <http://www.efanzines.com/SFC/#sfc>

Could you please be so kind and help us in reaching this noble goal of publishing in one volume all those 'Australian' texts by and on Lem? If there will be no other options, I can be even so desperate and try to visit you or a person who has copies of those materials in Australia (please keep in mind that I am now living in Poland).

(14 April 2019)

**[\*brg: 14 April 2019\*] Your files arrived okay today. That's amazing material, of which I was unaware.**

**I can't recall Dr Ikin producing a Lem issue of *Science Fiction*, but I wish he had done so, using as a basis a very short version of your material, written by you. I've been cut off from Lem material because of Franz Rottensteiner falling out with him. Franz was Lem's great promoter in the English-speaking world, but then they quarrelled. Lem's**

manager since then has never been in touch with me.

**This affects me because I would love to produce a *Best of SF Commentary*, but I cannot use a centrepiece, Lem's 'SF: A Hopeless Case: With Exceptions', which I published in 1973. Also, not being able to use this article means I cannot do a new edition of my book *Philip K Dick: Electric Shepherd*. The 1975 edition (Norstrilia Press) has long since sold out, and I've published a huge amount of other material about Dick since then.\*]**

I am very happy indeed that you have received the attachments. They contain exactly what is in the paper copy of my book on Lem, and by the way, my doctoral thesis is available, also on a microfilm, at Monash University Library at Clayton Campus.

It is not actually Dr Ikin producing a Lem issue of *Science Fiction*, but my very good Polish-Belorussian friend, Dr. Wiktor Janiewicz (Victor Yaznevich, lemolog@gmail.com).

I know from both Lem and Rottensteiner the background of their dispute and it is should be of no surprise to you, that each one is blaming the other one, but personally I think that it was mostly Lem's fault, as without Rottensteiner, Lem would have never have been known outside the former Soviet Bloc, and certainly not in America.

I think that maybe you could publish this *Best of SF Commentary* somewhere, where Lem's family and copyright owners could not stop you publishing it, for example in China or Russia. I was always of the opinion that copyright in the present form should be abolished because it prevents not only access to literature for the less wealthy, i. e. approximately 90 per cent of population of our planet, but also prevents scientific progress, for example, study of Lem. Of course, writers and editors should be properly compensated for their effort, but not in the present way, which also prevents good translators from translating Lem's *Solaris* to English directly from the original Polish.

(14 April 2019)

**[\*brg\* I'm looking forward to the special Lem issue of *Science Fiction*. On the one hand, I'm a bit disappointed that nobody thought to offer this to *SF Commentary* — but on the other hand, I don't have the financial resources that Van Ikin has. Witness his most recent issue, a sumptuous coverage of New Zealand author Phillip Mann. Publishing that issue would have wiped out my savings account.**

**I've found all the files you want, but they are all scans/PDF files, and add up to 61 MB. So I'm putting them on a USB and will send it today or tomorrow. However, if you would prefer the files on a CD ROM, that's just as easy.**

**I haven't scanned p. 4 from *SFC* 60–61, so might have to send that as OCR file rather than a scan.\*]**

Also — don't worry about p. 4 from *SFC* 60–61 — an OCR is OK!

And don't worry about the item 'On Lem' — maybe

it is a Letter (untitled) dated 13 January 1972 published by you in *SF Commentary* No. 26, April 1972, pp. 28–30, 89–90 or Letter (untitled) dated 7 May 1972 in *SF Commentary*, No. 29, August 1972, pp. 9, 43–4, or Letter (untitled) dated 9 September 1974, *SF Commentary* No. 41–42, February 1975, pp. 90–92 or a Letter (untitled) in *SF Commentary*, No. 44–45, 1975, pp. 96–7, and so on Anyway, I am unable to locate it in my bibliography of Lem and in other sources.

(16 April 2019)

Just to let you know that I have just received your letter with scans of SFC. *Thank you very, very much!*

(28 May 2019)

**JERRY KAUFMAN  
PO Box 25075, Seattle WA 98165, USA**

50 years? That's not too many.

Very nice covers by Elaine and Ditmar. Does Elaine's embroidery hang in your home somewhere?

**[\*brg\* Yes; on the wall above the kitchen table.\*]**

I have most issues of *SFC*, starting from around No. 10, I think. I have several of the Norstrilia Press books, including *The Plains*, *The Stellar Gauge*, and *Dreamworks*. I have a greater appreciation of Kate Wilhelm (thanks to Gordon Van Gelder) and Steve Sneyd thanks to Andrew Darlington. I have a mild urge to reading the 'Making Of' books that Colin Steele reviews.

And I have the prospect of reading volume 2 when it appears on eFanzines.

Thanks for all the good reading and deep thinking of the past 50 years.

(30 May 2019)

All of your gall is divided into three parts? That's what Julius Caesar would have said. Thanks much for sending us the print edition, parts 1 and 2. Are you also sending part 3?

I read part of the issue during our travels to Dublin, and was amused to hear Gillian Polack tell me about Vonda McIntyre's influence on her after having read her piece in *SFC* not one (or two) weeks earlier. I'm not sure of the timing, because I can't now remember if she talked to me about it at Worldcon or at Titancon in Belfast. Still, I was glad of the chance to meet Gillian and hear her story.

Harry sounds like a cat of distinction and one in a million.

Steve Jeffery's mention of Ada Palmer's book *Too Like the Lightning* made me wonder what the other books would be like — I mean the books that could have been titled *To Like the Lightning* and *Two Like the Lightning*.

On page 19, Leigh Edmonds mention two TV shows of which you haven't heard. I don't know anything about *Daylight* myself, but I've watched several seasons of *Grace and Frankie* and enjoyed them. Jane Fonda plays Grace; Lily Tomlin plays Frankie. The two are married to lawyers who are partners and, it seems, are also secret lovers (Martin Sheen and Sam Waterson). The show begins

when the husbands come out to their families, intending to divorce their wives and marry each other. Grace and Frankie, never really friends and with very different values and interests, are thrown together. There are also children from each marriage with their own challenges. The show is about how everyone deals or doesn't deal with the changes in relationships.

Doug Barbour compares his Martha Argerich collection with yours, and mentions James Ehnes. I have a few of each, and particularly like Ehnes's album of Paganini's Variations. Ehnes organises, or used to, a summer series of chamber music in Seattle.

William Brieding talks about Roger Zelazny's 'nonchalantly smarmy, smart-ass protagonist[s]'. I noticed, years ago, that they also have no apparent origins, somehow existing outside their society and often with no memory of where they came from.

Greg Benford talks about Big Dumb Objects, saying this means 'don't need management'. Without looking the term up in the *SF Encyclopedia* (because at the moment some glitch is preventing me from linking to it), I'll have to fall back on my possibly faulty understanding of the term. I thought it applied to giant and mysterious objects that give no indication of their origin or purpose, just existing to give the protagonists something to explore and the reader the proverbial Sense of Wonder.

I like Mark Plummer's invented term 'Turtle in the Room'. At Worldcon and in the FB and Twitter worlds it has been the controversy over the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer.

Springer Books had a table in the Dealer's Room in Dublin — books mentioned in this issue by Damien Broderick and Russell Blackford were included in their display. I was trying to keep my book buying to a minimum, but did bring home a flyer to remind myself of the line. They sell e-book versions, so maybe ...

I read the history of the Nova Mob with some interest, and especially liked John Bangsund's flyer on page 52, with the Mob fighting over the many suggested names. We started an SF book discussion group back in the 1980s, and decided to hold the meetings on the same date each month, rather than the same day of the week. Having the meeting on, say, the third Thursday, might mean someone whose Thursday evening were always spoken for could never come. But holding them on, for example, the 17th of each month would mean the days would change. The 17th? We could name the group Babel-17 after Chip Delany's book. But let's change the spelling to acknowledge that our talk might not always be insightful and penetrating: thus Babble-17 was born. It lasted for years.

(30 August 2019)

**LLOYD PENNEY**  
**1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke,**  
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The front cover: my compliments to Elaine on this birthday embroidery. Carlos Ruiz Zafón has never been more accurate in his feelings, especially in this age where books are looked down upon by the masses. They have

always provided a measure of comfort in our younger years, and now, they give us an anchor to a happier time, a more comfortable time in this age of doubt. I have trimmed my collection a bit over the years, but an apartment without books is merely an empty series of rooms.

What is a few decades between friends? It is the realisation that there is more time behind us than ahead of us, and my sixtieth birthday earlier this month has made that clear to me. It's been easy for me to say that it's just a number, but it is a big number. That big number tells me that while much has passed, there is much ahead, and I'd better get with it. I can see who I am, and who I should have been, and I find I must be pleased with who I am, while looking at what I should have been for some late-day enhancement.

Now that I have had our wonderful trip to England, I have to start looking for work again. I had some lucrative editorial work with a company whose main client was WorldVision, a major religious organisation, who sends their progress reports for their good works in villages and towns all over Asia, Africa, and Central America, and I got to work on about 200 of those reports. I am also part of the proofreading and editing team for the most current revival of *Amazing Stories* (Steve Davidson, owner, and local Toronto fan/pro Ira Nayman as editor-in-chief). I started working on issue 2, and issue 5 should arrive soon in my In box. Working on this might have a small stipend attached to it, but if I ever had a bucket list, working on *Amazing Stories* would probably be on it, so I am pleased. I am working on *Amazing* for the love of it.

We have a bit of a nest egg, but in this age where the term 'affordable rental' seems more and more to be an oxymoron, Yvonne is currently on a three-month assignment with the company she retired from, Royal Building Supplies. She needed the money after our trip to England, to replace what was spent, so she has returned to the Accounts Payable department to clean it up, as usual. That's been the heart of her working career — go to a company and clean up their AP Department, because few companies seem to realise the value of that department. It pays the bills, and is the guardian of the credit rating.

Personal journalism is something I wanted in all my correspondence. I learned to do this at the feet of Walt Willis, Harry Warner Jr., and Mike Glicksohn, and they all said a letter of comment should offer comment on the issue at hand, plus a measure of personal journalism to relay an impression of yourself to all fans all over the world. Today, after nearly 40 years in the local, I wish I could say the same thing. I find my letters often forgotten, and dismissed for various reasons, including my nationality. That's won't stop me right now; I can't say for certain in later years, though.

Ah, Stonehenge! I was there as part of a tour group a mere three weeks ago. A cold and windy day that day, and of course, no trees around, plus apathetic sheep keeping the grass short. At least, we had the privilege of walking among the stones; nothing was cordoned off. We were warned not to touch the stones, but you really didn't need to. The knowledge that you were standing in the midst of extreme age and history was enough.

Is the excitement of fanzine involvement today match the excitement of when we first started? I started writing

letters in 1982 or so, and when I saw my byline in the letter column, it was as satisfying as getting it in a newspaper. My training was in journalism, so doing an egoscan was great fun. I did try my hand at Pubbing My Own Ish with Keith Soltys (*Torus*, so many years ago now), but I had more fun with letters of comment, personal journalism, and relaying information, such as convention lists. I still do the latter. I have accumulated a huge store of printed fanzines (plus many gigabytes of e-zines), and if life goes the way it is looking, and I may have to simply give my collection to Murray Moore or someone like him. Murray lives about ten minutes away from me. He received Mike Glicksohn's collection, and he will probably get mine.

Yvonne and I have had a varied fannish career each, but one thing we did together was run conventions. We were on the committee for our local literary convention for 30 years, and we retired from it about nine years ago now. We have seen fans come and go, and interests come and go as well. Fans in Toronto? Too many schisms, too many gaffiations, too many new people I don't know. Canadian national fandom is now mostly literary, and fan awards consist of awards given to friends of the pros. Fandom is in the decline here, which pushed to embrace newer interests connected to modern-day fandom, like steampunk.

(As I continue to read this issue, it sounds less and less like a fanzine, and more and more like your autobiography. Intentional, or just the way it turned out? Perhaps this is also the way I am writing this loc.)

**[\*brg\* Ever since it began, issues of SFC have contained chunks of my autobiography. Take a look at the early issues, especially from the beginning of 1971 on, now they are scanned and available from fanac.org.\*]**

I have found that there is zine culture here and there, the cool kids on the street who eschew computers to hand out hand-drawn publications. I remember introducing myself, and telling them about my experience and how far back SF zines and apas go, and they were not the least bit interested. They laughed at all those sci-fi geeks, and carried on with their own 'pure' publications.

For the record, if it were not for Yvonne Robert Penney, I would have been out on the streets a long time ago. My work experience is too narrow for this day and age, and while I have found some interesting jobs to apply to lately, I also know that more than 200 to 300 others will also apply to the job, and youth seems more valued than experience. Next month, I shall start receiving a supplement from the government to offset the change in income from Yvonne working to Yvonne retiring (in spite of the fact she's back at work temporarily). At least I will have a little bit of money coming in, which I should receive until I hit age 65 in 2024. I love Yvonne dearly for saving my bacon more than once, and I will never be able to pay her back adequately, except for possibly being the best spouse I can be for her.

**[\*brg\* I know I've said it umpteen times, but ... if it were not for Elaine I would have been long since broke, mad, or dead, not necessarily in that order.\*]**

I do have a number of Kate Wilhelm books on my shelf, and in a box of books we've tried to give to literary conventions, without any luck. I met Randy Byers once, but we really didn't get the chance to chat. Same goes for Milt Stevens; we talked at a Worldcon, I think more to see who that person is at the other end of the letter column.

All those Tolkien books, and I am pleased to say I have at least some of them. Like many others, the good Professor has interested me in the depths of his universe of Middle-Earth, and I was able to pick up a couple of dozen books discarded by a neighbour of Mike Glicksohn's many years ago. The newest addition to the collection is *An Atlas of Tolkien* by David Day.

The 800. That's quite a list of contributors, and I see a number of them who have left us over the years. I am proud to be counted among them, and thank you for including me there.

(28 June 2019)

Congratulations again on this 50th anniversary, and on your well-deserved Eternity Award, and on the fact that the next issue will be your 100th! I only wish Canadian fandom had awards like this one. We basically have none, so after our own 40-plus years in fandom, Yvonne and I have a few Aurora Awards. Basically, I think we've been forgotten, which made moving on to steampunk even easier.

Looks like you have had some work. So have I, but tomorrow, I have a job interview with an advertising agency for the position of copy editor. Yvonne's current assignment is winding up soon, so I could really use that job. Fingers crossed that I get it.

I did meet Vonda McIntyre, but never did meet Gene Wolfe. Vonda was a fan before she turned pro, a big part of Seattle fandom. I see huge lists of passings in each issue of *Ansible*, and it does get painful to see so many people who made up your own experience of SF, comics, gaming, etc. going away, making the fandom/prodom you remember change until you barely recognise it.

I am having a discussion on fandom and its current state on Facebook with local friends. We figure it's been at least two generations of fans who have never encountered a fan-run convention, and think that conventions and fandom are fully monetised, run by pro corporations, are the norm, which seems to make forming some kind of community like fandom much more difficult, as most of these new people come to buy what they see and get what they can get out of the procon, and leave as an individual instead of part of a group of friends.

**[\*brg\* We've been much luckier in Australia, with three fan-run conventions run each year: Continuum in Melbourne, Swancon in Perth, and Conflux in Canberra. But the competition from pro convention ComiCon in June has hit Continuum over recent years.\*]**

The job I referred to last time ended not long after that, as most of my salary was paid by a government program. As soon as the program ended, so did my employment there. I have had a couple of work-at-home jobs, but nothing really good since. We did indeed return

to England, for three weeks this past May and June. I turned 60 in London.

Murdoch Mysteries will be starting its thirteenth season next month. I did buy a copy of Pullman's *Book of Dust* while in London, and I hope to get started on it soon.

(27 August 2019)

It has been a while since I downloaded this issue, for which I apologise, but response is still required, and necessary. Many thanks, and many congratulations, on *SF Commentary* 100. Perhaps all three parts of your 50th anniversary edition should be put together into one volume, whether it is electronic, or paper.

I have been lax in my fanzine correspondence, partially because of various projects on the go — find myself more employment, get all our pictures of our London trip online, clean up the apartment, put books away, all the usual stuff, but there is a new project to work on. Thanks to the luck of the resurrection of *Amazing Stories* magazine, and further luck of the editor-in-chief being local and an old friend, I am hoping to relaunch myself as a book editor. I have edited and proofread four issues of *Amazing*, and then edited and proofed a book which is part of the *Amazing* subscription (*Captain Future in Love* by Allen Steele), and then a large manuscript from Montreal horror writer Nancy Kilpatrick, and now a YA manuscript by local writer and old friend Shirley Meier, I now have some experience, and a couple of recommendations. At this point, if there is any direction I could point myself, it is this, and I am hopeful for it. Rob Sawyer recommended that I get myself the newest *Chicago Style Manual*, which arrived only today, so I have some studying to do, to make sure that I know what Chicago (and the whole publishing industry) needs. Wish me luck; this could be a steep learning curve.

Retirement ... mostly because at my tender age of 60, I am failing to find any kind of employment, and so I have been describing myself as semi-retired, but not by choice. I have always been as active as we can afford, and of course, there is always the fact that we have been vendors of steampunk jewellery, and that has so far been self-sustaining. We fear the interest itself is fading, so our possible decision to shut down the business may be made for us. At least, it's been great fun. We still go to our regular Third Monday pubnight. Fandom here seems to have faded away. We do send out notifications of our pubnight, but we are still lucky to get five or six to the event. Fandom here always seems to break into small groups, so it really isn't doing anything new, I suppose.

I admit that when I see anything these days with Guillermo del Toro, I automatically think of his ex-wife. Del Toro lived in Toronto for some time with wife Lorenza, but his fame seems to have divided them, and they'd been married for some time. Lorenza travels, and may be in Mexico right now, but we do see her here, often in a steampunk setting.

(29 December 2019)

## JULIAN WARNER

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I got around to working out where 2018 started and finished in terms of purchases. I don't record dates against items but I do record them. I had to work things out roughly based on release dates. Some things hit the shelves almost immediately on release and other things take months to reach our sunny shores.

I had about 145 items flagged as purchased in 2018, which doesn't sound a lot for me but there were a lot of re-issue box sets in that lot. A 16-CD Lou Reed collection here, a 27-CD King Crimson collection there ...

Doing some stats in a spreadsheet, I added some tags to items and found that I had bought:

- 56 new albums versus 89 reissued albums; and
- 11 Australian albums, 1 Brazilian, 1 British (so called), 1 Cajun, 1 Classical (in the sense you would understand), 2 Country, 1 Cuban, 2 'Desert Blues' (Mali/Touareg), 15 Electronic, 1 Ethiopian, 5 Folk, 1 French, 1 Funk (as opposed to Rock), 2 German, 1 Irish, 4 Japanese, 22 Jazz, 1 Mauritanian, 2 Modern Classical, 2 Pakistan, 8 Reggae, 2 Soundtracks, 2 Sweden, 3 Turkey and the remainder of 56 being Rock of some generalised description.
- There are a few items where more than one tag applies. How do you tag the Charles Lloyd (jazz) and Lucinda Williams (country/rock) album?
- As far as Gillespie/Warner crossover goes, I picked up quite a few Miles Davis and John Coltrane reissues or 'lost album' type things. You may or may not like some of those. Other albums which might have been in your region of interest are Neil Young's *Roxy: Tonight's The Night Live*, Roxy Music's first album re-issued in luxury form; Chilli Willi and the Red Hot Peppers' *Real Sharp*, which is British 1970s RnB featuring the guitarist later known as Snakefinger; locals Xylouris White (if you like Greek lute and drums), Emmylou Harris's *The Ballad of Sally Rose*, Judy Henske's *The Elektra Albums* for some strong-voiced folk/blues, Martin Simpson's *Trials and Tribulations*, Ralph McTell's *All Things Change 1967-1970*, Richard Thompson's *13 Rivers*, Buffalo Springfield *The Complete Albums Collection* in one box, Marc Ribot's *Songs of Resistance 1942-2018*, Bob Dylan and the Band's *Basement Tapes Raw*, Lubomyr Melnyk's *Fallen Trees* — although his fleet-fingered piano style is an acquired taste, John Renbourn and Stefan Grossman's *The Three Kingdoms*. Either you or Elaine might like Paolo Pandolfo's *Le Labyrinthe*, which is viola da gamba pieces by Marin Marais.
- One of my favourites for 2018 surprised me, being Alice Coltrane's *The Ecstatic Music of ...* Ordinarily I would be very wary of something which is Hare Krishna meets Gospel but it actually works very well. It got past my prejudice against Alice Coltrane for being a very strange person.
- There was some very good reggae and electronic music reissued during 2018 but you would be interested in neither so we will pass over those.
- I bought very large amounts of King Crimson during the year (partially blame Basement Discs for that) but it is possible to hear too much of them.

- I enjoyed Bonnie Raitt's self-titled album a lot, having come to it late in 2018.
- My liking for 'World Music' was still strongly evident during the year. We have listened to a lot of what gets generally titled 'Desert Blues' over the last few years. There are now many artists — primarily from Mali — who apply electric guitar to loping camel rhythms with lots of call-and-response singing and clapping. The term still used to describe the ethnicity of the performers is 'Touareg' but they themselves prefer to be called 'Tamasheq'.
- We bought one album by Noura Mint Seymali from Mauritania because we had been impressed with her performance at Womadelaide.
- One of the major trends in reissued albums is soundtracks for increasingly obscure films. The only two soundtracks I picked up were one for a *Moomins* TV show and Don Ellis's soundtracks for the two *French Connection* films. My taste for novelty albums has decreased over the years, but I did acquire the Osipov State Folk Orchestra's *Balalaika Favourites*.
- As we have been attending the Jazz Lab down the road over the last couple of years, I have bought some Australian and other jazz which I might not have encountered otherwise. This was certainly true of buying albums by the Czech a capella vocal group Skety and the Finnish Kari Ikonen Trio (piano/bass/drums).
- Similarly as we occasionally get to live performances by Ed Kuepper and his various groups I manage to track down their recordings, both old and new. I still resist the temptation to download music from the shadier regions of the internet. Hopefully some of the money I spend reaches the artists.
- There was only one purchase of 2018 which I would regard as a failure. That was *Drunk* by Thundercat. He had let some remixers loose on his original album entitled *Drunk* and they had played around with speeds and pitches so that all of the tracks sounded as if they had been made by someone who was heavily affected by valium. Horribly woozy. Thundercat has some cachet for being the bass player for Kamasi Washington, who is the current big thing in the jazz/funk/rap world. I do not recommend *Drunk* though.

And more of the reissues: one of my favourite bands, Wire, had their first three albums reissued in luxury form, Jethro Tull continued its luxury reissue regime, and great jazz albums continue to resurface, Dylan continuously excavates his past, and 'lost' Japanese gems mostly associated with the Yellow Magic Orchestra (Ryuichi Sakamoto and company) sneak out.

(9 July 2019)

**[\*brg\* Thanks for the survey of exciting stuff bought and listened to during 2018. I've never had the courage to make a list of CDs bought during a year, but merely keep a list of CDs listened to. I buy far more than I have time to listen to. Although I have interests way beyond those shown in my lists, it's not worth buying more than a few boxed sets each year because I don't have time to listen (attentively) to more than one or two CDs a day —**

**and that's on a good day.**

**I keep finding jazz people I like, most recently, and only 47 years too late, Herbie Hancock. Murray MacLachlan gave me a copy of a couple of his 1970s albums, and they are brilliant, in much the same way that Miles Davis from that period transcends all categories.**

**I've also heard that Alice Coltrane is worth listening to, but I'll have to remember to ask at Basement Discs. Readings has cut its display stock in all categories, so I don't find surprises the way I used to.**

**I don't get to concerts at all these days. Not only is there the problem of obtaining tickets to concerts of people I really want to see, there is now a lack of centralised information on upcoming concerts, and there is no assurance that the trains will be running on the night. It's too much of a pain to spend half the night getting home by bus/train combinations. We've missed out on many dinner dates, Nova Mob meetings, etc, because the trackworks never finish.**

**You have a slightly better strike rate than I do. I do buy crap CDs, either because I've read over-favourable reviews or because I've heard one good track by this person or that. I bought one Iain Mathews CD during the year — never again. Ditto for Cass McCombs. But I can't see any other total failures on the 2019 list so far.\*]**

I do miss those incisive old reviews and reviewers where you could read just how bad a new release is, but those days are gone. Now that you can be sued for deriding a piece of crap, whether deserved or not, the enthusiasm for one-star reviews has diminished. And so we are led to believe that a truly awful album is merely mediocre — or it isn't reviewed at all.

I suspect that if it wasn't only a couple of blocks away, we would not get to the Jazz Lab as frequently. As it is we are fortunate to have it so close.

Alan is here to take me away so I will stop nattering.  
(9 July 2019)

## **JOHN LITCHEN (again)**

Sorry I've been out of touch lately. Looking after Monica full time takes a lot out of me, especially when I have to wake up and help her in the middle of the night. I don't get much more than three or four hours' sleep at a time. Even though we have a physio coming in to help her three times a week and a couple of other ladies coming in twice a week to look after her so I can do some shopping, I'm still tireder than I used to be. I guess time gets away from me and sometimes I just didn't feel like doing anything.

Last Wednesday I came back from the supermarket suddenly feeling dizzy. I broke out into a cold sweat and almost immediately after started vomiting. If I tried to stand up I got so dizzy I kept starting to fall over. I've got good balance from years of Aikido practice so I could recover quickly but the vertigo didn't go away unless I lay



(from left) John Litchen, Marc Ortlieb (projectionist of the Aussiefan film) and Allan Bray, ARCon 1995 (Aussiecon Reunion Convention). (Photo: Richard Hyrckiewicz.)

for a while. I will have to get onto the next volume of memoirs soon also — the 1970s and perhaps the 1980s. A lot happened in the 1970s, I met Monica, and that changed my life. We made the Antifan film and ... I went to New Guinea twice, to Bahrain ... (15 July 2019)

down. The vertigo and the vomiting went on for 24 hours and I had to get a doctor in to see me. He said I probably had BPPV (benign paroxysmal peripheral vertigo), which is caused by calcium crystals in the ear canals being dislodged and rolling about ... in effect making you seasick. He gave me an exercise to do which made the vertigo disappear and an injection for the nausea and vomiting. After that I started to get better. As soon as I felt comfortable driving again I went to see my local GP and he said the shivering and temperature was probably caused by a viral infection that affects the inner ear canal along with the BPPV. (He did tell me the name but I can't remember it). He didn't prescribe anything, as it was on the mend anyway. At the moment I feel about 90 per cent better. There is still some slight stuffiness in the head and touch of dizziness if I move suddenly, so I'm being careful about how I move at the moment. After that I suddenly felt a lot older. Now I feel like an old man, which I suppose I am since I turned 79 last April, whereas before, I didn't feel old at all. I guess your mind has a lot to do with how old you feel and how it manifests physically. I think it will take another couple of weeks before I'm back to normal again. (At least I hope so.)

Thanks for the photos. It's good to see John Bangsund and Sally. They don't actually look much different from other photos we took years ago in Canberra, although I know they've had their health problems. Sorry to hear about Bill having a fall. Please send him my best wishes when you see him next. And you're right. Merv and Helena are looking a bit frail, but still, they come up looking good in that photo.

I've not done much lately other than to put together my brother-in-law's book of his journey to Australia with two mates on bicycles in 1955–56. *Journey of a Lifetime* is 600 pages long with lots of photos covering their epic bike ride from Germany through Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, India, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Australia to arrive in time to attend the Melbourne Olympics. (During this epic ride they met the Shah of Persia, and various heads of states, including Prime Minister Nehru in India. A fascinating story!)

I'm still reading books on Mars, both very old and very new. It seems to be a subject that isn't going to go away

I found the history of the Nova Mob quite fascinating. I have never been a member of this group and as far as I remember, never attended a meeting ... but reading the bit about how the idea of bidding for the first worldcon we had (in 1975) made me think that I must have been at one of them ... perhaps more. I remember going to John Bangsund's place over in St Kilda at Bundalohn Court when the subject of bidding for the worldcon came up. I mentioned this in my short piece 'What Was the Name of that Film?' (*Metaphysical Review*, July 1994). I remember suggesting we make a film, as I had quite a lot of film left over from another project and was happy to donate that for the promotion film. I don't think it was taken too seriously at first, but over a short period the idea grew, and other people had discussed it. One day I was told we were making a film, and the script was already being worked out.

I also attended a couple of other meetings after John had moved to another residence, by which time I had met Monica and told John that her older brother Hugo Correa was the first Chilean science fiction writer. He asked me to write an article about him, which he published in a special edition of *Philosophical Gas* that, of course, he renamed for this issue *Gas Filosofico*, which had a brilliant cartoon drawn by John. He knew the name because he used to get a semi-prozine from Spain called *Nueva Dimension*, and actually had a copy of an issue entirely devoted to the short stories of Hugo Correa. The article was called 'The Other Hugo'.

As part of making overseas fans aware of Australian ones, John Bangsund wanted people to write articles for another of his fanzines, so I contributed one (by this time he was living in Canberra) called 'A Hop, Step and a 10,000 Year Jump'. This was an episodic piece, shaped much like the stories in J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*. He liked the article, but since I'd done it in a hurry on an old typewriter and never made a copy, he got the only one and subsequently lost it. He wrote me a letter months later apologising for misplacing it and that he would publish it when it turned up, but it never did. By this time the film was completed and Monica and I went to Sydney to a convention where Paul Stevens and I presented the film for the first time. They were fun days. After the Sydney con we came back and recorded the

soundtrack with Lee Harding narrating, tightened up the scenes a bit so the film had a smoother flow, and had a final print made which then went to the USA — and the rest is history.

(31 July 2019)

The only colour film we made to promote Australian fandom is the five-minute one we did after the *Antifan* film was in circulation in the US. Monica and I went to Canberra and stayed a weekend at John and Sally's place to take some colour movie shots for this promotional film. Robin Johnson was also there that weekend. If I remember right, it was there that John asked me to write something about my recent foray into New Guinea, which resulted in the lost article previously mentioned.

The later film for Sydney's attempt to gain the world-con for 1983 was shot in black and white. You may have seen some colour slides taken during the shoot of the scene where everyone who is in the film buckets water to help re-fill Sydney Harbour after it was drained by Antifan. (He pulled out a giant plug underwater to achieve this. This scene was shot at Williamstown Beach just out from the lifesaving club.) I shall have to put all this in my next memoir, assuming I can remember the details. I do have a lot of photos taken of Paul Stevens during the production of this film. All of these would appear in whatever book I get to produce.

(1 August 2019)

I've found the film on YouTube and downloaded a copy. It's listed as *Antifan Strikes Back*, which is actually the title of the Sydney in '83 film. Apparently our film was known in the US as *The Aussifan Film*, even though the lead character is Antifan, and I always thought of it as *The Antifan Film*. Our film never actually had a name.

The two films are together and there is a huge difference between the first and second film. I photographed the second film as well. The Sydney in '83 committee flew Paul and me up to Sydney for a weekend of filming. Our first film was a much better production. It was fun to watch it again, as it brought back some good memories.

The four- or five-minute colour promotional short film is not included on YouTube. This was shot a few months after the first film was already circulating in the US, and presumably someone took it over to show it around. The idea of that short film was to show in a series of quick flashes as many of our fans (faces or head shots) as we could so that American fans would get to see who was who in Australia. John Bangsund appears in that film dressed in a peculiar outfit in front of the Australian National Library. He got the longest shots; all the others were two or three seconds only.

It's a really poor copy, and much of it is over-exposed with some detail lost. I will have to get a new print made from the original film one day when I can afford it. I don't have the original Sydney film though. That stayed in Sydney once it was done. Below is the link to YouTube and the film if you want to have a look. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_ixDUtw6Z7Y&fbclid=IwAR3O1\\_3C4PP8rX-O2Y4VzdkY1PKmKGNRMaRYQyNIQIVIGsLPVxXvU1esQA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ixDUtw6Z7Y&fbclid=IwAR3O1_3C4PP8rX-O2Y4VzdkY1PKmKGNRMaRYQyNIQIVIGsLPVxXvU1esQA)

(1 August 2019)

**ROMAN ORSZANSKI**  
**PO Box 3231, Rundle Malle,**  
**Adelaide SA 5000**

I noticed your comments about meeting Vonda McIntyre after the writer's workshop in 1977. While she might not have attended any of the Aussiecons, I'm certain she was one of the GoHs at Unicon (along with Christ Priest).

(26 July 2019)

**[\*brg\* Yes, she and Chris Priest were Guests of Honour at the convention held at Monash University in Clayton because the 1977 Writers' Workshop had been held the week before at the same venue.\*]**

**DANIEL KING**  
**420 Spencer Road, Thornlie WA 6108**

The latest issue of *SFC* has arrived — thanks for that. A quick glance didn't reveal much Philip K. Dick content, though: I thought Part 2 of the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition was going to include such things as my article about *Galactic Pot Healer*

Adelaide Literary Magazine, a litmag published, misleadingly, not in Adelaide but in New York, has published 10 of my 'Kalki' poems so far. You can see the latest five here: [https://adelaidemagazine.org/p\\_daniel\\_king25.html](https://adelaidemagazine.org/p_daniel_king25.html). 'Atman Counterfire' and 'Firefly Floodwall' are particularly space-related.

(25 July 2019)

**[\*brg\* Your article about Philip K. Dick's *Galactic Pot Healer* appeared in *SFC* 100. I'm looking forward to further articles about any topics you want to tackle.\*]**

**LAVELLE ALLEN**  
**Oregon USA**

This is Randy Byers' sister LaVelle. Thank you for sending your issues containing Randy's photos. I enjoyed seeing them, reading the tributes and seeing how Randy made it into Ron D.'s 'The Frequency of Liberation'. As I've said before to others: I'm so glad that Randy found the fan world. I love the platform and friends it gave him for his creative witty side.

(31 July 2019)

**CY CHAUVIN**  
**14248 Wilfred, Detroit MI 48213, USA**

I just recently saw *Worlds of Ursula K. LeGuin* on PBS (*American Masters*). I thought of you almost immediately because it showed a photo of the Aussiecon I program book, and then a review by George Turner of some Le Guin books. Toward the end, there was some black-and-white videotape that I thought might be from Aussiecon I as well (if such a recording was made) — at least I thought I saw someone who looked like Susan Wood sitting next to Le Guin, and then someone else who looked like Peter Nicholls.

**[\*brg\* A small selection from the Aussiecon Tapes is on YouTube because some of my DVDs were borrowed in order to make an exhibit for the Susan Wood memorial program item at the World Convention in either 2017 or 2018. Only five DVD sets of the Aussiecon complete video were made by the National Sound and Vision Archive in Canberra after Mark Loney found the original tapes and donated them to the Archive. I pre-ordered a set at an advertised cost of \$200, but the in the end the set cost \$800 (which Elaine paid, because I did not have \$800 at the time). Recently I've been able to watch the DVD of *Worlds of Ursula K. Le Guin*, which is a wonderful documentary, and includes some valuable extras, including the whole of Ursula's 1975 Aussiecon Guest of Honour speech.\*]**

It was interesting to finally hear LeGuin speak. (I'd never hear or saw her before at any convention, and not in any film or TV.) Of course she didn't sound like I expected (but nor did James Blish, or nearly any author I've read enough to develop a mental voice for), but now I have it. I don't know if I can carry over that voice into her stories — or should. (I'm re-reading *The Eye of the Heron* now.)

The video clips from Aussiecon, seen these days on YouTube, may have been acknowledged at the end, but the credits were so small and went by so quickly that even though I watched the Le Guin program twice I couldn't tell. The one of her donning a propeller beanie cap is especially precious.

**[\*brg\* And her thank-you to Bill Wright for supplying the propeller beanie cap ... and her thank-you to John Bangsund 'whose idea it was at the beginning'. (Actually, the concept of Aussiecon was Andrew Porter's right at the beginning.)\*]**

Of course, her political-social ideas got the most attention in the film, and yet her characters and spare beautiful writing style have meant the most to me. Not that I haven't enjoyed her ideas and the social speculation, but perhaps I thought it was a given in SF. (I do recall reading the jacket copy of *The Left Hand of Darkness* prior to wrapping it as a gift for my niece, and just wondering if a 'gender-changing' novel was really what I wanted to give her, although I had not considered that before.) This seemed to be taken to the most extreme by a high school teacher who in his discussion of her story 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas' considered how they might choose if the story situation were real. But the point is that it can't possibly be real; it's a metaphor, a fable.

Neal Gaiman was the best of the commentators — one could see he really loved her work and knew it. I am not so sure about Margaret Atwood, who also commented. So did your fav. writer Michael Chabon! Julie Phillips, who wrote the excellent biography of James Tiptree, Jr./Alice Sheldon, also had a few words in the program — perhaps she is going to write a biography of LeGuin?

**[\*brg\* That's the assumption we've all made, although the Le Guin biography will not be Phillips'**

**next published book. I did read that Julie Phillips undertook a lot of preliminary work on the Le Guin biography before she (Le Guin) died.\*]**

Most of the time when biographies and other similar works provide details of the author's parents, I fall asleep — the details seem irrelevant — but LeGuin's parents seem the exception to me. I've read three of the books by her mother, Theodora Kroeber. (I just pulled out *Ishi: The Last of His Tribe*, and realised that it in 1964 it was published by Parnassus Press, the same publisher that asked LeGuin to write a young adult novel — *A Wizard of Earthsea*. It's illustrated by the same artist as well, Ruth Robbins.)

I did read the most recent issue of *SFC* (No. 98) on the eFanzines site. I thought your comment in the interview that you reprinted about recent sf being backward-looking fantasy and not engaging in an analysis of ideas still very astute after all these years. At least from my limited perspective — I mostly read short stories from the magazines. I don't have much of a sense for what might be good among the novels. I mean, I did love *Among Others* by Jo Walton, but it's not SF.

I also enjoyed your article about Norstrilia Press. For those reading from the outside, there was certainly no hint of the tension between the various partners about which type of books to publish. While you didn't publish as much SF criticism as you would have liked, it appears you published more interesting and durable novels than most small publishers of that era. Your focus wasn't so narrow minded. *Moon in the Ground* by Keith Antil looks interesting, perhaps because of the cover, and also the idea of a novel in manuscript winning an award but having no publisher!

(7 August 2019)

You remind me to revise the review article on *The Berlin Project*, which I delayed to read Benford's newest book, in the hopeful thought I might be able to relate the two.

Something led me to look through some old issues of *Foundation* (Nos. 7–8 and 10), which was a very enjoyable reread — the excitement of the times in sf! But especially good was a David I. Masson's 'Forum' article in No. 10, which even had a prediction for 2020! (But I see from its website that *Foundation* has changed a lot.)

(14 August 2019)

I was really surprised to see a book by an author you frequently mention, Gerald Murnane's *A Season on Earth*, at the Eastpointe Public Library, a local suburban library I often frequent. At first I thought it was produced by an American publisher, but it was by an Australian publisher, *A Season on Earth*, the complete edition of his second novel *A Lifetime on Clouds*. It seems quite something for it to appear here — but this library also had the new and last book of Ursula Le Guin's poetry, and it's where I found *Rewrite*, Greg Benford's latest novel as well. Greg is making the American library circuit, it appears. So did I borrow it? I read the introduction, but the novel's description made it sound like it wouldn't be what I would like, at least today. Instead, I borrowed the *Big Book of Classic Fantasy*, edited by Ann and Jeff Vander-

meer, which casts its net very wide, as well as including some very obscure stories by older authors I love, such as E. Nesbit.

(13 December 2019)

**CURT PHILIPS**  
**19310 Pleasant View Drive,**  
**Abingdon VA 24210, USA**

I too have read Henry Wessells' *A Conversation Larger than the Universe*. It's exceptional. I met Henry at a dinner party in New York a little over a year ago and — perhaps recognising a kindred soul — he kindly gave me a copy. The book absorbed me immediately, and when I returned to the apartment of the friend I was visiting that evening I stayed up quite late reading it. It's a 'must read' for any bookman, particularly one in our field of interest.

You mention that you're glad to know that Joe and Edie's Fanac.org has scanned and made available many issues of *SFC*, particularly as no American institutions hold a collection of your magazine. Eventually one will, as I have an incomplete but substantial collection of *SFC*, and am adding to it as I find additional back issues. My current plan is that my collection will be donated to a university archive. I don't quite know where that will be yet as I've not quite finished using my collection myself, and I hope to continuing using it for a bit longer, but the University of Georgia has expressed interest, the library at Virginia Tech has a large SF collection but no fanzine or reference materials to go with it. The one in Iowa that bought Rusty Hevelin's collection may welcome a spot donation of a collection of *SFC*. So as I say, barring disaster, it's likely that an archive collection of *SFC* will take up residence in an American institution in the not terribly distant future. I'm 60 now, so that clock is over in the corner, quietly ticking ... (15 July 2019)

**[\*brg\* So which issues are you missing? Most of them should be archived by Fanac.org by now. I would have to charge postage for any print copies of which I might have spares.\*]**

**GREG BENFORD**  
**84 Harvey Court, Irvine CA 92612-4070, USA**

Got *SFC* 100! Handsome indeed. Pleasant to have *The Berlin Project* on your favourites lists too. It's gotten plenty reaction and comment. WW II keeps on giving!

I have two more books — attached as PDF files:

- Dismal Science Book: Westfahl\_7738-5\_1-271.pdf
- Norman Spinrad Review.docx; Locus Mag: Rewrite Review Jan 2019.pdf

I'm not going to the New Zealand worldcon. Been there, and it seems a tough season too. You?

(13 December 2019)

**[\*brg\* Not me, for reasons too many to enumerate. Many thanks to Carey Handfield, Justin Ackroyd, and Marc Ortlieb for their attempt to get me there; and David Russell for his contribution.\*]**

**MICHAEL BISHOP**  
**PO Box 646, Pine Mountain GA 31822, USA**

Just want you to know that I've received your latest mailing, all the way from Australia, and thank you for it wholeheartedly. Must apologise, just as wholeheartedly, for not commenting on the previous issues that you've sent. I read them with genuine interest but find myself with nothing pertinent or thus very entertaining/amusing/insightful to write about. And that's definitely my failing rather than that of the well-edited, laid-out, and attractive magazines.

Attached you will find a Christmas letter. I hope it's not too generic, and fear that it may strike you as just way nonetheless. Still, it does impart some news about what we've been up to this past year, a better year for us than some.

(20 December 2019)

**ROBERT ELORDIETA**  
**Unit 4, 15 High Street, Traralgon VIC 3844**

I just saw *Mary and the Witch's Flower* on SBS World Movies last Sunday afternoon. I enjoyed the movie. It is a Japanese Anime movie based on a book called *The Little Broomstick* by Mary Stewart.

Last Saturday afternoon I went to the cinema in Morwell with my workmate Glenn. We saw *The Fast and the Furious: Hobbs and Shaw*. It is an action movie, so the viewer doesn't have to think too deeply.

Vance Marcollo, an ex-high school teacher who lives in the same street as me, has just lent me a thick history book about Africa. I'd also been reading *A Song of Ice and Fire: A Dance with Dragons* by George R. R. Martin, which is a book that I own. I haven't finished it yet, but I put it on hold while I read the African book: *The Fortunes of Africa: A 5000 Year History of Wealth, Greed and Endeavour* by Martin Meredith.

(6 August 2019)

Recently I saw *God Friended Me* (Channel 7), which reminded me of previous shows I had seen with a similar theme: people helping out other people in times of trouble. (Those shows were *Highway to Heaven* and *Touched by an Angel*.) *God Friended Me* uses podcasts and social media as part of the story-telling, as well as the face-to-face interaction between the characters.

The other show I enjoyed recently is *FBI*, which is created by Dick Wolf, the guy who created such TV shows as *Law and Order*, *Law and Order: SVU*, *Chicago Fire*, *Chicago PD*, and *Chicago Med*. *FBI* (Channel 10), set in New York, follows the adventures of two FBI agents who are partners and, with the help of other FBI agents, solve crimes. Each episode investigates a different crime; there were no parts-1-and-2 episodes.

A new US TV show that has just started on Channel 7 is *The Rookie*. It stars Nathan Fillion. He was previously in a TV crime show called *Castle*, which went for eight seasons. Nathan plays a 40-year-old rookie cop in Los Angeles. His character and two others characters are doing on-the-job training.

(11 August 2019)

The British definitely do great TV shows. That's great that you have caught up on *Shetland* and *Broadchurch*. I will keep my eye out for *Broadchurch*.

SBS has been showing two new interesting British documentaries on Tuesday and Wednesday nights: *London: A 2000 Year History* and Tony Robinson's *Egyptian Tomb Hunting*. I hope they will come out on disc so that you can watch them.

(18 August 2019)

**IRENE PAGRAM**  
**Colac VIC 3250**

Thank you for your thoughts, Bruce. It was dad's time. He turned 90 in April, the first in his family to reach that milestone. He was admitted 17 July with pneumonia and quickly developed pleurisy as well, but ultimately his remaining aged kidney couldn't sustain the antibiotic treatment and he got sicker and became resigned to palliative care rather than recovery.

I was there nearly every day and we had great conversations, becoming more one-sided when he could still hear but not speak. He'd just say 'mm mmm' for affirmation he'd heard. Monday evening I was going as Sue and David had arrived to swap over, kissed him, said, 'I love you Dad', and he said 'I love you too' as clear as could be. Last words to me, so precious. The hospital rang at 6.50 a.m. Tuesday morning to say come now; but he must have died only minutes after. He looked completely peaceful when I got there at 7.15 a.m. and there were chairs all around him. The staff said: 'He wasn't alone at the end, we were all here.' They had put a sprig of his daphne on the pillow. He was the loveliest man.

(9 August 2019)

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

Bruce Gillespie the award winning ed.  
Of a half century of *SFC* said  
'I'm glad that it's done  
And although it is fun  
My bank account's now in the red!'

(24 October 2019)

**[\*brg\* Not quite the first piece of verse I've ever had sent as a letter of comment. (Jack Wodhams sent me such a one in 1969.) Thanks, Rob. You're not kidding about the bank account. I've actually done the sums on No 99, and total cost of the print edition is \$1400. I simply plead poverty when preparing Nos 101 and 102.\*]**

**GEOFF ALLSHORN**  
**Montmorency VIC 3094**

When we think of the elders of science fiction, your name must surely be included in that pantheon. Your writings encompass an eclectic assortment of scientific, speculative, and fascinatingly mundane material, providing a delightful glimpse into the world of science fiction

fandom for the last half century. As someone with an interest in social history, I believe that your contribution to the genre will provide future historians with primary source material into our lives, times, changing cultures, and our idealism. Thank you for everything that you have done — and continue to do — for not only science fiction but also for wider Australian literature! Thanks also for your recent documentation regarding the nearly fifty-year history of the Nova Mob (*SFC* 99). I personally had no idea that this mob had such a long and rich history. If I may add my own humble contribution to that historical record: the Nova Mob meeting for March 2015 was a tribute to *Star Trek* actor Leonard Nimoy, who had passed away the previous month. A friend encouraged me to attend that meeting, and I was able to add some minor details to the extensive tribute which others offered that night. It has been a pleasure and honour to be friends with you and Elaine over recent years, and to read your many and varied writings and collections. I look forward to your next 100 issues! Live Long and Prosper!

(24 October 2019)

**MICHAEL DIRDA**  
**1200 Woodside Parkway,**  
**Silver Spring, MD 20910, USA**

Having finally gone through the mail that accumulated during my week away in San Diego, the highlight is *SF Commentary 100: 50th Anniversary Edition, Part 3*. Thank you, Bruce, for including my Aickman piece in the company of essays by John-Henri Holmberg (on *Frankenstein*) and many other distinguished contributors. I have my nightstand reading — and very elegantly presented reading at that — all set for the next several evenings.

(1 February 2020)

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

I can continue the climate-related (or at least weather-related) tale I had started in the loc printed in *SFC* 99. The rains of (Northern Hemisphere) fall 2018 led to a flow that started eroding the banks of the stream flowing through the property of my condo development, worryingly close to some of the buildings. Hopes (which I think were ill-founded from the beginning) of getting the county to help pay for repairs came to naught, but repairs paid for by the association (and ultimately by us homeowners) have started. I thought we might get hit by a special assessment, but it seems the cost is being folded into the normal budget. We are told that plans are in the works to get help from the county (which owns most of the stream except for the bit on our development) in reducing the danger of erosion in the future, since more rainfall seems to be in the cards from the climate change that Trump does not believe in. On another front, the stand of trees that had been chopped down has been replaced by young trees that have been regularly spaced. This is supposed to discourage them from leaning as they grow, so that they will not end up falling over in high

wind like the old one that caused the damage. A few of the new trees died between winter and summer. I hope they will be replaced. Recently the area also got a new layer of topsoil and some other landscaping improvements, but if it's been reseeded, nothing has sprouted yet. Ah, well. Baby steps.

A little more landscaping work is in progress regarding the above stand of trees, and work on the stream banks is now in progress, so there is hope.

(19 July 2019)

As a follow-up to my poetry comments in *SFC* 99, I wanted to mention a lecture I ran across by linguist John McWhorter on changes in poetry since the mid twentieth century. (This was lecture 22 in a Great Courses 'course' called *Myths, Lies, and Half-Truths of Language Usage*.) McWhorter notes how much less of a role poetry plays in general society today than it did even in the recent past. Among his other illustrations is the parody of 'Hiawatha' in a mass-market 1941 *Bugs Bunny* cartoon. In those days it could be assumed that all the viewers had read the poem in school. (As a later example, I myself remember a parody of 'Barbara Fritchie' in a *Rocky and Bullwinkle* TV cartoon from the 1960s, but I did not myself encounter the original of what was parodied until years afterward. I believe I read it independently, and that it was never in any of my English courses even through university.) McWhorter notes that an appreciation of the formal style of oratory has declined pretty much in parallel and he sees both declines as a move away from special 'high' language to a more general use of a style closer to conversation. In my earlier loc, I was far from the first to note that poetry does survive in song lyrics. McWhorter, however, who no doubt listens to more popular music than I do, says that even in songs the lyrics are getting looser in formal structure, for instance with approximate rhymes accepted rather than the strict rhymes which were once the rule, and which indeed many song-writers gloried in. Strictly rhymed song lyrics are regarded as something only for children these days, per McWhorter, for instance in Disney feature cartoon musicals. McWhorter also notes that poetry of a somewhat free sort is popular in rap, an art form that is not quite music, but almost so.

(15 October 2019)

I actually finished the above paragraph after getting back from Capclave. I felt healthy by con time, but I imagine I was still lacking in stamina, since I seemed to have less energy throughout, and felt decidedly wiped out by the end of the con, despite having gotten nearly a normal amount of sleep and having drunk zero alcohol. Still, it was a decent con. Rob Sawyer, one of the GoHs, seems to have mellowed out considerably from what I remember about him from past cons. (Either that or I'm a victim of small sample size.) He's also now shaving his head, so that I did not even recognise him at the first Capclave panel he was on.

Leigh Edmonds writes, 'The interesting thing about counterfactual history is that it can only be written when the history of a particular topic is well known, so that, for example, it only makes sense to write about a world in

which Germany won World War II if one happens to know that, in fact, Germany lost.' I think that depends on who 'one' is. Clearly the author has to know the real history, and some publishers evidently think that the audience has to know too, which likely is why there are so many novels hinging on World War II, the American Civil War, the Spanish Armada, the Cuban Missile Crisis, etc. (I here assume that Leigh is using 'counterfactual' broadly enough to include alternate-history fiction rather than just the quasifictional game played among professional historians and sometimes published for the amusement of amateur ones. I take him to mean this because historians can assume that other professional historians know quite a lot, not just what is 'well known'.)

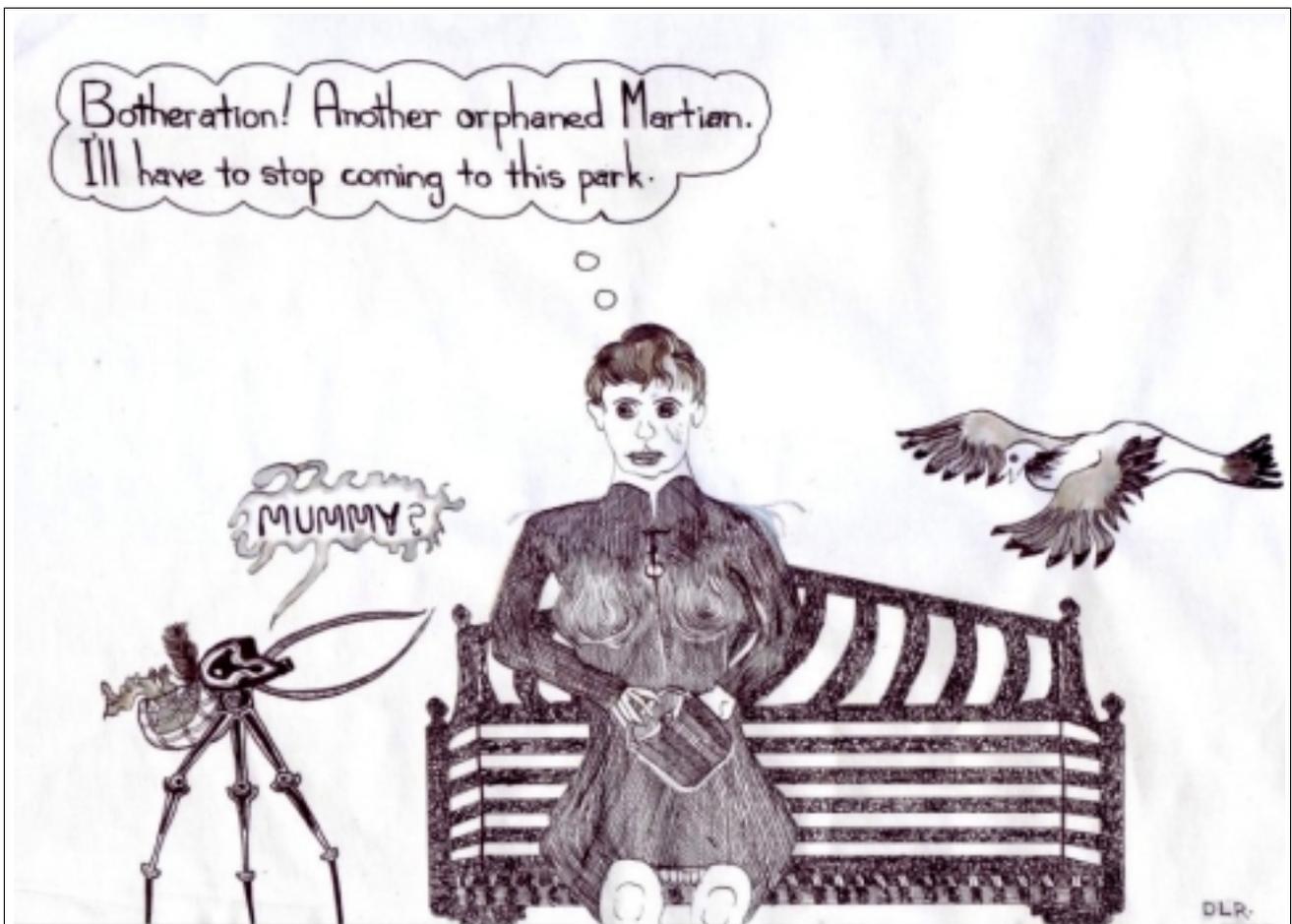
As a counterexample, one of the foundational works of alternate-world sf is de Camp's novella 'Lest Darkness Fall', and I very much doubt that most of de Camp's readers knew anything about Italy under the Goths, and probably not even about Justinian's invasion and why it was a Bad Thing. Despite that, the work was very successful with readers. Similarly, the single most massive corpus of alternate history is the '1632' series, which most directly hinges on changing the outcome of the Thirty Years War. I can't imagine that most of the American readers of the series knew much of anything about that war and why it mattered to history. Writers may have to work harder to make unfamiliar history interesting, but it can be done, and often is.

For a long time I had been, like Leigh, faithfully following the *Death in Paradise* detective series, but I have fallen behind, partly inadvertently and partly because it is getting a bit old. It has become rather too obvious that the same few filming locations are being re-dressed to represent multiple hotel suites and apartments, and the means of committing locked-room murders have started to repeat a little too obviously. At the same time, the series is getting a little annoying in how frequently it is bringing in new inspectors from Scotland Yard and turning over the members of his assistants from the local police Ste. Marie force. (*Doctor Who* now has a female Doctor, but as far as I have viewed, none of the *Death in P.* inspectors has been a woman.) My local library does have the DVDs, so I do have an opportunity to catch up if my mood changes.

Seeing Alex Skovron's loc so soon after Capclave reminds me that Jon Skovron, a DC-area author of young-adult sf/f, has the same surname, one I don't recall seeing elsewhere. Is Skovron a rare enough name that he could be a relative?

I have now finished Alec Nevala-Lee's *Astounding*, mentioned in my loc in *SFC* 99. and also by Cy Chauvin (where there is a typo in the author's surname and where the title presented is slightly wrong, unless Cy saw a British edition in Ireland that had a different title). I definitely recommend the work, although I don't endorse all of Nevala-Lee's conclusions.

I was, however, sorry to read that Nevala-Lee had approved of the renaming by Dell of the Campbell Award. There is no clear boundary on when to condemn figures from the past for not meeting our present social and moral standards, but we have to stop somewhere. Campbell was sufficiently muted, ambiguous, and inconsistent in his racism and sexism that I doubt that he



comes out worse than average for his contemporaries. Franklin Roosevelt, who appears on the US ten-cent piece to this day, probably was just as reprehensible.

The local sf book club read Sawyer's 1997 *Illegal Alien* recently, and I was amused to see that Lloyd Penney had been tuckerised therein all those years ago. I informed the club members that he was still around in fandom. Lloyd remarks upon the depressing frequency of obituaries of well-known sf writers and fans. To a great extent this is an inevitable consequence of the expansion after WWII of sf itself and of sf fandom. More and more people have now reached the natural end of their lifespans and their deaths may be sad news but are not surprising. A smaller group is formed by sf people who are a little younger but who have aged into the danger zone for cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Still fewer are the regrettable deaths of the relatively young, which we do still see from time to time. I have remarked in the past that I think that in some publications things are being made to look even worse than they really are by reporting the deaths not only of real sf people, but of actors who happen to have appeared in sf shows or movies as a minor part of their overall careers.

John Hertz says that St. Thomas More's *Utopia* is a satire. I myself would say that, like Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, it's an 'ambiguous utopia'. It's not a flat-out description of what More would take to be an ideal society, but perhaps his idea of the best society that could be achieved by natural reason alone, and hence a standpoint from which to criticise Tudor England and Europe more generally. If the Utopians, unaided by Revelation,

could attain this much of a just society, should not Christian Europe be able to do better? I imagine that More, like any Tudor official, approved of more state control than we would, but he would not approve of everything that the Utopians do. There are also probably straight elements of satire: for instance, rather than making chamber pots out of gold to show their contempt for the metal, in 'reality' the rational Utopians would probably instead use it for its properties of attractive appearance and resistance to corrosion, or as foreign exchange. (I think the Utopians do engage in overseas trade, and I remember for sure that they hire foreign mercenaries.)

(23 October 2019)

[27 October 2019]: I'm not sure I ever congratulated you in so many words on 50 years (and counting) of *SFC*. An accomplishment seldom if ever matched chronologically, and surely never matched within sf fandom over such a span for quality and sheer wordage. I think I first received your fanzines in 1971, so I've been around for most of that time, although we've only met twice, and on each occasion very briefly.

Obituaries: I believe that I once met Vonda McIntyre in the early 1970s near the start of her career and of my time in fandom, but I have nothing coherent to say about her or her work. Despite my living in the Chicago area from birth through college, I never met Gene Wolfe. (He was rising to prominence at just about the time that I left Chicago for grad school.) I may possibly have later laid

eyes on him at some Worldcon, but nothing has stuck in my memory. I did once respond in a fanzine lettercol to something he had said in an earlier lettercol, but the discussion went no further. I also once write a review of the first volume of the *Book of the Long Sun* in which I noted that Wolfe seemed to be paralleling the Bing Crosby movie *The Bells of St. Mary's*. No one seems to have taken up that idea. A lot of Wolfe's work went past me completely. In other instances the work offered a sort of entry-level narrative that I could enjoy, but I missed a lot that close study would have revealed to the diligent reader. Nonetheless, somehow Wolfe did not strike me as reeking of the English Department in the manner of some other sf writers who played similar literary games with unreliable narrators and so forth. I was saddened by his death, even though I knew he had lived a long life.

After I wrote the above, I happened to listen to an episode of a podcast series recommended to me by Martin Wooster, *Conversations with Tyler*. These are one-on-one interviews with various notables, usually in the social sciences or literature, conducted by Tyler Cowen of George Mason University. After he gets through with the substantive part of the interview Tyler often turns to topics of personal interest to himself, one of which is science fiction. Henry Farrell is a political scientist and evidently something of a public intellectual, although I had never run across him before this interview. He turns out to be a Gene Wolfe reader, and in the interview he draws an extended parallel with Proust, among other things arguing that where Proust depicts the downward slide of the aristocracy and the rise of a democratic social order, in the *Book of the New Sun*, Wolfe does the reverse. Supposedly text transcripts of the interviews are available on the podcast website, so evidently anyone curious only about Farrell's remarks on Wolfe could jump immediately to that part of the interview.

There are several points I could pick up from Robert Day's loc, but in the interest of not letting my letter wordage get totally out of control I'll mention only his finds of many classical CDs at charity shops ('thrift stores' in Yank speak, and, I think, 'op shops' in Oz). The single thrift store convenient to me does carry CDs, but I've never found any worthwhile classical ones there. On the other hand, on occasion I've done better at one local used bookstore that also carries CDs. Once or twice I've even picked up at one swoop several decent ones at a dollar each from the quick-disposal table on the sidewalk in front of the store.

[28 October]: It has finally gotten cold enough here to inspire me to a little more cooking. Yesterday I made my first batch of homemade soup for the season and then poured it out into single-serving containers to cool before refrigeration and (as needed) freezing. I then sat to down to calculate the calories per serving, which was a matter of dividing the total calories of the ingredients by the number of containers. I arrived at an absurdly small per-container calorie count, and I belatedly realised that in making the soup I had added more water than I generally do. In fact, I could combine the contents of two containers into one for a reasonable main-course serving, which would economise on refrigerator space.

That would have instantly generated a lot of dirty storage containers in itself. The situation was made worse since some of the containers were too small to comfortably hold twice as much soup as they started with. I did have enough clean larger containers to hold the rest of the soup, but I now had on my hands yet more dirty small containers. The dishwasher was almost full before this influx, so I quickly ran a load, and I now have to take out and store the clean dishes so I can start loading the dirty containers. Fortunately the containers are stackable, so in the meantime they are not completely filling the sink.

Steve Jeffery wonders when the most recent unapologetic utopia was written. He himself recognises that this is partly a matter of definition. In the modern world of ebooks and on-demand printing, I'm sure that people we have never heard of must be writing classic-style utopias to this day. I do recall that a few utopias were being printed by major publishers as late as the 1970s, likely in response to the social unrest of that era. Moreover, L. Neil Smith was publishing libertarian utopias combined with adventure plots at least through the 1980s. I have not followed his work consistently, but my impression is that after that point the utopian element in Smith's work recedes or disappears.

In the Soviet Union, Marxism–Leninism predicted that the society of full communism, which unlike mere socialism would be characterised by features such as distribution 'from each according to his ability and to each according to his need' and the disappearance of crime, would dawn in the fairly near future. Any sf set later than roughly 40 years from the time of publication was therefore required by censorship to take place in the communist era. However, most Soviet sf merely used this as a minor part of the background. (One could argue that the *Star Trek* franchise has done something similar. Earth is pretty utopian by the time of Starfleet, but we see little of the home planet.) The last Soviet works centring on actually outlining the wonderful world of future full communism, in the tradition of Yefremov's *Andromeda* or the Strugatskys' *Noon: 22nd Century*, probably came out in the 1960s or early 1970s. Even those 1960s works had abandoned the old tour-of-utopia plot in favour of various less clichéd structures that would still afford a view of the wonderful new world.

At least for the most part, Iain M. Banks adopts a strategy similar to *Star Trek* and Soviet sf: things are wonderful back in the Culture, but the stories mostly follow Special Circumstances operatives working elsewhere in the universe. As best I recall, a degree of ambiguity about the Culture becomes more prominent in later books, so that the Culture eventually ceases to be presented as a utopia. I wonder if that retroactively de-utopianises the earlier parts of the series.

Steve also discusses the relation between poetry and science from a different perspective than I have used, and one that I enjoyed reading about.

[12 November]: Judy Buckrich reflects on the Communist movement in Australia. Everything that I know about this topic comes from Australian mystery novels. The father of Jon Cleary's detective Scobie Malone had been a flaming Red in his youth and decades later still mouths the rhetoric. The novels are set contemporary with their

publication in the 1980s or so, so that the father's glory days were probably in about the 1950s. Cleary seems to regard the elder Malone as amusing or annoying, but not as someone who had served as a tool of mass-murderer Stalin. In the Phryne Fisher stories by Kerry Greenwood, set in the 1920s, two of Phryne's henchmen are at least nominal Communists, who again Greenwood seems to regard with more amusement than aversion, and without reference to the butchery that was going on in the USSR in those years. I wonder if perhaps, given Australia's relative isolation and relative strategic unimportance, Moscow paid less attention to the Australian Party than it did to the CP USA. Post-Cold War revelations have established that the American Party was under Moscow's detailed control regarding ideology, funding, and espionage. If the Australian Party was left more to its own devices, perhaps it developed into something a bit more accommodated to local conditions and was correspondingly less evil.

**[\*brg\* The simple truth is that most people who joined the Communist Party in America, Australia, or Britain during that era knew little about what was happening in the Soviet Union until the early 1950s, but had a very clear image of the barbarities committed against working people and the unemployed in their own country during the 1930s Depression. Phillip Adams, long-time broadcaster, notes that he joined the CP when he was very young after he read John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Like Frederik Pohl in *The Way the Future Was*, he has written that Communist Party meetings were more like Sunday afternoon church group meetings than anything else. Australian trade unionists had a more robust view of the influence of the Communist Party. Supporters regarded the Communist Party (which contended elections during the 1930s and beyond) as the only real champion of workers' rights; others in the trade union movement fought so hard against what they regarded as the CP influence in the Australian Labor Party that they managed to keep the ALP out of office during the 1950s and 1960s.\*]**

My sympathies to Doug Barbour on the medical problems he was suffering through when he wrote his locs. I hope that it is at least mostly behind him now. This might be a good place for me to throw in a comment that Rob Sawyer made at Capclave — he contended that Canada 'punches above its weight' in sf writers and he ascribed this to guaranteed medical care, which meant that Canadian aspiring sf authors could afford to take a chance and abandon a day job when trying to establish themselves, whereas Americans in an analogous position would hang onto the day job for the health insurance, and do less writing. This is an intriguing thought, but (quite apart from the issue of the desirability of state-funded health care), I am not sure that the argument holds up. Does Canada in fact have more sf writers per capita than the US? I do not find this immediately obvious. If yes, does Canada still have an advantage once one subtracts already-selling sf writers like Spider Robinson who emigrated to Canada from the US because of

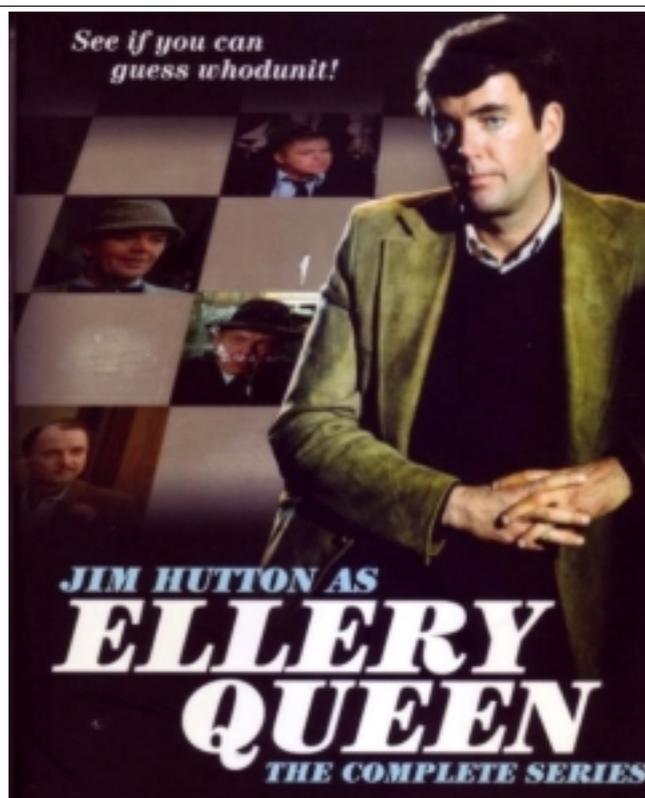
the Vietnam War? If so, can the advantage be ascribed to health insurance, considering that the aspiring American sf writers would probably mostly be in their twenties, when health care generally is not a pressing issue and when young people tend to have a mindset of ignoring risks? And what about the fact that many aspiring writers have spouses who work day jobs? Generally in the US, the employer-subsidised health insurance of one spouse can be extended to cover the other spouse and any children. It would also seem to follow that the same health-insurance argument should apply to every country in the Western world, since in that grouping only the US ties subsidised insurance to day jobs. I have never seen a claim that the US has the fewest sf writers per capita in the West. I suppose Sawyer could reply that only Canada resembles the US closely enough to make the comparison meaningful. To which I in turn would argue that there are still many differences besides health insurance between the two countries. (Most Canadians live within 100 miles of the US border. I think there would be significantly fewer differences if we compared only Canadians and Americans living within 100, or even 400, miles of the common border, but for better or worse, a huge chunk of the American population lives south of that point.)

[24 November]: Last instalment I discussed a fair-play TV mystery show, *Death in Paradise*. Among the DVDs at the public library, I happened upon a somewhat similar program, the 1975 *Ellery Queen* (not to be confused with other EQ screen versions). It is set in the postwar 1940s (for which, I imagine, period props were easier to come by in 1975 than they would be today). It only lasted one season, but I am enjoying the episodes. The program obviously had a bigger production budget than does *D. in P.* It also featured numbers of then-famous guest stars, which I find an unfortunate distraction. I saw at least some of the *EQ* episodes at or near their first airing (and before watching the DVDs I could correctly hum the theme music) but so far I have remembered nothing about any of the plots. I regret that the show lasted only one season, but I still have many unwatched episodes to go on the DVDs. Evidently the reason that the TV show is set in the 1940s is because that was the heyday of the *EQ* radio show that inspired it. Perhaps I should see if those radio shows are available on the Internet.

**[\*brg\* One of the few shows I saw on TV after Elaine's sister gave us a TV set in 1979 was the 1975 series of *Ellery Queen*, with very stylish actor Jim Hutton as Ellery Queen and David Wayne as his Police Inspector father. Not only did the series boast of memorable mysteries, amusing dialogue, and fine actors, but it is one of the few TV series I know of with a magnificent visual style. (*The Avengers* from the 1960s is my other candidate for Stylish TV Series.)\*]**

Several locs ago, I first voiced my hypothesis that it is extremely unlikely that anyone with an advanced degree in English will write a decent traditional-sf novel. (I confined myself to sf as opposed to fantasy, and to traditional sf as opposed to 'literary sf'.) I speculated that

this resulted from self-selection, or indoctrination, into aspects of literature valued by university English departments that differ drastically from those of chief importance in traditional sf. (I fudged a bit by saying that a degree in medieval English literature might not count, nor did authors such as Jack Williamson who had established records in sf and later picked up a degree in English in hopes of a more secure source of income.) I recently found an exception to my stated rule. A jacket bio informed me that Jack McDevitt acquired a master's in 'literature' before publishing sf. Since, per the bio, he had previously taught English in school, I presume 'literature' means 'English literature'. I have not read all of McDevitt's work, but I enjoy his Alex Benedict series, and some other stray titles. However, I do not find McDevitt to be a major exception. He tries to stay within the sf conventions (science correct or at least rationalisable except for permitting FTL), but he often gets pretty near the boundaries, writing very, very, soft sf, as with a society 9000 years in the future that looks astonishingly similar to our own except for being able to perform interstellar travel with about the ease of a multi-day automobile road trip. Also, in at least two novels he has aliens who are, with no rationalisation, non-credibly similar to humans. Oddly enough, advanced degrees in foreign languages and literature (as held by Cherryh, Le Guin, and many others) clearly do not militate against traditional sf, possibly because their holders have shown the mental flexibility to look outside their own society.



(24 November 2019)

## We also heard from ...

### GILLIAN POLACK (Canberra, ACT)

'The 50th anniversary *SF Commentary* cheered me up considerably. Congratulations on 50 years, Bruce Richard Gillespie!'

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'I love the covers and I'm about half-way through reading it *SFC* 98.'

### JEANETTE GILLESPIE (Guildford, Victoria)

'Congratulations on *SFC* 98. I'll comment further when I've had the chance to read some of it.'

### BARBARA SELVAY (Clifton Hill, Victoria)

'Thanks for sending the Anniversary Edition. It takes a special person to have achieved this milestone. You are this person. Congratulations!'

### PAT CHARNOCK (Harringay, London)

'Graham said you very kindly said something nice about *Raucous Caucus* on Facebook, and he gave me a printout. It was only short, one paragraph, but there was a lot of egoboo in there, and that lovely feeling that you've connected with someone. Thank you. Would you mind if I refer to it in the next issue?'

**[\*brg\* Of course it's all right! I'm just ashamed I haven't written all those letters to *Raucous Caucus* I promised myself to write.\*]**

### RUSSELL BLACKFORD (Wallsend, NSW)

'I enjoyed reading *SFC* 99 online. Was amused by your diary entries and Yvonne's piece about meeting a whole bunch of us.'

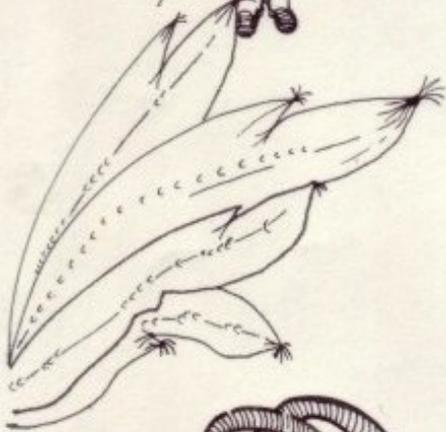


**WERNER KOOPMANN  
(Buchholz, Germany)**

'These photos were taken by Ulla in Kandern (near Freiburg). Kandern probably is not on the map, being a very small location. But we knew that there ought to be a railway from Freiburg to Kandern, the Reben-sammler. The Kandern railway is run only by pensioners who don't get paid for their work. They don't have a site for themselves. The Kandertalbahn is a museum train only.'



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D.L.R.

# SF Commentary 101

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CLASSIC STEVE STILES (cover of SFC 91)